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Ognjen Spahić – Montenegro

Puna glava radosti (2014)

Head Full of Joy

Publishing House **Nova Knjiga**

Biography

Ognjen Spahić was born in 1977 in Podgorica, Montenegro. Prior to *Puna glava radosti*, Spahić published two earlier collections of short stories: *Sve to (All That)* in 2001, and *Zimska potraga (Winter Search)* in 2007. His novel *Hansenova djeca (Hansen's Children)*, published in 2004, won him the Meša Selimović Prize for 2005, awarded to the best new novel from Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. To date, *Hansenova djeca* has been published in French, Italian, Slovenian, Romanian, