A GOOD EUROPEAN

Eight Short Stories by

Ilija Trojanow
Tanja Dückers
Nasrin Siege
Vladimir Arsenijević
Zinaida Lindén
Wilfried N'Sondé
Arian Leka
Oliver Rohe

FREI ——— RAUM
A Project of the Goethe-Institut

About the e-book

At the latest since the Enlightenment, the concept of freedom has been of immense importance to European identity. But the promise that this term long held has apparently lost its charisma. What does freedom mean to us today? How do we deal with values that seem to collide irreconcilably? What is it like to live in peace when one has emerged from war? Can we combine awareness of tradition and self-determination? Is it possible to guarantee both permeable borders and secure coexistence? Eight European authors attempt to pinpoint the current situation from very different narrative perspectives and allow contradictory experiences to come together: Vladimir Arsenijević, Tanja Dückers, Arian Leka, Zinaida Lindén, Oliver Rohe, Nasrin Siege, Wilfried N'Sondé and Ilija Trojanow. A zoo is founded but then devoured, a girl is afraid of helicopters and a youthful holiday flirt in Croatia becomes a balancing act between history and desire.

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Preface

One of the attractions of literary texts is that they envision things that neither the authors nor the readers themselves have personally experienced. By suspending reality with its demands and rules, literature opens up a space of freedom, because reading makes it possible to slip into the thoughts and feelings of a fictitious character. When we participate in this we experience at the figure's side situations that are not part of our own reality. What seems unknown and inaccessible can come close up to us in fiction; an initially unfamiliar experience becomes, if not our own, then one that is nevertheless familiar. Strictly speaking, a paradox: while we are withdrawing and immersing ourselves in a book, we are at the same time opening ourselves up.

For *Freiraum*, a Europe-wide project of the Goethe-Institut, opening up to the unknown and the ability to put ourselves in another's shoes played a major role from the very beginning. After all, what is the point of Europe if everyone is concerned only with his or herself and thinks nothing but his or her own expectations are important? In contrast, the project offers hope: as soon as actors in places like Carlisle, Thessaloniki, Tallinn, Dresden, Rome or Nicosia think about where and why freedom is at stake for them and entrust their problems to the project partners in the other cities, they can look at these problems with an unbiased eye and thus contribute to solutions. *Freiraum*, the project, is based on the assumption that the imaginative powers of others can help to alleviate hardships.

It was only a matter of time before literature itself became part of the project, and that is the background against which the eight stories collected in this volume were written. They accompany their readers to places where freedom exists as a promise, but is missing in everyday life. There are many reasons for this. For Wilfried N'Sondé, it is the lack of valid papers that deprives the characters of their freedom of movement. Who determines that some are allowed to travel, others not? Tanja Dückers's figures, on the other hand, are allowed to travel; nevertheless, they fail to step out of their ingrained patterns. Oliver Rohe and Zinaida Lindén each convey in his or her own way what external attributions bring about and how difficult it is to resist them *à la longue*. Ilija Trojanow focuses on depicting economic hardship: what would have enriched life in a provincial town is literally consumed. And then it is life itself that, as long as we are young, lies before us with its many possibilities. The older we get, the more decisions we make, the fewer possibilities remain, and we realise, like the protagonist in Arian Leka's story "Paranoia", that where wings could have grown only black hair sprouts.

Should we therefore cease to fight for possibilities and freedom? Certainly not! In an interview that can be read on the website of the *Freiraum* project, the philosopher Juliane Rebentisch says she defends the "moments of freedom from the social sphere [...], as moments in which we distance ourselves from our own socialisation, from our own self-conceptions, in order to grasp out towards ourselves once again from this distance to ourselves - and doing so anew within

the social sphere". What an exhilarating thought: whoever takes the liberty of moving away from his or her self finds the way back to his or her self and others all the better!

Cristina Nord, Director of the Freiraum Project

Game for a Zoo. By Ilija Trojanow

Building a zoo is no easy task. Not for a small town out in the provinces. Especially not these days. What we have to help build is socialism, says the party secretary—not a zoo! There's no arguing with the man, even if all we're talking about is a modest little pen with a few roe deer and a couple of red stags, a few peacocks, some guinea fowl, mountain goats, and maybe a limping fox. So what are the odds of getting a real zoo, the kind I imagine day after day as I wipe down the wooden tables in the restaurant, eagerly waiting for spring to arrive, or as I sweep the floor dreaming of zebras and giraffes—and even an elephant when I'm cleaning out the gutter on the roof? When the first guests sit down on the patio overlooking the lake, order beers, gaze at the craggy knolls and stretch their limbs out into the early summer, a lion scampers through my mind. I shake my head slightly, almost imperceptibly, and go on serving kofta and kebabs the whole summer long, all the while dreaming away.

Years ago I figured out exactly where it should go: a fallow meadow stuck between two coves on the other side of the lake. Every day I look at this bright spit of land jutting out of the thick forests and rising up the slopes. In summer, once the sun has gained a foothold, half the town gathers at our lake, and that half could walk around the lake and straight into my zoo where they would enjoy themselves. Then they could fortify themselves in the restaurant on their way back. Nor would visitors from out of town, including the high society from the capital, pass up the chance to see our zoo. Even if it didn't have any lions or elephants.

My dreams know how to be patient. The restaurant gets renovated, the terrace expanded, the meadow in front of the forest keeps growing wild and one day, for no reason at all and not due to any pressure, the party committee decides to act on my proposal and approves an animal pen on the north side of the lake. And what a joy that they've entrusted the task to me. As it happens I'm quite familiar with our country's wildlife. Right away I manage to get hold of a few roe deer and one red stag, then five mountain goats a little later on. I buy a frail old dancing bear off a Roma man with a bad case of gout. By now it's pretty impressive, the little pen with the native fauna. I plant bushes and trees, fill the water troughs, paint a few signs and call the vet from the provincial capital when the first roe deer gives birth. And every day I take my dream walk by the lake, never losing sight of what's still missing, of what could transform this pen into a genuine zoo, something from very far away, something different, something like... well... for example... a giraffe.

—A giraffe? No problem, Uncle.

That from my nephew Grozdan, who's done amazingly well for himself. He works in a ministry in the capital and comes to visit us once a year in his official car.

— What do you mean, no problem?

— You're in luck, Uncle, and you're luck has a name: Sekou Touré.

— Seeku Ture?

— No, Se-kou Tou-ré. Don't you listen to the news? *The baboon that stood up to the leopard. The spider that outwitted the hyena.*

— What hyena?

— De Gaulle, Uncle. General Charles de Gaulle. Don't rack your brains, it's complicated. Geopolitics. I'll tell you what you need to know. For now just remember—we have a new friend in Africa, and pretty soon we might even have a...

— In Africa?

—supplier.

—What does he supply?

— Giraffes, for example. Giraffes or gnus or gazelles. How do I know? Maybe there'll be a lion in it for you some day.

— A lion!

— I wouldn't count it out.

— Now that would be a zoo, with a lion there it would be a real zoo.

— Let's see, Uncle. Leave all the rest to me.

I no longer have to wipe tabletops. Now I'm in charge of the pen and have more time for thinking. About the hyena, the general, and my nephew. A happy coincidence. Someone from our family with connections to Africa. Serendipitous. Because the fact is, giraffes don't live anywhere else. Except I'm a little surprised that Grozdan wants to supply toilet bowls in return for the animals. Maybe he was just joking. I don't always understand him. Most of the time he calls out of the blue and catches me completely off guard...

— Good news, Uncle. We have a giraffe, and now, hang on to your seat, you won't believe it, there's also a lion!

It's a bad connection, but I gather he expects me to go the capital to fetch the animals and accompany

them to their new home. I'm amazed at the party secretary's sudden enthusiasm. He claps me on the shoulder and wishes me good luck. I take the bus to the capital and start tearing up the minute I lay eyes on the beautiful creatures. The next day the vet informs me that the lion is blind and the giraffe is lame. But that doesn't dampen my joy, especially since the friendly colleagues from the big zoo in the capital throw in a few zebras... a zoo has to look like a zoo, right, even if it is somewhere in the provinces. I thank them and remain grateful, even though as the years go by the zebras turn out to be barren.

Our animals are the delight of the town. Only nobody knows for sure where this Guinea is. I take heart and order a gigantic carved sign, which I hang between two beech trees along the lake path: WELCOME TO THE ZOO. Now even the party secretary is convinced we need more wildlife.

The stars are aligned, the phone rings and a happy voice says:

— Dar es Salaam.

— Grozdan?

— Dar es Sa-laaaaaaam.

— Is that you, Grozdan?

— How does that sound for you, Uncle? Dar es Salaam. Sounds pretty nice, doesn't it?

— I'm not sure ...

— And that's not the half of it. Ny-e-re-re, U-ja-maaaaa.

— Are you talking about animals?

— As many as you like. Guess with whom we've just declared fraternity...

— How am I supposed to know, Grozdan?

—Tanzania.

— Serengeti!

— Precisely. Uncle, the animal treasury of Africa is yours for the taking.

Grozdan has added to his repertoire. He's shipping peach compote and pickled peppers. Now and then a few crates reinforced with metal bands get mixed in with the shipments of jars and cans, but he doesn't waste words on that. The Tanzanians are even more grateful than their Guinean predecessors and reciprocate with young, healthy, frisky gazelles.

Grozdan gulps down his beer. He's back on home leave.

— I love this lake in the autumn. When everything quiets down again after the summer holidays. And the woods are so full of colour. In a few weeks your gazelles will be here. I didn't have any idea how many different types there are. They asked me which kind we wanted, Grant's or Thomson's or impalas or kongoni or dik-diks... the list went on and on. I was amazed. And I thought that a gazelle's a gazelle just like a deer's a deer. Mmmm, that beer tastes good. Sure we have red stags in addition to the roe deer, but that's as far as it goes. Wild boars don't really count, do they? I went for the impala, I hope that's fine with you, the name sounded great and I also ordered a few more zebras, fertile ones this time. Otherwise they'll soon die out on you.

— You did well, Grozdan. The zebras are the children's favourite.

— That's only because you still don't have any monkeys. Just let me see to that.

Fortune finds me in roundabout ways. Ever since I know how important geopolitics is for my zoo, I read the newspaper very carefully. Page five, where there's occasionally a snippet about Africa. The autumn has lost its gold, though I no longer have to sweep up the leaves. They've foisted an experienced zoo administrator on me, but I work alongside him, as deputy director. The newspaper reports on a state visit by one of our country's good friends, a man by the name of Agostinho Neto. The President of the People's Republic of Angola has brought us an unusual present, a horde of baboons. We have a great use for these baboons, according to Grozdan H., a high-ranking official in the foreign service, the article relates. The baboons arrive a few weeks later, just in time for the onset of winter, accompanied by a snippy letter from the director of the big zoo in the capital, who is baffled as to why an insignificant provincial zoo requires the whole horde, while the capital is suffering from an acute baboon shortage. The monkeys soon get used to life here between the lake and the mountains. I even teach them how to throw snowballs.

But the high point of my life comes in the form of an unexpected telegram:

HAILE SELASSIE TOPPLED IN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION STOP LIONS AVAILABLE STOP GROZDAN

After so many decades and so many hopes and dreams, the day arrives when a proud, healthy lion steps into the zoo—the blind one having died in the August of the Prague Spring. We all celebrate in the restaurant by the lake, the zoo director and the party secretary and Grozdan and me. After many toasts to

lions, baboons, impalas and giraffes, the party secretary practically spits into my ear: we didn't manage to build socialism but at least your zoo got off the ground. Confused, I stare out at the cliffs.

And I'm still staring at them the next day when the party secretary's drunken confession is confirmed on the radio. The thought of what it all might mean for my zoo gives me the shivers.

Two guinea hens are the first to disappear. I check all the fences and all the gates and console myself that it must be an isolated case. But soon the losses mount and it's clear I have to do something. Only what? I go to the police.

— I'd like to report the theft of eight peacocks, ten golden guinea fowl, and six mountain goats.

— Do the animals belong to you?

— No, but they're my responsibility, I look after them.

— Apparently not well enough.

— They came in the night.

— And who are they?

— I don't know.

— So what do you want us to do about it?

— I...

— Are we supposed to procure new animals for you? Or interrogate anyone who looks like he might have a crispy golden guinea hen in his belly?

— Don't say that...

— Old man do you have the faintest idea the number of crimes being committed in this town ever since we've started playing at democracy? And you show up here and expect me to bother about a few runaway goats.

— Mountain goats, black mountain goats, they're exceptional.

— So—maybe they're also exceptionally tasty.

I decide to stand guard throughout the night. I only nodded off once. The next morning I have a headache and a bruise on my head. Four roe deer are missing. The thieves used a wire to shut the gate when they left. They're bound to be in the forest, so I spend all day traipsing through the woods—I know every nook and cranny. But I overestimate my strength and collapse in a clearing. The ground is wet from melted snow. First I see ashes, then the ribcage of a goat. My heart freezes as never before. The scene around me is one big battlefield. Bones all around, it stinks. A flayed hide is lying next to a tree and it stinks. Not even Grozdan can help me. He's been delegated to South Africa, where his task is to make new friends, as ambassador.

When the impalas disappear, I realize I have to take urgent action. I call the zoo in the capital.

— What are we supposed to do with more animals?

— Back then you wanted them, the baboons.

— Whoever that was it must have been a long time ago. Listen, I can imagine how difficult things are for you, but we're also having a hard time keeping the animals fed. Do you think I can ask my workers to give meat to the leopards when they've forgotten what it tastes like? And who's supposed to pay for the meat anyway? Tell me, how am I supposed to feed leopards without meat? All our beasts of prey look like Somalis as it is.

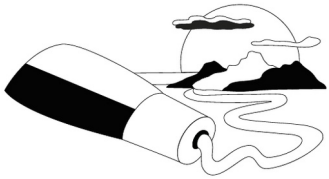
— We have a different problem. Here people are eating the animals.

— Surely not the leopards.
— I don't have any leopards.
— Then consider yourself lucky.

I make one phone call after the other, trying to reason with every director of every zoo in the country. All in vain. The gazelles vanish one by one. I share my meagre pension with the old Abyssinian lion. One morning I count the zebras three times, and each time one is missing. That's when I open all the gates and say good-bye to every last animal and then toss the keys into the lake. Then I take off through the forest one last time. I can no longer protect my zoo. Somewhere I come to a stop. I start to howl, without shedding tears, and in my ears it sounds like the feeble yapping of an old wolf. I sink to the ground. Now I'm on all fours, and I howl and howl.

Translated from German by Philip Boehm

Libellen. Von Tanja Dückers



The dragonfly in front of her trembled. Trembled, but only with fatigue, not with fear. Ebba tried to look elsewhere. Her mother had fallen asleep, her round head with thick reddish brown hair swaying to the left, to the right. The silver barrette with the dragonfly made of pierced dots jumped up and down at every curve, every turn, every pothole. Why had her mother wanted to travel by bus from Berlin to Croatia? It was crazy. Why Croatia? This country signified nothing to Ebba. Just because there were cheap holiday resorts and, don't forget, a cheap bus trip. When her father disappeared three months ago (he had still been there to attend grandfather's, Mum's father's, funeral, where Ebba had last seen him), he took the Audi. The Audi, the stereo and, according to her mother, a whole lot of money. We could at least have taken the train, thought Ebba. Even better she would have liked to go away alone, without her mother. But she wasn't allowed to do that. Her mother, who had recently not found the returnable bottles machine at Aldi and shouted at the vendor at the hot dog stand because she thought (falsely, as it turned out) she was being ripped off; her mother, who sometimes wore different-coloured stockings under her long flowing dresses (dresses which looked like bed sheets) because she couldn't find two matching ones; her mother thought that she, Ebba, was too young, disoriented and inexperienced to travel alone or with Maike. When Ebba lay in her bed at night, counting the plastic stars on the ceiling-sky in her room, she had often imagined that she hated her mother. But she knew she couldn't hate her mother, she was too close to her. Her mother was simply always there, with her

questioning eyes, flowing clothes, well-worn sandals, and broad, colourful scarves, which she forgot all over the flat, but quite especially in Ebba's room. Ebba tried as best she could to ignore her mother.

Passport checkpoint, again. Her mother of course turned around to whisper unnecessarily "Passport checkpoint!" Nothing escaped her. Even the dragonfly on her thick hair seemed to Ebba like a third eye, a kind of rearward controlling organ.

Was her father also taking a holiday now? In summer he didn't have to keep to school hours; no, he was probably sitting in Berlin, and one of these days he would be standing at the front door again, with a beard and an awkward expression on his face, a smeared thermos in his hand, just like the last few times after he disappeared. Her father would be back home, carving chess pieces, painting small boxes, and drawing Ebba sitting by the window, and then go with these things to the flea market on weekends. Why her father went away and why he came back – the beardless, fidgety, hot-headed father just before his escape, and the silent, sad, bearded father in the door with the thermos and the dirt under his fingernails –Ebba didn't understand.

The bus rumbled on, making the silver barrette flash up and down like a camera. The early morning sun fell on her mother's thick reddish brown hair; they had already been sitting in the bus for twenty-four hours. Once Ebba's left, then Ebba's right buttock fell asleep. And the loo was always occupied, just when

you could barely hold it in. Mum's "austerity": by bus from Berlin to the Adriatic ....

The flat wasn't as chic as it had been last year on Malta, but it was only five minutes to the beach. Every morning, her mother checked Ebba's beach bag to see if Ebba had taken sunscreen with SPF 15 and not one with only 12 or even 8, because of her sensitive skin. Ebba wanted of course to get a tan at all costs, but with a SPF of 15 and a constantly watchful eye surveilling everything, it wasn't possible. Is that what freedom was – to fly with Maike in the middle of the school year to Ibiza or Corsica? Freedom, adventure, would be dark brown and smell like sweat, that much was clear.

Ebba was hoping to meet some nice boys at the resort, but so far she had seen only pensioners or nagging families drifting past her with large cool bags. There was no boy at her school at home whom she liked or was not already taken. After each vacation, Maike had shown her crumpled photos of dark-skinned guys with great smiles; her parents let her travel through Europe alone via InterRail. The idea of talking to no one but her mother for the next three weeks depressed Ebba. Her mother, whom she now saw not only after school, in the evening and in the morning, had given her bilingual paperback books of *Twentieth Century Short Stories* back at home, which she had silently placed next to Ebba's breakfast plate. Right after Ebba came back from her first beach walk, her mother already complained that Ebba wasn't using the holiday to do something "for her mind". And

when Ebba at last started to read one of the paperbacks, her mother asked such subtle questions from time to time that she always managed to find out that Ebba had of course not been reading the French but only the German version.

The only trump card Ebba held in her hand was the question, "What do you think, when will dad come back this time?" With that she touched her mother's sore spot. Her mother kept shifting about, sighing, and saying something like, "I hope before school starts again!", or, "I hope, before my birthday!"

Once Ebba asked her mother a particularly mean question. It was right after she involved Ebba in an intense but uninteresting conversation about the upcoming renovation of their flat in Berlin at the very moment when a boy had passed by and given Ebba a long look. As soon as the boy was out of reach, Ebba's mother dropped the subject again and stared thoughtfully at the sea.

Ebba asked: "Tell me, can you imagine... I mean don't get me wrong, it's just you sometimes wonder – that dad was never really in love with you? That's it just turned out that way for him and he comes back again and again only out of habit? Because he knows you put food on the table?"

Her mother didn't answer. Ebba knew she was bothered by the question of why this awkward, dependent man, who was grateful for everything her mother did for him, kept abandoning her. She just couldn't understand it. That her husband had become a

vagabond free of any ambition she thought, it seemed to Ebba, was her own failure. Divorce him? Impossible! Then you would have officially admitted the mistake. And what would granny have said about that?

At that moment the boy from earlier came back with an ice cream in his hand. Ebba already heard her mother clearing her throat and trying to start a conversation, but this time she was faster: she looked up at him, and her smile was returned. A tingling sensation spread from her belly to her fingertips. She made no effort to hide her interest from her mother. She sighed pleasurably and looked after the boy, who instead of going to the holiday settlement went to a lifeguard's observation chair. There someone called something to him from afar – it seemed to be in Croatian; then he joined the men in white shirts and shorts as if it was a matter of course. One of them was carrying binoculars around his neck. Her mother began a lecture on her experiences with boys "from southern European countries", who tried to pick up "tourist girls" and were the most unreliable sorts imaginable.

"They only want a girl who will soon be sitting in a plane again. Why else do they hang around the beach all summer, why do you think?"

Her mother held her head at such a clever angle that she could both look directly at Ebba and point her dragonfly eye at her. The dragonfly was an enchanted imp, an evil fairy – that much was clear.

The next day, Ebba saw the Croatian three times: in the morning with binoculars in the observation chair

– it looked as if one of the older men was instructing him – in the afternoon on the way to the ice cream stall, and again on the way back.

Today he had smiled first, cautiously. As Ebba made a few diary-like notes on the back of a postcard in one of her few mother-free minutes – her mother was on the loo – she remembered she didn't know anything about the boy and wasn't even sure she found him at all cute.

Later, her mother Ebba invited to the cinema and was very nice all evening. Ebba was almost sorry to have felt such a strong aversion to her.

Afterwards she lay in bed next to her mother and waited until her breathing had become even. Only then did Ebba think she could have moment's peace for reflection. It crossed her mind that she used to get along quite well with her mother. Before dad had disappeared, come back, disappeared. Back then they hadn't yet got so much in each other's hair.

The next morning, when Ebba woke, she sensed that something was different: her mother wasn't humming or whistling while she made coffee, the silver dragonfly wasn't sitting in its usual place but still lying on the bedside table. Something had changed.

A minute later, Ebba's mother sat down at bed: "Ebba, your dad called me on the mobile. He wants to talk. He wants to come back ... We... we really want to try it together again. He's stopped gambling – oh, you didn't know? – and he'll bring the Audi back with him ... he says."

"And what does that mean now?" Ebba asked suspiciously.

"Ebba, I've predated our return trip. We'll leave earlier."

Ebba was sitting on the beach laying patterns of shells. She had quarrelled of course with her mother for hours. Until they were both hoarse. Her mother had finally gone to the cinema. Then Ebba had strolled alone along the sea.

"How are you?" She suddenly heard a voice behind her. Ebba turned around quickly, a hand proffered her pistachios. She took two and immediately thought that her mother would interpret this as a sign of "consent" in other things. The pistachios tasted delicious. The boy dropped down into the sand next to her. They were silent for a moment.

"How is it that you speak English so well?" Ebba asked at last. She couldn't conceal her curiosity.

"Well, I work here ... meet a lot of tourists", he replied, confirming the suspicion that her mother had already planted in her brain, deeper than Ebba cared to think.

"And what do you do here?" Ebba asked, looking without interest at the sky. Just don't be too nice too soon!

The boy told her that he wanted to become a lifeguard to earn some money in the summer months. In a year he would be finished with school. After they had sat side by side for a while, he spoke more; he seemed to have shed his initial shyness, which had perhaps been just a trick. Ebba accepted an invitation to a glass of sparkling wine at a beach bar. She accepted everything he offered her. Her mother was busy with herself today, talking to her father for a fortune

the whole time, though only this morning she had refused to buy Ebba a women's magazine on the grounds that it was outrageously expensive.

As Ebba took the second glass of wine and the boy put a hand on her bare thigh, she was suddenly overcome by a crippling sadness. Suddenly she doesn't care what I do, what happens to me .... She thought of her mother hanging on the phone. Then she turned her head to the side; fortunately it was already so dark that the boy – she hadn't understood his name – couldn't see her tears; and, yes, then his lips were already coming towards her. Later, they rolled on the beach, and she let him push up her T-shirt. But when he started fumbling with her panties, Ebba urged him to stop. She was back at the apartment before twelve. Half a metre from the door, however, she had once again enjoyed his fierce kisses.

"Oh, here you are again", her mother murmured distractedly, and Ebba saw that she had been crying. Without thinking, she went to her mother and hugged her. For a few minutes, they both held each other in their arms. "Well, what experiences have you been having...", her mother said, but it was just a remark, almost loving, not a question.

Later, in bed, her mother held on to Ebba's hand as she reported in detail what her father had said. He'd grumbled about how he had not been accepted at art school back then, and why he didn't have the confidence to try again. After all, who made it on the first try? Her mother would be seeing her father anyway in three days, but she had talked with him about

these things the whole time on the mobile for a load of money. Ebba said nothing; at some point she closed her eyes – for once before her mother did. Only the dragonfly lying on the bed table still glared at Ebba.

Her falling asleep early had consequences. Ebba's mother had said that they would not leave sooner, but, as planned, in a week. She had spent so much time talking to her father that they had together decided not to shorten the holiday, for Ebba's sake. Always this back and forth.

The phrase "decided together" was pronounced by her mother almost solemnly; uttering it seemed to make her happy. Ebba found out about it only in the afternoon, after she had arranged to meet Jiri – that was the boy's name – for the evening, believing she had little time left. Now he thinks I can't endure a day without him. Ebba was annoyed.

When she and Jiri met, they talked about this and that – German food, Croatian food, what kind of music they listened to, if they have brothers and sisters – and tried to get through a decent period of waiting until it was dark enough. Then they smooched around on the beach, and Ebba thought longingly of the movie *Grease*, which she had seen last year and which begins with a romantic scene at the sea. She always thought of some picture or movie when she kissed Jiri, constantly wondering if they were doing everything right. Sometimes she would have liked to talk to a friend, but Ebba's friends were on the North Sea, in southern France, in Scotland, on balconies in Berlin – everywhere but here. And her mother? Bad joke.

Her mother telephoned with her father every night for hours. During the day she went to a gym to spoil her few remaining days on the Adriatic in the attempt to lose 15 pounds. Ebba thought of her modest, not particularly handsome father and didn't understand why her mother was now turning her holiday upside down. She hadn't even got back the Audi yet.

The advantage of the new situation, however, was that her mother made no comments at all on the meetings with Jiri. I could get pregnant – what would she say then? Ebba once mused. For a moment she toyed with the idea of letting it come to that. Just to annoy her mother, who now couldn't care less about her.

The night before she was to leave, Ebba was a little nervous. Today she would see Jiri for the last time – assuming he didn't insist on taking her to the bus terminal. Now she would find out whether he wanted her address in Berlin or not. As she stood in the bathroom in front of the mirror, her mother came from behind and put her heavy hands on her shoulders. "Do you know that your grandfather was in this region during World War II?" "Uh uh, how should I?". "I thought Grandad Paul would have talked about it", sighed Ebba's mother and turned her head so that the dragonfly glared at Ebba. "What did he do here?", Ebba, now curious, wanted to know. Her mother shrugged. "Nothing good probably. Hunted partisans and he ... that's what he once said. And now go – to your Croatian." There - her mother had succeeded superbly in giving her a decent little something to take

along. It had always been said that grandfather was "in Russia". Ebba thought of Grandfather, who had recently died and whom she had liked so much.

As usual, Jiri and Ebba met at eight o'clock in "their" café, right next to the lifeguard's observation chair. Sparkling wine with orange juice – the waiter brought it to them without asking. After the usual two glasses and inconsequential banter about which countries the nicest and the stupidest tourists on the Adriatic came from, they walked hand in hand along the sea; yes, she would miss Jiri just a bit in Berlin, even though, when her mother's snoring had awaken her last night and she couldn't go back to sleep, she had written down a piece of loo paper that she wasn't really in love.

They went from one beach bar to the next, and Ebba felt that these hectic changes of scene were all about quickly ordering something to get her quickly drunk. She didn't like the atmosphere of the bars; the women were much older and overdressed, almost slutty; she felt uncomfortable. Here and there, Jiri met friends or acquaintances, and also other girls, with whom he talked in Croatian for a long time without including her in the conversation. Actually, she would have most liked to go home. She was tired today.

But now Jiri was escorting her to a dark path that led in serpentines to a mountain. Jiri had a nice name for the mountain, but Ebba wasn't able to remember it. Jiri was holding her by the hand all the time. Sometimes he stopped, pulled her close and kissed her,

pushing his tongue deep into her mouth. But he realized she didn't like this, and soon his tongue just tapped against her incisors, licked her lips, the corners of her mouth and dove, very wet and warm, into her ears. Ebba couldn't get enough of that. Then they trudged on; the path was lined with Mediterranean stonecrops; they heard cicadas, the rustling of small animals, the distant laughter of parties at the foot of the mountain, and the deep tooting of ships, swelling and subsiding. A moment of happiness, exciting and glittering like the holiday lights of the beach bars far below, pulsed through Ebba. Now it was she who held Jiri, hugged him, and dove with her tongue into his ears.

They walked on silently, hand in hand. Finally they came to a hill with a wide view over the sea. The sight was overwhelming: all the glittering, the lights and the noise, the white lines of little ships on the horizon, birds with big wings circling over the waves. Ebba became dizzy, but not only because of her fear of heights. She sank into the grass; only a split second later, Jiri was beside her. On her. It went so fast; he suddenly lay on her, pressing her knees apart with his; his chin, his ribs, his elbows, his hipbones – everything squeezed, pressed, poked her. At last she punched him on the shoulder with her fist: "Stop ...". "Sorry", he said in confusion. Then, softer: "You're just so beautiful, I can't control myself!" Now he drew her towards him more gently, kissed her. Then again. And again his tongue. He knew what she liked. Ebba looked up into the starry sky; she didn't know what she wanted. Jiri now seemed so strange to her again.

How old was he really? She moved away a little. But he stroked her tenderly, put his mouth to her ear and began to talk ... Ebba now heard that the "soul of his father" hovered above them, in the small waft of mist that hung like a beard on the mountain. His father had died here, on this mountain, only a few years ago. Still very young. He left behind Jiri's mother, Jiri and his three younger siblings. Jiri had seen him in the morning, before his father wanted to go to his olive trees .... His father had suffered a heart attack after climbing in the heat and couldn't make his way down again. Ebba looked up anxiously at the mist. "And then you found him here, your father?" she asked full of compassion. "Yes, after two days ...", Jiri replied softly. Then he put his head in her lap and she stroked his dark hair. "It's funny", he continued. "My grandfather died here in the mountains too ... during the Second World War. He was with the partisans, you know. The ones who fought against the Ustashe militia. They were allied with the Germans, you know, the Ustashe." Ebba looked down at the ground. She had hashed and rehashed the Second World War at school three times, till the subject was coming out of her ears, but she knew nothing about Croatia, about this militia with the strange name allied with the Nazis and everything. Not until this very night did she even know her grandfather had been here. Didn't Mum have any time to tell her this on the endless bus ride? No, she had to tell her on the last night of the holiday, right before her date, in passing. "Not a good place for my family! Now my dad has followed him", murmured Jiri. Ebba was uneasily silent. For a moment, Jiri remained in his position; then the grief

over his father's death seemed wiped away; his hands deftly undid her bra and were soon playing with the hem of her underpants. And he didn't forget his tongue in all this. And Ebba had the feeling, somehow, of making up for something.

Jiri was very tender, mumbled something about "love". She didn't get pregnant. It was full moon, and she tried to think about *Grease.*

Back in Berlin, Ebba's mother, who was a geriatric nurse, worked very hard for a while, doing countless overtime hours. She wanted to support her husband, who could barely unload his self-painted watercolours on the flea market, and spare herself, him and Ebba from having to move to a cheaper, uglier flat.

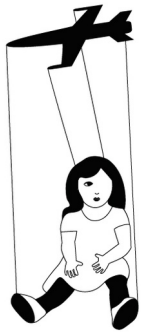
Only a few months later, she would kick Ebba's father out, and he, used to leaving and not being left, was never to return. And then, years later, a new man was to come and make Ebba's mother happy and want to give Ebba everything she once wanted to have as a child (she was now almost grown up herself). Her mother would also answer all the questions about her grandfather who had been hunting partisans with the so-called "Devil's Battalion" of the Wehrmacht in the mountains of Croatia, and do a lot of research on him – just when Ebba was under the stress of her school-leaving exams. Everything always came too late. There were no simultaneities, you never got anything when you needed it, the ticking of time and your own heartbeat – the big clock of the outside world and the

little “inside” one, as Ebba called it – just never fitted together.

And happiness? What was that...? Maybe for a moment the glittering of holiday lights on the beach.

Translated from German by Jonathan Uhlaner

Dad Will Join Us Later. By Nasrin Siege



This is Simin. Simin is sitting on a bed. She's in green checked pyjamas. Simin is a bit skinny and she has black hair. It kinks all over her head and is therefore curly.

Simin's feet are covered in thick, colourful stripes. Simin counts the coloured stripes. She has known how to count for a long time now, and she has known the names for the colours in Arabic and in German for even longer.

The stripes are blue and red and green and white. One sock has nine stripes and one has eight. Simin counts once more. No, she didn't miscount. The left sock is missing a blue stripe.

Simin is here with her mum at Grandma's. Not that long. Since yesterday, actually. Grandma gave her the thick wool socks. Right when they first got there.

Dad hasn't come yet.

Simin frowns. Dad stayed back there.

Simin squeezes Lara. Lucky that Lara came with them. But she's so small. So small she fits in Simin's backpack. Simin smoothes Lara's yellow hair. Lara likes that. She looks at Simin with one eye. Lara knows that Dad hasn't come yet.

Mum's and Aunt Ezraa's voices are coming from the living room. Simin's heart starts leaping for joy. Simin jumps out of bed and runs into the living room. She looks at Mum and Aunt Esraa. Aunt Esraa's on the computer.

"You don't have to cry," she hears Mum say.

"I'm only crying because", says the aunt, "I'm glad you and Simin are in Germany". "And I'm glad you're in Sweden."

"There's Simin!" Aunt Ezraa waves. "And you have Lara with you!"

Simin waves back. Lara too.

Simin wiggles her foot in front of the screen.

"They're beautiful. Where'd you get those beautiful socks?"

There's a loud bang on the street. Simin and Lara hide quickly.

Mum looks under the bed.

"There's nothing to be afraid of. That was from an exhaust."

Mama holds out her hand. Simin shakes her head.

"Come on out."

Simin shakes her head.

Mum sighs and goes back to Aunt Esraa.

"My mother knitted these beautiful colourful socks for Simin." Mum keeps talking with Aunt Esraa.

They're warm too, Simin wants to call out to her. But the words don't want to come out because they're staying inside her somewhere.

"They must be warm", Aunt Esraa heard Simin's words that didn't come out. "Now that winter is coming."

Simin is furious at the words. Because they always get stuck somewhere. Because they don't come out. Because she wants to tell Aunt Esraa everything!

"You're safe in Germany", says Aunt Esraa.

Cautiously, Simin crawls out of her hiding place and lies down again in bed with Lara.

There's such a good smell coming from the kitchen. Rattling noises are coming from the kitchen. And water-sounds. Grandma-noises come from the kitchen. And it's not Christmas. Simin was at Grand-

ma-Frankfurt's once. But that was a long time ago and Simin was even smaller than now. Mum was there too, and so was Dad.

Mum's standing in the doorway. Outside, the sun is shining. Mum goes to the window. “Zip” go the curtains and the sun falls on Simin's colourful bedspread. A great beam of sunlight tickles her eyes. But just a little bit.

Mum sits down by Simin. She strokes the wild curls off her face. Simin cuddles up to Mum.

"After breakfast, we'll go for a walk."

Simin nods.

A sweet breakfast cloud comes from the kitchen. Along with a song Grandma is singing. Simin and Mum laugh. Grandma has a nice voice. She used to be an opera singer. But that was a long time ago. As long as everything. Simin takes Lara in her arms and looks at the window.

"Come along", Mum's voice then says water and a bathtub.

Grandma trills like a bird.

Simin and Lara get up.

On Simin's feet shine the thick, colourful striped socks.

They all say Simin looks like Grandma. But Grandma is old and Simin is still a child. And Grandma's curls are white as clouds. Or Mother Hulda. Grandma can sing so beautifully. Simin shakes her head. She can't sing like Grandma can.

Grandma reaches out her arms. "There you are, my little one. Come sit at the table!" Grandma adjusts the chair. "Did you sleep well?" Simin nods.

Simin sits down at the table with Lara. Mum's at the table too. Mum pours herself a cup of coffee. Grandma pours cocoa into the bear mug. Simin likes the mug. It has a big body with five little bears playing in the grass. They must be sisters and brothers. Simin imagines herself playing with the bears. Simin laughs.

"What would you like to eat?" Grandma points at the kitchen table.

Simin stops playing with the bears.

"Cereal?"

Simin shakes her head.

"Maybe a piece of bread with butter and jam?"

Simin looks at Mum.

"Simin always needs some time in the morning", explains Mum.

Grandma nods and sits down at the table with them. Grandma eats bread with jam and drinks coffee with a little milk. Mum drinks her coffee black. Simin drinks cocoa from the bear cup.

"Say something!" Grandma looks at Simin.

Simin's mug falls over. The bears are swimming in cocoa on the table. Lara falls to the floor. Simin runs to Mum.

"It's all right." Mama takes Simin in her arms. "Not so bad!"

Grandma wipes the brown lake away from the table with a cloth.

"See?" smiles Grandma. "Everything's fine now!

Grandma wants to go to the doctor with Simin.

"She's been under enough stress already", says Mum. "She needs a little more time."

"But don't wait too long!" Grandma speaks sternly.

"I'm going for a walk with Simin now", says Mum. "And on our way we'll visit Philipp."

"Good idea", Grandma agrees. "I'll sing something for myself." Simin is looking forward to seeing Philipp. Because she knows him and because he's Dad's friend.

It's cold outside. The sun touches Simin's face. Only Simin's hands are cold. "You need gloves", says Mum.

Just a few people and a few dogs are in the park. The trees have no leaves. Their branches are like arms, Simin wants to say to Mum. But the words get stuck again. Somewhere in Simin. Mum looks at them. "Do you have something you want to tell me?" Simin nods.

All of a sudden a plane appears. It comes shooting out from among the clouds. It has a long white tail. Simin runs away. Very fast. Simin hides. The bushes are scratchy.

"There's nothing to be afraid of." Mum's sitting in front of the bushes. "There's no war here."

Simin used to play a lot with the other children on the street. But then the planes came and Simin and the other kids didn't play on the street so often.

But when they did play on the street and a plane came, Simin and the other children ran away. Then they took cover and didn't know where. The planes dropped explosives into the streets and houses. Then there was a bang and the streets and houses collapsed. Everybody was screaming. Simin screamed. Some people didn't get up after that.

One time Simin was out in the street with Mum. Mum wanted to see Dad at the hospital where he works. Fortunately, there were no planes in the sky.

On the way Simin found Lara. Lara's name wasn't Lara then. That's when she was called Doll. Doll was lying under a broken window of a house. Only her right eye was missing. Simin was looking for the eye. But she didn't find it. The doll's unblinking eye looked a little sad. It's brown, by the way.

Simin took Doll to Dad. Dad's a doctor and he works at the hospital. Simin showed him Lara. At that time she was already called Lara, because Simin gave her the name Lara. Dad examined Lara's eye, which wasn't there. "There's nothing you can do", Dad shook his head. "Never mind", Simin said. "I like her with one eye, too." Dad smiled. Simin remembers Dad's smile.

"It's time you flew home with Simin", Dad said.

"I don't want to go to Germany without you", said Mum.

"Understand me, Lisa! I'm still needed here!" Dad took Mum in his arms. "And we'll try to Skype, right?"

"Skype?" Mum looked so funny, in a way Simin didn't like. "Are you dreaming? It's hardly working anymore!"

"Sometimes it still works", and now Dad looked in a way Simin doesn't like. "And I'll be there soon", Dad promised.

Mum, Simin and Lara took the bus. Simin looked out of the window. Until Dad couldn't be seen anymore.

"Why is Dad staying here?"

"Because he's a doctor and he wants to help", Mom said.

"He's coming", Simin told Mama.

"True..."
"When is he coming?"
"Soon..."

There were a lot of women and children on the bus. The bus drove for a long time. Simin was asleep most of the time. Simin woke up when the bus stopped. They all got out and had something to eat and drink. Simin and Mum had to change buses. It drove for a very long time again and stopped a few times until it pulled over at the airfield. Simin and Mum and Lara flew to Grandma-Frankfurt. Simin calls her that because she lives in Frankfurt. Dad's mum lives in Damascus and that's why Simin calls her Grandma-Damascus.

Simin likes Philipp. Dad and Philipp studied in Frankfurt. They've been friends ever since. That was many years ago. Simin wasn't born then. First Dad and Mum had to get to know each other at university.

Philipp kneels before Simin. He has cheerful blue eyes and a short blond plait. Philipp smiles. "What's your doll's name?" asks Philipp. Simin opens her mouth, moves her tongue, her lips. She tries so hard until she cries. Philipp now looks gravely at Mum, who is sitting on a chair. He slowly stands up and sits down on the chair at the table.

"She was still talking in the bus from Aleppo"; Mum again looks funny in the way Simin doesn't like. "I don't know exactly when she stopped talking." Simin runs to Mum and puts her arm around her.

"Why is Rami staying in Aleppo?"

"Because he's a doctor", Mama says.

"Typical Rami", Simin hears Philipp say. "But I can really understand him."

Philipp and Mum talk for a while and Simin listens carefully. There are words Simin doesn't know. There are words Simin has heard before. "German passport" - which Dad doesn't have because he's Syrian and Mum and Simin do have.

"Get in touch with me if you need any help", says Philipp with an earnest look.

"I will", says Mum.

"Give Simin a little more time. She's been through a lot and now she needs a rest."

"I know", Mum takes a deep breath. "And she misses Rami."

"I came to you mainly because of my mother." Mum gets up. She takes Simin's hand and laughs softly. "She said I should take Simin to the doctor."

Philipp gets up too. He hugs Mum. Then he kneels before Simin again.

"You're safe here", he says. "And everything will be all right. You'll see."

"Dad... is coming... he said so", Simin listens to her own words. They came all by themselves. As free as sunbeams in the morning and the rustling of leaves in the park. Very softly. But they're there.

Translated from German by Edith C. Watts

Simple, Little Things. By Vladimir Arsenijević

That morning she found a large black insect in the kitchen.

It sat in the sink and circumspectly stretched out its long feelers, like a wise man. Nauseated, she let the water run. The animal was immediately caught by the water jet. It wriggled in the eddy that swept it away towards the drain.

She turned to make coffee. She had made it a habit to prepare a double dose every morning.

Only when the coffee machine started hissing did she look back at the sink. The big black insect was still there. It fought against the water. Its legs were losing their strength, the tips of its wings already shredded, raw, dark yellow flesh already emerging at those places.

She felt her stomach heave. Turned off the tap.

The insect calmed down. It didn't move for a while. Then it started to climb up the sink. Badly wounded, it dragged its hind legs and slipped down helplessly again and again. But it didn't give up.

From the window-sill she took an empty flowerpot with residues of dry soil sticking to the bottom. She put it over the insect, which slowly pushed itself up against the inside wall. She put the pot back on the window-sill and closed the window.

She sat down at the kitchen table. Wiped her forehead with the back of her hand. She poured herself coffee and took a sip. But the coffee didn't taste good, she couldn't handle the usual half of the double dose of her customary morning coffee today.

*

Forty days had passed since her husband's death. Although the church priest wanted to say a prayer for his salvation in the village and suggested holding a memorial service for him, she didn't even dream of considering it. It was enough that he had imposed himself at the funeral and run through the summary version of a service against her will. Whenever he crossed himself and said "Amen", she and her son had stood still, their heads bowed. Only the geriatric nurse had emulated the priest and crossed herself voluntarily. But the wrong way around. She had shed tears and gotten on her nerves.

At the request of the deceased, only the three of them, apart from the priest, attended the funeral. Later they scattered the ashes in a previously designated place. Here, too, only the three were present. The presence of the geriatric nurse was bothersome, and she and her son made equal efforts to ignore the woman. They hadn't even chosen her. A palliative care service had sent her to them. She had fled the war that raged in an eastern country about twenty years ago. At first she assumed that the nurse was a Muslim, but then she saw how she crossed herself. Every morning she drank a cup of tea in the kitchen before going to work. She entered the hospital room as if it were a spaceship. Or a sinister mining tunnel. She eavesdropped through the wall while the nurse read to him. Day in, day out. After all the years she's been here, her pronunciation was still deplorable.

They thought the end would come sooner, but sometimes these things drag on unpredictably. And so the nurse stayed with them for almost a year. Inexplica-

bly, she did not succeed in committing her name to memory during this time. Deep down, she knew she had no ill will towards her, but she just couldn't retain her name. The nurse was offended and their relationship remained distant.

In any case, they did not see any more of each other after all the commotion around the death, cremation and all the accompanying rituals was over. The nurse vanished from her memory and there was no concrete reason to think of her this particular morning. And yet she did. The feeling that life would send her some kind of message smouldered within her, and flared up when the doorbell rang unexpectedly amidst her coffee ruminations. This feeling culminated when, of all people, she, the geriatric nurse, stood before the door. She had never been so happy to see the nurse. "How nice of you to visit", she said to her. "Do come in, please."

The nurse entered the apartment very tentatively. She put her bag down in the corridor and wanted to take off her shoes as before.

She stopped her. "Would you like some coffee?" she asked as she invited her into the sitting room.

"Yes, why not", the nurse replied. Her pronunciation was still wretched. Maybe, she thought, there might yet be a future in which that wouldn't bother her anymore.

"Coming right away, my dear", she chirped and handed her the second half of the usual double dose of morning coffee.

*

After the nurse had left, her stomach constricted with hunger. She thought of lettuce and strawberries, two slices of rye bread with a thin layer of butter on top, and the tart taste of alpine cheese that stuck to the palate. But as soon as she took a step into the kitchen, the big black insect came to her mind. She opened the window and looked cautiously into the flowerpot. It was still there, at the bottom of the pot, sitting on its dry earth shroud. Its long feelers had gracefully set it up once again. When it sensed someone leaning over it, it froze.

It moved her deeply. She almost wanted to caress it. But then she flinched, retreated and prepared the meal she had planned in a few easy steps, put everything on a wooden tray and went into the sitting room.

*

That afternoon, she met her son at her favourite pastry shop. She was very impressed by the nurse's unexpected visit, but he seemed to find her description too effusive. She watched him type a message on his cell phone, nodding mechanically. She gave him a light slap on the hand in which he held the cell phone and said: "Hey!" His face was puffy. "I was just telling you about her husband." And she continued: "He's gotten a residence permit. Finally, he too can get out of the horror and go to his wife and children."

“Nice for them, right?” her son replied indifferently. She sighed: "Of course", she said. "But sometimes I think it would be best if they all stayed where they are."

"Just because you feel comfortable right where you are", he said with reluctance in his voice, "doesn't mean you're entitled to it all by yourself".

He had always been a smartass. Like his father.

"I don't know", she said. "One should be able to choose somehow."

Her son's face was suddenly all smiles. "While we're at it", he said and bent over, "I've got a question for you. Ready? All right, listen up. Where do you think the eastern border of Europe is?"

He seemed to want to provoke, like a talk-show host.

She closed her eyes and imagined a boundary stone on a bare, wind-swept mountain top. But where was this mountain?

She didn't know, but he wasn't in a hurry. She would think her answer over calmly. He used the pause to tell her that the host had recently put this very same question - Where does Europe end in the East? - to a guest in the panel discussion at the cultural centre. He kept looking at her piercingly. The glitter in his eyes was almost manic.

"I don't know", she said. "I really don't know. What did the guest say?"

If only someone would love him, she thought as she looked at him. If only someone, for just a moment, would love him.

"*It does not end*", he whispered dramatically. "*It fades away.*"

*

That night she avoided the kitchen. She watched the news on TV. Dictators, presidents, ministers and generals flickered before her eyes one after the other across the screen. Columns of refugees, long-suffering people, pursued by misfortune. Wars, conflicts, natural disasters, murders, sexual abuse. She kept zapping. For a while she watched an ancient sitcom. Nothing was so reassuring to her, nothing made life so enjoyable as bad jokes and canned laughter, she thought. Simple little things, all those simple little things! She almost choked. She turned the TV up. For a few minutes she laughed along with the canned people, then a sense of shame overcame her, and she turned the TV off and went to bed.

She woke up in the middle of the night. Got up and went into the kitchen. Drank a glass of tap water. Then she opened the window. Cautiously, she looked into the flowerpot. She had sensed it: the insect was gone. She lifted the flowerpot. It wasn't underneath or behind it. She bent far out over the window-sill and looked at the façade.

A barely visible trace, a slimy serpentine line, ran across the outer wall and disappeared into the darkness.

She closed the window and went back to bed.

*

Only later would she be overcome with fear.

Before daybreak.

Translated from Serbian to German by Maja Matić

Translated from German to English by Edith C. Watts

A Good European. By Zinaida Lindén

- *I am just learning how to be a good European.*

She is as petite as a porcelain doll. Too much make-up. A short, tight dress. A sweaty handshake. She is anxious and tense. Not exactly the academic type. She took her PhD in Nizhny Novgorod – or was it Veliky Novgorod? – and taught European literature there. Now she hopes to do another doctorate again, here in Europe.

- *What do you mean?*

The Nordic professor raises his eyebrows.

- *A good European – as opposed to what?*

- *I want to become a good European... researcher.*

Her English is pretty bumpy. Not exactly suitable for a scholarly seminar.

Among the writers she mentions in her presentation is Michel Houellebecq. She has no trouble spelling out his name, but seems a bit unsure when she talks about his controversial novel *Submission*. She would so much like to do that correctly, European.

- *Before I moved here I had no idea about the level of... tolerance.*

She is odd, doesn't know the rules. Doesn't even know how to dress. These Russians – must they always, at any appropriate or inappropriate occasion, so exhibit their femininity?

She smiles guiltily and hurries on with her lecture. Now she's talking about postmodernity.

- *Dans 'Simulacres et Simulation' Jean Baudrillard analyse comment notre société postmoderne a perdu le contact avec la réalité...*

- Her French is fluent. Does that make her a European?

Two and a half years ago, she had no idea that she wasn't one. She was convinced that she was European. What else? She was born in Europe, far away from the Urals and the Caspian Sea. As a child, she read Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens. In her youth she loved Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé. And now here in the north, is she not a European? She who always believed in *liberté, fraternité, egalité.* And who has shunned everything in her homeland that was in the least anti-European.

Here she keeps hearing that she is not a European. Doesn't come from Europe. Because Europe would stand for something higher, better. Now it's time to roll up your sleeves and learn. She'll certainly succeed, she's always been so good. A good doctoral student, a good teacher, a good wife. Good at pancake baking and shirt ironing. And yet her husband left her for a younger woman. And she has a new, sweet little daughter.

In Russia, she had no future on the partner market. No Russian man wants a divorced mother with a small child. Luckily, she has kept her freshness despite her thirty-seven years. Luckily, she met Leif at a conference in St. Petersburg. Leif is a good European, a good stepfather to her daughter, a good son who often visits his ailing father in a good European facility. Luckily, she was allowed to bring her little daughter here to the north to give the child a good, European future.

A pity her mother will never get this.

Her mother, who still lives at home and suddenly went blind six months ago. Although she had diabetes, blindness came without warning. There fol-

lowed an unplanned trip home, many nerve-wracking hospital visits, several unsuccessful attempts to engage the neighbours, some stressful meetings with an overburdened social worker, and finally a private arrangement with a very religious but suspicious home-help. Now she has to manage and arrange, support and organize, do and do. From a distance. Remote control the everyday life of the old woman, by telephone and computer.

How is she going to be able to write a good European dissertation when her entire waking time is spent thinking about mama?

According to the family reunification law, mama doesn't belong to the family. Until recently, older non-Europeans who had no relatives in their home country had the opportunity to move here to the north. "Regulation Pertaining to the Last Surviving Relative", it was called. Her mother's last surviving relative – that's her. But the clause has been removed from the Alien Law to prevent social tourism. So that hordes of seniors don't invade fortress Northern Europe. Some non-Europeans with dementia or who have been victims of strokes have even been expelled.

"Too bad your mother isn't politically active", one or two good Samaritans sighed. "Then you could apply for asylum."

There is a coffee break.

She tries to talk to a Polish linguist, but he ignores her. Talk to this slut from the land of the oppressors? That was all he needed!

The Nordic professor stands in line for the coffee behind her. But not too close: if you sit on the Equali-

ty Committee of the university you have a reputation to lose.

The Russian woman turns around. The professor leans forward politely.

Did you perhaps dance ballet as a child? he asks.

Mais oui!

A happy smile spreads across her face and she shows her small, neat teeth. The first French words she learned were *pliés, relevés, battement tendu ....*

You can think what you will of the Russians, but they can dance.

The professor nods gently. As an academic, however, one must think critically. Can she think critically? A person as exotic as her?

A lady in a sari and with a big red dot on her forehead, standing in line in front of them, says with sudden delight:

I love Tchaikovsky's ballet music! Tchaikovsky's my favourite European composer!

The white teeth of the lady in the sari stand out clearly in her dark face. She is a Bengali. She specializes in children's literature. She has also lived here for two and a half years. Her English is perfect. Is that what makes her a European in times of Brexit? She is still only an Indo-European: Bengali belongs to the Indo-European language family. This has been proven by comparative linguistics.

- Would you like to meet over a cup of tea sometime?

The women exchange phone numbers. In the Bengali culture too you take care of your old parents back at home. The lady in the sari surely knows what it's

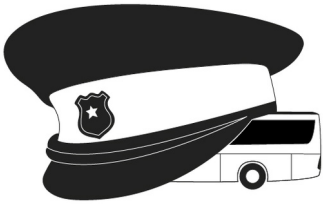
like to manage and arrange, to do and to do. To become her mama's mama. To be the "last surviving relative".

Good to discuss this at a meeting. Talking helps.

- *Thank you for kindness*, says the Russian in her lumpy English. *Nothing is stranger than kindness. The kindness of strangers.*

Translated from German by Jonathan Uhlaner

On the Run. By Wilfried N'Sondé



It must have been a Tuesday at the central bus station in Berlin-Charlottenburg; I had chosen a day with little rush so as to travel to Paris as comfortably as possible. Twelve hours driving time, sometimes more, rarely less. So that the route didn't become a real ordeal, you had to plan accordingly.

I was relieved and a little proud to note that just under twenty people, politely lined up in a queue, waited patiently outside the bus door. So buoyantly I entered the station concourse, into which a gusty, icy east wind drove me. Since the beginning of February, the thermometer had not climbed above zero, but the bitterly cold air that bit my face and all unprotected areas of the skin was the herald of a particularly unpleasant night.

After checking in, I made myself comfortable on the back seat, which fortunately I had all to myself. I was looking forward to stretching myself out; I could sleep in peace, maybe even until our destination. So the departure for Paris stood under a very good sign; a pleasure trip on which I could let the silence of the frosted landscape gently envelop me in a nocturnal cloak. The idea was particularly pleasing because passengers have no longer been automatically disturbed by the passport controls since the borders between Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and France were opened. As an adolescent, I had been amazed by the mishap of the great French poet Gérard de Nerval, who wanted to travel from his home in Paris to the palace of Fontainebleau and was arrested and detained in Melun, fifty kilometres from Paris, because he wasn't able to produce his passport for the police. I take the last bite of my sandwich and the chips and

remember my first visit to Berlin: the train left around 8 pm from the Gare du Nord in Paris and should have arrived the next day at 10 o'clock at Berlin Zoo Station. During those long fourteen hours I had been checked five times, three times alone in divided Germany.

I was half asleep when Julie boarded the bus at the first stop in Hannover late in the evening. She had difficulty getting in with the rather bulky bag on her back, holding her two daughters by the hand as the three moved forward through the narrow centre aisle, one ahead, the other behind. The adorable four-year-old twins Noëlle and Joëlle had the touching childlike enthusiasm of still unclouded happiness written in their faces, especially right before departure, intoxicated by the upcoming long journey. So that the three could stay together, I offered them my five seats in the back of the bus. The little girls drummed their feet against the seat, pressed noses to the window, their lustrous eyes wide open, in the expectation of everything there was to discover beyond the glass. Their short legs dangled back and forth; they clapped their hands in delight as the engine stuttered before starting.

Julie's worried or suspicious look was mainly directed to the floor, as if she feared her eyes would betray her thoughts. Secrets? At first I thought it was shyness or fatigue, especially as the young mother reminded her children to be quieter, in a subdued, extremely gentle voice, immensely tender and patient. Still, the children whispered loudly, playing, squabbling, trying to sneak from one end of the bus to the other. In spite of the late hour, their droll games,

their irrepressible exultation, their barely concealed conspiratorial chuckles, and simply the good humour that conveyed their innocence and the lust for life sparkling in their eyes amused the other passengers, who slowly slipped into impervious sleep.

When the girls were exhausted, peace returned to the bus, which in the meantime was driving through the Netherlands. A quick look outside: here and there streets were lit by lanterns, a house. In the cone of light, I perceived how violent the icy wind was, which was making the leaves, covered with a thin layer of ice, shiver. The girls came back to their mother; with heavy eyelids, their eyes already dreamwards; they cuddled at her side, asked for a kiss, a caress; then their bodies went limp. As they fell asleep, Julie attentively covered them with their coats. With her daughters snuggled in the embryo position, Julie raised her head. She examined the wandering horizon with a piercing look, peering as if seeking an answer that would emerge from the deepest nocturnal blue. The urgency with which she explored the darkness made me curious; she was serious, not a blink, her arms protectively wrapped around the waists of the two angels, now fitfully sucking on their thumbs. Perhaps she sensed something bad; she remained tense, alarmed, watchful.

We were speeding on without hindrance, making our way through a Western Europe plunged into darkness, when Julie put her hand on my shoulder and shook me gently, asking if I could keep an eye on Noëlle and Joëlle while she was gone for a moment. It was on this occasion that she gave me her first name. I agreed, smiled back, and was touched by her chil-

dren sleeping behind me. The pink ribbons in the rumpled hair described lines and circles above their heads every time they moved in their sleep.

Julie had just closed the loo door behind her when suddenly a light emerged that tore the sleepers from their dreams and blinded them. The girls straightened up, pouting and rubbing their eyes with their fists. The driver slowed down and, as soon as he asked us to get ready for inspection by the Dutch border police, I heard Julie come back up the stairs and run towards her children. She was very scared. The fear left on her face the expression of a hunted animal that has no refuge. Led by a police car, the bus drove off the highway and came to a halt in the parking area of a petrol station. Two customs officers boarded, wearing uniforms with the flags of the Netherlands and the European Union and weapons on their belts. The first greeted us briefly in a loud, authoritarian tone and announced a passport inspection; we would have to get our travel documents out. Julie's face remained uncommunicative; behind her temples was the frantic up and down of the jaw; fear paralyzed her, and she no longer answered the questions of Joëlle, who doggedly wanted to know from her why they had stopped. They wanted to drive on, like all the other cars they saw passing in the distance.

The officials began the inspection in good humor; routine, a smile, the usual decorous and polite phrases. I saw that Julie had a problem. The more the distance between the customs officers and her shrank, the more she tensed up. They were almost at the end of the bus. The driver started the engine to re-continue driving. I don't know what my expression told

them, but theirs were suddenly different, suspicious. The policeman who took my passport frowned and asked me where I was going. The words stuck in my throat; I stuttered "Paris"; something strangled my breath. Then that was that; they kept going. Julie lowered her eyes, stammering futile explanations. No papers, no residence permit, migrants; she searched for something in her bag, pulled out a file, but there was nothing to be done; they shook their heads, she kept talking and started to cry. It didn't help. One of the officers asked the driver to stop the engine and open the luggage compartment door. Humiliated and desperate, Julie took her coat, as did Joëlle and Noëlle, who noisily raised their noses, gathered their things together, and followed the guardians of the law without a word. The other passengers on the bus, me included, remained silent. The deep discomfort found no words, but it brought on nausea. Only shy, disapproving, powerless looks. What had she done wrong that she should be forbidden to continue her journey?

From my window, the three of them looked tiny between the two nearly six-foot-three officials. One ran a hand over his face, from forehead to chin, turned his eyes away from the girls and smoothed his mustache. The other man kept talking on the phone, trying to get an answer, without success, and became angry. One of the girls sobbed on his mum's leg, her small breast heaving her winter coat irregularly. Her sister waved a tiny hand in my direction; I was appalled by the sadness in her face and ashamed that I was allowed go on while she had to stay there. Dead

in the middle of winter, held in the icy February cold, forced to stop, thwarted.

Translated from German by Jonathan Uhlaner

Paranoia. By Arian Leka

What is the right word? Bad? The day starts badly. First of all, my wife, who on the one hand imitates the silent smile of Romy Schneider in The Old Gun, and on the other hand is constantly talking. If she doesn't find the right explanation, she cries.

"I've never been free. Neither in the dictatorship nor now", says my wife. She leaves the room and locks herself in the bathroom. "When I was little, my father kept me under surveillance. When I reached puberty, I was spied on by my brother. Then you came along. You seemed to give me the freedom, but you controlled me from a distance. Now neither my father nor my brother nor you are keeping your eyes on me. Now it's our daughter who clings to me. My daughter", she says, and comes out again.

Now it's my turn. Some time ago, my wife enriched the bathroom with a new object.

"This isn't a toy", she said, taking it out of the box, and added, as she placed it carefully on the old tiles: "This is a *Richard Salter*."

It was a scale. On the left it shows the number 120. Right 10. In the middle 0. I would have liked a barometer instead of the scale, but my wife said:

"To get the lead role, I have to lose seven pounds. Got that?"

I mount the scales. The arrow settles between 70 and 90. Have I lost weight? Not a bit. I've gained 300 grams. This drives my wife crazy. How can I gain 300 grams if I've stopped drinking alcohol and eat no heavy foods?

I alight. I don't know why I feel I won't live long. How do people like me die? Quietly?

"Come out! Your daughter will be late for school."

If there's a moment I hate, it's this one.

"You're not like how you used to be", my wife says as soon as I step into the room from the bathroom. "You're a workshop that produces nothing but bad mood! What happened to your promises that you and I would someday ... That me and you ... Where are the times when you used to soar? Aha! You're just not what you used to be back then!"

Not only my wife doesn't feel free anymore, I don't either. I lie down on the edge of the bed. I look at my body. At the places where I should have grown wings, as I promised my wife, black body hair has grown like fur. I can't fly. I'm the guy who brings the bread home, but no joy.

All that would have been enough to poison the day for good. But there was more. Evil seems almighty after glancing at the computer. A new mail appears in the inbox on the screen. I get up. I wait until the new mail is downloaded and gets lost amongst the discounts, cheap loans and "10 steps to lose weight without a dietician". I read only the subject line. There haven't been any invitations for a long time.

"Everyone's forgotten you. Not only don't you get any more invitations. Your name isn't even on the water and electricity bill", my mother once said.

While I wait for the text to appear on the screen and to read the longed-for word PUBLISHER, I hear my father's words echoing in my ears as he walks down the hall:

"Be genius or ..."

I know the rest.

"... find a job ...".

How would that sound if my dad said that in Albanian? “Look for work, or ...?”

Fuck! My father never talks dirty. I wonder how he can stand it without cursing, scolding, yelling! For my father, the story is over. There’s no room left for geniuses, let alone for people like me, who make a living translating. How? Listlessly. Just like him.

My father worked in the publishing house “8th of November”. He was the copy editor. *The third eye.* This meant that when a work was translated from German, the second eye compared it to the French, and my father looked through the versions in a third language. He checked the translations by political prisoners who translated for the sake of people's power, but he didn’t like to be reminded of it. Their names never appeared in the books any more than did my father’s name. The prisoners hadn’t seen their children for years, and I too rarely saw my father. He left when I was still asleep, he came back when I was already asleep. His trade was listed on the national occupational list under the number 2634 / 010-07. If he had at least once received a medal or a tribute! It wasn’t until after he had given a newspaper interview that humanity learned that my father had been the one who had translated the sentence from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* which deals with persons who appear twice in history, once as a tragedy and once as a farce, into flawless Albanian. Had he also implemented the ideals of *Liberté - Egalité - Fraternité*? Partly. My father receives the same monthly pension as his friends: $ 120; in bed, my mother and he have become brother and sister; he is free to chat and choose where he wants to have his

afternoon coffee, in the Bar Bruxelles or in the Café London. For him, the story is over. A thorn from a thorn. A rose from the rose. I know the sequel: "A translation from a translator."

Nobody in my family knows that what I want to do has nothing to do with translation. Nobody knows that what I want is not to translate others but to write my own book. But how? How is that supposed to work if I can't even rest myself for twenty minutes? My wife doesn't know that I send publishers an exposé every month. That's why she pricks up her ears and listens for every new e-mail in the inbox. She wants to know. Whether that's not the translator with the nice little butt from the editorial department who smiles are as hot as Penelope Cruz and stretches like Scarlett Johansson. Nothing happens. The inbox is waiting for the publisher. More precisely, for his answer.

While the internet is charging, I lie down again. My wife comes in. She lies down next to me. As if it weren't enough already – *You've got fat! You're a workshop that produces nothing but bad mood!* – she says to me now: "Why don't you try ...!"

I know. I'm not trying to change anything. I get up from the bed and put the headphones on. I have to fulfil the daily target for translating film dialogue. *Play*. The first thing I hear is what the young Bolshevik says to Doctor Zhivago: "That's right! Yuri! Adapt yourself!"

"Stop doing movies!" says my father sharply and goes into the bathroom. There's no choice. There's no freedom. In this world there's room only for the ordinary. The sulky and disgruntled. For you and me.

In the hall my daughter appears. She gives me a sign. Then she asks me what the dollar rate is, how much is 8 x 7 and if she can watch the series *Sex and the City* in the evening. She too is disgruntled. Like us. She has her eyes on her cell phone. Headphones always on her ears. I wonder. In my day, the disgruntled were different. The only thing our daughter wants from us is electricity and 24-hour Wi-Fi.

My father shuts the bathroom door. He took the remote control with him. He may have no power to change the world, but he has the power to change channels from the loo. The press review on TV.

"Let's start with the headlines on the covers. First to politics. And then."

"Papaaa! Quieter!"

My dad makes the TV quieter from the loo. I want to scold, yell, and call down a plague on his house, but I can't. The rights and freedoms of children. I won't be loud in front of my daughter. But after so many years, I've learned something, I tell myself. No matter where we sit, whether at the computer, on the edge of the bed, on a stool or on the loo seat, we all find ourselves in front of a television listening to the same thing: we poison ourselves with the news and die, as in a room full of poison.

My father comes out of the bathroom and says to me:

"You're not a genius? Then look for a job so you become one, otherwise we'll all go crazy!"

I go back to the computer. The e-mail is open. It isn't a publisher. The sender is an employee of one of the embassies in Tirana.

I've became even heavier. If I weighed myself now, my weight would surely be 500 grams more. My wife would finally have to grasp what it's all about with those grams I gain, even if I'm not eating. I'm a workshop that produces only one commodity: bad mood. Three hundred grams net of it per day.

I read the e-mail. Fuck! The sender orders something that he has never wanted from me. He has previously commissioned services from me, but not yet a murder. And this by e-mail? Does he think I'm a contract killer? Am I a criminal who hides behind the beautiful words he translates?

The more I read the mail, the more xenophobic I become. I'm trying to make a connection between the mail and my xenophobia. Haha. My xenophobia isn't fear but mistrust. I don't hate. Hatred, like love, is sacred, I can't waste it on everyone. But on a daily basis, my conviction grows stronger that I'm bound hand and foot and no longer live in my own country. And now this foreigner comes along and orders a murder from me! Don't be so reckless, I say to him, but talk only to myself. Don't you know we're being eavesdropped on? There, I already see them, the crooks who crack passwords to blackmail and demand money from us. Yes, the former Sigurimi people, who today are experts working for the big bankers and business people, don't you get it? They're rubbing their hands contentedly now they've trapped us. Yup! I see them before me. They're sitting in front of our open mail. With a malicious smile on their lips. Haha. They surely smell something suspicious. Are these two so naive, they wonder, or are they setting a trap for us? Haha! Is the embassy sending a coded secret report in

the form of a simple message? Some TOP SECRET of which only the leadership of NATO and Interpol is aware? But surely they're not so stupid as to announce it already today. Haha!

The taste in my mouth is as a rusty hook must taste in the mouth of a fish. I've been caught, but I have to muster all my courage. Will I be bugged? Me? But I'm just a normal person who, to survive, translates everything that comes his hands – old movies, children's bibles, medication information leaflets and manuals for household appliances.

Although only a few minutes have passed since the e-mail arrived, I've already figured out what I'll answer if the public prosecutor arraigns me. I won't deny my acquaintance with the foreign diplomat, but I'll declare my innocence by stating that the diplomat was interested in the Albanian tradition of blood revenge. It was murder in a metaphorical sense, you understand, Mr Examining Magistrate ...?

The foreign diplomat must have been confused. Of all the words available to him, he chose the falsest one. He was referring to the nature of the commission. What he wanted from me was neither *murder* nor *assassination* nor *sleep* nor *dispatch*. He just wanted the *execution* of the order. If only I had listened to my father! He wouldn't even visit me in prison. And even if he did, he would just say

"I always told you: find a job!"

I step onto the balcony. From here I see the Café Zurich, where strangers and residents of the settlement meet to bet, drink the local cognac and local beer. I go down the stairs. I mumble, because everyone is whispering. Paranoia grows. Everyone believes

they're being bugged. No one talks loudly any more. They mumble. A faint crackle in the telephone receiver is enough, and everyone sees themselves caught in the coils of a conspiratorial net. Intelligence services? Embassies? Secret agents? On the third floor landing I meet my neighbour. Although we'll soon be in the square in front of the house, he wastes no time and whispers to me to be careful.

"You better watch out, especially for the street hawkers. Even if they look like social cases, they're the ones who spy on us the most. They scan what we put in the bag. Why do you think plastic bags were invented", he monologizes. "Because they are cheaper? No! Plastic bags were invented to control us: the CIA invested with the industrialists. Now they know who we are. Through our purchases. Right, Professor?"

I arrive at Café Zurich. I enter, and even before I sit down I already hear what's being said ...

"Before, only the Sigurimi was listening to us. Now everyone is listening to us. "

I recall my wife who complained about never having been free.

"Just look at him", someone says and looks at the waiter. "Do you think you can bribe him? No matter what you give him, it won't be enough. The waiter gossips, slanders you, stirs things up against you. Watch out! Especially for the elderly."

"The beggars are the worst. They work in three shifts. The beggars are non-stop spies."

"What do you think the beggars talk about when they meet in the neighbourhood house in the evening? He's loaded! He has nothing! He gives! He gives you nothing!"

I don't know why it seems to me that everyone is talking to me. What should I do? Tell them that I am under suspicion? That they have me on the hook? That I'll be arrested?

I get up and make my way to the editorial office. As we wait for the last page of the paper to be finished, I tell my colleagues, off-handedly, about the paranoia that has befallen us all.

"In every vendor and every beggar people smell a spy", I tell them.

Instead of being surprised, they stare at me.

"Do you really don't know, or are you just playing dumb?"

"We know what's going on. Or are you now going to wag your finger and talk about the right-wing extremists? About racial abuse and homophobia? You know the little Roma and the Egyptians. Yes those, who keep us from sleeping and ask for scrap metal and waste paper? Do you really think they're doing badly? The Roma and Egyptians aren't Egyptians and Roma at all. They're secret agents. Get it now? And don't say I did not warn you", the typesetter tells me.

"And don't be fooled when they're feet-up in the dustbin!" says the translator who smiles like Scarlett Johansson. "You feel bad when you see them running around with empty prams? That's just masquerade. They're not collecting bottles and cans, they're watching what we throw in the trash. They're paid for it. Yes, singing and laughing, they rummage through our rubbish, read the bills, contracts, payments, piecing together torn letters, collecting the price tags. In short, they inventory our households and inform ... "

"Whom? Whom do they inform?" I ask angrily.

“Criminals, who else? That's how it is!”

“The criminals then inform the criminal justice system and the contract killers: when they’re caught by the police, they spill the beans. The state gets their reports, and thanks to the Roma and Egyptians they know everything about us.”

“But the state is part of the Euro-Atlantic organizations and writes very different reports.”

“CIA, NATO, UN, OSCE, KFOR, UNHCR. All of them. Do you get it now, where our rubbish lands?”

“At the international institutions. They know everything about us. Also what condoms you use, expensive or cheap, with strawberry or rose scent”, says the translator who smiles like Penelope Cruz.

I'm speechless.

“Pull yourself together”, says the typesetter. “I'll tell you the last secret, too, so that you can take precautions. If you want to live undisturbed, do your shopping far away from your flat. Where nobody knows you. Mix your rubbish with the rubbish of your neighbours. Throw it away where it won’t be found by the Egyptians, the waiters, the beggars, the police and the internationals. And one last word: give up plastic bags. Buy a cloth bag so they can’t see what’s inside and what you’re carrying home. We’re surrounded, brother! We’re spied on from all sides. But when I tell that to people, they think I’m crazy.”

I have to go back. Home. The e-mail that came this morning is waiting for me. I want to remove it. I have exactly four options: *Delete*, *Spam*, *Archive* or *Trash*. But just as I think I’ve made up my mind, I’m terrified as never before. What if there’s a Roma or Egyptian

clan lurking in the electronic wastebasket, there in the trash folder?

I arrive home. I enter the room. Everyone is sleeping. I have to continue work where I left off. I put on the headphones. 01:30:56 minutes. I hear the young Bolshevik say to Zhivago: "Yuri! Adapt yourself!" Watch out, Yuri!

Translated from Albanian to German by Zuzana Finger

Translated from German to English by Jonathan Uhlaner

Counter-Attack. By Oliver Rohe

“According to our latest information”, the lawyer tells me, “he is said to have sympathized with the Islamic State, and even sworn allegiance to it. I haven’t the slightest idea if that’s true. He won’t talk to me anymore. No one I know from his circle is still willing to keep me up to date. Neither his wife and children, nor his former employers, nor his friends from the mosque. The social authorities have lost his track, which they never really followed anyway. He no longer has a fixed place of residence, no one knows how he is doing or where he is, even when it’s said he’s in Hungary or Austria. Or in Bosnia. Of course, those who don’t know the process or know it too well – those who have slandered him from the start: government, police, press, whether right-wing or middle-class, sometimes even left-wing – see this turn to the Islamic State, to terror, as a result of his development, as a logical consequence of his life; they will say that what began with the views of his youth, when he fought for a radical Islamic movement in the Lebanese Civil War in 1982 or 1983, has now come full circle, that all the scepticism, all the suspicions towards him, have proven justified in the end. In retrospect, he would actually have had coming what the CIA did to him more than fifteen years ago, when after he had been interrogated and beaten by the local police, it abducted him in front of this shabby hotel in Romania and put him in a prison in Afghanistan. He disappeared for six months. Six months. You still don’t understand anything about the whole story”, he says to me. “You just came across it; you were still in school at the time when it all happened, you don’t know the details – the ones that came to light later,

bit by bit, here in a report, there in an internal CIA memo – all the appalling details about his imprisonment; you know nothing of the humiliations, beatings and torture he suffered there, in secret, abandoned and, of this I am convinced, with the knowledge of the German state; and this although my client, as you know, is a perfectly normal citizen of our country, a German like you and me, but with one restriction, one flaw, that he's been a German only since 1995 or 1996; German, yes, certainly, but previously Lebanese, which he inevitably still is a bit; everyone here has the Lebanese men hereabouts in sight, all of whom are drug dealers, car thieves, cheaters and welfare recipients, who have such a bad image that even the Syrians, who have just arrived in Germany, know about their bad reputation and do everything they can to avoid being confused with them. Now where was I?"

"The imprisonment."

"He was held captive for six months. He asked to speak to a German embassy official, even went on a hunger strike; at last a man shows up who introduced himself as a German official and had a first name which couldn't be more German: Hans. Hans interrogated him and promised that he would soon be released. No one knows today whether this Hans was actually German or not, whether he really came from the embassy or whether he was a CIA agent posing as a German. Assuming he was a German working for our embassy or intelligence agency, our state then knew that my client was being held prisoner and did nothing, much less got him out. I'm convinced that this Hans had nothing to do with the subsequent re-

lease of my client. At some point the CIA people realized that the man they had kidnapped in Romania and tortured in Afghanistan was not the Al Qaeda fighter they wanted, that his only offense was to bear the same name as a wanted alleged member of Al Qaeda. They evidently made a mistake, caught the wrong man; the CIA kidnapped a Muhammad, just the wrong Mohammed. When they realized their mistake six months later, they dragged my client out of the dungeon where they had thrown him and tortured him, and dumped him in no-man's land, somewhere in Romania. With a few dollars stuffed in his shirt pocket, with which he was supposed somehow to survive. Maybe too with a pat on the back, as much as to say: *Come on now, no hard feelings.* You will want to know: How did he find his way back to his native Germany?"

"No, I was just thinking about his wife and kids."

"His wife and kids were left completely in the dark. She went to her husband's former co-workers, looked for him everywhere, where he used to go regularly, in cafes, in grocery shops; she talked to the vendors, asked the family doctor if her husband told him about any plans to flee or whether anything about his health had changed, whether he had a serious illness that might explain his flight; she collected all the conjectures and rumours circulating in the neighbourhood, she rang up everywhere: nothing. She went to the police several times and got the answer that they didn't know anything; then they said they were going to investigate, but that they didn't know anything – which may well be true, perhaps even the police were groping in the dark. His wife did every-

thing possible to find her beloved husband. Then she came to terms with the situation, came to the conclusion that the most painful and at the same time most common thing must have happened: her husband had left her from one day to the next for another, a young, pretty woman, a German, why not; he had moved to another city, to another country, to another continent; he had changed his name. He had put an end to their life together, the shared flat and the children, without a twinge of conscience. She had no reason to stay in Germany, which for her meant only suffering. So she packed her things and went back to Lebanon with the kids. A voluntary return home, imagine that, the dream of our right-wing parties. So no one was waiting for him the day my client stood outside his apartment door. After the martyrdom of captivity, a second martyrdom began for him now, which was never to end. All his lawsuits in American courts have failed, in spite of support from various organizations and influential lawyers. No chance to get a confession of responsibility from the guilty party for his suffering. He was not entitled to any compensation, not even only a symbolic one, not even an apology, because the USA had committed no crime against him. *Go on, get lost.* When his incredible case became known in Germany, our government immediately put all levers in motion to diminish or disguise its direct or indirect responsibility for the fate of one of its citizens. We know, however, that Germany has allowed CIA aircraft to fly across its airspace and therefore very likely is aware of the worldwide abduction practice of this parallel system of extrajudicial prosecution. We know that several European

countries have allowed the use of secret prisons on their territory under this programme. We know that the mosque where my client prayed was under surveillance by American intelligence agencies, with or without the knowledge of the German secret service, which was also watching the mosque. We know that someone – we? the Americans? somebody else? – must have told the Romanian police that my client was suspected of something, because the Romanians then interrogated him for three weeks with no legal basis. We know that Germany, under pressure from its American allies, refused to enforce the arrest warrants for CIA agents involved in the kidnappings. In spite of these facts, in spite of all this incriminating evidence, our government continues to hide behind 'reasons of state'. And so it follows", the lawyer continues, "that my client still hasn't received even the least financial compensation so that he could to start a new life, and above all receives no support or care in his advanced state of mental decline. He sleeps all the time, and when he's not sleeping, he roars; he can't manage to keep a job, stick to working hours; he has panic attacks; it can happen that he suddenly stands up in the middle of a conversation and leaves, that he flares up, has violent outbreaks, fits of rage in a shop where a salesperson refuses to apologize for a faulty piece of clothing; he wreaks havoc, he slaps a man in the post office, as perhaps you've read in the papers, because allegedly the official had given him a dirty look; he beats up a Polish building site manager. He's sentenced to prison, first with, then without parole; he is in jail and is committed to psychiatric treatment. He abuses and threatens the patients,

beats up his orderlies, destroys furniture in the dining room and his room. First he was turned down in court as a plaintiff, as a victim of a terrible injustice, an international political conspiracy; then he was summoned before the law as a petty criminal or for abnormal behaviour due to his state of mental health. The court dismissed his charges, one after the other. But he found ways and means to come back to court again and again, now as a defendant, now as the accused, as if he was constantly seeking contact with the court, as if he was constantly trying to make himself heard before the law, somehow to communicate something, to get what is rightfully his, even if this is punishment. His imprisonment in Afghanistan will never be recognized; he never lived through his six-months of martyrdom, he only dreamt it. He is a liar."

"But isn't there any evidence of his kidnapping?"

"You're right. Your attentiveness does you honour. How can you believe a man who claims to have been kidnapped on holiday by the CIA and tortured in Afghanistan? Who can accept such a monstrosity? Why not say you were abducted by Martians? The evidence", the lawyer says, "can be found in his hair. His body speaks for him. The hair analysis has shown that he spent several months in the Asian climate zone in which Afghanistan is located. His hair bears witness to the mental despair, to the torture and hunger. But you're not the only one who demands evidence, who doubts. This doubt, which states nourish out of self-interest, is firmly rooted in our minds, it lurks in everything that is said and written about history. Many people in Germany and the United States, friends and acquaintances, young journalists to

whom I talk, continue to question that my client is telling the truth, in spite of what has already been published about the kidnapping programme, in spite of the disclosure of internal CIA memos and the statements of fellow prisoners in Afghanistan. They question my client's testimony and at the same time refer to his distant past as an Islamist in Lebanon or to his connection to a German mosque that was visited by alleged Al Qaeda members, thus justifying by way of his past the kidnapping they really don't want to believe in. On the one hand they question the arbitrary arrest, on the other they support and defend it. Or they ignore the timing: the criminal acts and delusions of my client, all of which *came after his imprisonment in Afghanistan*, are supposed to be an incontestable expression of his political radicalism or his predisposition to such. But even the worst psychologist knows that this form of violence is only the response to an experienced suffering or the constant negation of that suffering, like the aftershock of an earthquake. But in any case my client has – as the doubters, to whom I hope you don't belong, say – tempted fate. He deserves what he got."

"You keep back the information that he has now disappeared again, that he has recently admitted to sympathizing with groups even worse than Al Qaeda."

"His renewed disappearance is, I think, a way of at last taking the fate intended for him into his own hands. He has been forced to disappear under dire circumstances, without anybody having been troubled about it, without having been believed or having his fate acknowledged; now he disappears on his own,

he disappears according to his own rules, as he sees fit. He takes on the role of the outcast. He confesses to what he was first falsely accused of, with a doggedness that is both morally repugnant and illegal. He becomes a supporter of the radicals."

Translated from French to German by Kirsten Gleinig

Translated from German to English by Jonathan Uhlaner

Biographies

Arsenijević, Vladimir, born in 1965, is a prose writer, translator and publicist. He is the chairman of the KROKODIL literary association, known for the regional literary festival of the same name. He is also the founder of the publishing house Rende and the audio book publisher Reflektor. His published works include: *Cloaca Maxima: a soap opera* (first part of the tetralogy *Cloaca Maxima*) (1994), *Anđela* (Angel, second part of the tetralogy) (1997), *Mexiko – ein Kriegstagebuch* (Mexico – a war diary) (2000), *Ishmail* (a graphic novel in collaboration with the comic artist Aleksandar Zograf) (2004), *Predator* (2008), *Jugolaboratorium* (Yugolaboratory) (2009), *Minut – put oko sveta za 60 sekundi* (One minute – a journey around the world in 60 seconds) (2011) together with illustrator Valentina Broštean, *Let* (The flight) (2013) and *Ovo nije veselo mesto* (This is not a funny place) (2014). In 2016 he published a radical remake of his second novel *Anđela* (Angel) under the title *Ti i ja, Anđela* (You and I, angel), and after twenty years he took up work again on his unfinished cycle of novels *Cloaca Maxima*. The novel *Zur Grenze hin* (To the border) is the third part of the tetralogy. Arsenijević's books have been translated into more than twenty languages. He has received several literary awards: the NIN Prize for the best novel of the year (1994), the Sterija Prize (1996) and the Prize of the Serbian National Library for the Most Widely-Read book (2011). He lives in Belgrade.

Dückers, Tanja, born in Berlin (West) in 1968, is a writer, journalist and literary scholar. Her works include the novels *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies), *Der längste Tag des Jahres* (The Longest Day of the Year), *Spielzone* (Play Area) and *Hausers Zimmer* (Hauser's Room); a volume of short stories, *Café Brazil*; two volumes of essays, *Morgen nach Utopia* (Morning after Utopia); and *Über das Erinnern* (On Remembering); four volumes of poetry, two children's books and two plays. She has collaborated with artists from various disciplines, including composers and painters. Most recently, she has published the autobiographically tinted retrospect *Mein altes West-Berlin* (My Old West Berlin). Dückers writes regularly on sociopolitical subjects for various publications, including *ZEIT* Online, *Tagesspiegel*, *SZ*, *taz*, *Jungle World*, Deutschlandradio, Goethe.de, *Politics & Culture*, *cultural exchange* and *ai-journal* (Amnesty International). She is a speaker on cultural and sociopolitical topics at many forums and panels. She has also conducted writing workshops in Germany and abroad, including in Belarus, Romania, India, Kenya, United Kingdom and the United States. Dückers has taught several times in the USA in the field of German Studies. For one and a half years now she has been engaged in the project "Weiter Schreiben / Write On", which tries to make it easier for new writers from crisis areas to enter the literary scene. Her tandem partner is the young Yemeni poet Galal Alahmadi. In November 2017, she entered another creative field with her own chocolate brand "Preußisch süß" (Prussian Sweet), Berlin District Chocolate. Together with the Berlin chocolatier Christoph Wohlfar-

th, Dückers has developed flavours appropriate for the various parts of Berlin. She lives in Berlin with her family. www.tanjadueckers.dewww.preussisch-suess.de

Leka, Arian, born in 1966 in Durrës, is the author of sixteen works of literature, numerous scientific articles and a monograph on the connection between literary avant-gardes, modernism and socialist realism in Albania. His literary work has been honoured four times by the Albanian Ministry of Culture with national prizes such as the Best Book of the Year. Born in the harbour city of Durrës in 1966, Arian Leka, through his own texts devoted to his birthplace and the country as a whole, has bonded the history and maritime symbols of Albania with his creativity as a poet, prose writer and essayist, transforming them into the aesthetic language of urban life and emphasizing the forms of multicultural life. His works have been translated into many languages. His short story *Brothers of the Blade* was chosen for the best European Fiction 2011 (Dalkey Archive Press, edited by Aleksandar Hemon). In 2017 his short story *Die Zelle aus Papier* (The Paper Cell), was included in the anthology *Glückliche Wirkungen* (Ullstein Buchverlage Berlin, edited by Michael Krüger and Alida Bremer). Other works by him have been published in literary magazines such as *Lettre International* and *Gerbergasse 18* (Germany); *Buchkultur* and *Lichtungen* (Austria); *Poem* and *Orient Express* (UK); *Otro Lunes* (Spain); *Asia Literary Review* (Hong Kong, China); *Singularidades* (Portugal); *Europski Glasnik*, *Nova Istra* and *Essay Today* (Croatia); *Herito* and *Dziennikarze*

Wędrowni Wiosna (Poland); Polje (Serbia); and *Ars* (Montenegro). Arian Leka holds a PhD in in Albanological Studies. He lives in Tirana, where he works at the Albanian Academy of Albanological Studies.

Lindén, Zinaida, novelist, journalist, author of short stories, translator and film critic, writes both in Swedish (the second official language of Finland) and in her native Russian. Born in Leningrad as Zinaida Ushakova, she graduated from the Philological faculty of Leningrad University in 1986, specializing in the Swedish language and Swedish literature. She worked as a tourist guide and translator, traveling around the former Soviet Union before joining the Leningrad Academy of Theater, Music and Cinema, where she studied the films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman. Zinaida Lindén has published three novels and four collections of short stories in Finland in Swedish. Her books have been translated into Finnish, Danish and Croatian. She has published her own Russian versions of five of her books in Moscow and St Petersburg. Lindén has translated two books on the history of Finland by Henrik Meinander and poetry and prose by several Swedish-speaking writers of Finland into Russian. In 2005 she received the Runeberg Prize for Literature in Finland.

N'Sondé, Wilfried, born in Brazzaville (The Republic of the Congo) in 1968. In 1973, at the age of four, he moved with his family to France, to a suburb of Paris. He was the fifth of ten children and graduated from high school in 1986. After studying law and political

science at the Sorbonne and the University of Paris X Nanterre, he lived in Berlin for 24 years. N'Sondé has lived again in Paris since the summer of 2015. He is the author of four novels for Actes Sud: *Le cœur des enfants léopards* (The Heart of the Leopard Children) (2007), winner of the Prix des 5 continents de la Francophonie and Prix Senghor de la création littéraire; *Le silence des esprits* (The silence of the spirits) (2010); *Fleur de béton* (Concrete flower) (2012); *Berlinoise* (Berlinerish) (2015); and *Un océan, deux mers, trois continents* (An ocean, two seas, three continents) (2018). His novel *Orage sur le Tanganyika* (Storm over Tanganyika) (2013) was published by Éditions Didier. N'Sondé worked for a long time as a social worker in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the greater Berlin area and was tasked with improving the framework conditions for the integration of immigrants in German society. In the first half of 2017 he was a visiting professor at the University of Bern, Switzerland. N'Sondé is a composer and musician as well as a writer. His music moves between jazz, slam and chanson.

Rohe, Oliver, born in 1972, is the author of three novels: *Défaut d'origine* (2003) and *Terrain vague*, (2005), both published by Editions Allia, and *Un peuple en petit* (2009), published by Editions Gallimard. The first two are available in English under the titles *Origin Unknown* (Dalkey Archive Press, translation by Jane Kuntz) and *Vacant Lot* (Counterpath Press, translation by Laird Hunt). He has also written a fictional biography of Mikhail Kalachnikov, *Ma dernière création est un piège à taupes* (Editions Inculte 2012, Ba-

bel Actes Sud, 2015) and, together with Jérôme Ferrari, an essay on war and images, *A fendre le cœur le plus dur* (Editions Inculte 2015, Babel Actes Sud 2017). He contributes to many literary magazines and other publications.

Siege, Nasrin, born in Tehran/Iran in 1950, came to the Federal Republic of Germany at the age of nine, studied psychology in Kiel and worked as a psychotherapist and development aid worker. From 1983 to 2016 she lived with her husband and two children in Tanzania, Zambia, Madagascar and Ethiopia. She has been living in Germany again since the end of 2016. For more than twenty years, Siege has dedicated herself to African children and written about their daily lives in numerous books for children and young people. In 1996, together with friends, she founded the non-profit organisation Hilfe für Afrika e.V. (Help for Africa), which continues to support various aid projects in Africa.

Trojanow, Ilija, born in Sofia in 1965. He has lived in Nairobi, Munich, Mumbai and Cape Town and currently lives in Vienna. An author, publisher and translator, he has received numerous awards for his work, including the Berlin Literature Prize in 2007 and the Heinrich Böll Prize of the City of Cologne in 2017. His most recently published works include the essay *Nach der Flucht* (After the escape) (2017), a volume of poems *Verwurzelt in Stein* (Rooted in Stone) (2017), *Meine Olympiade* (My Olympic Games) (2016) and *Macht und Widerstand* (Power and Resistance) (2015).

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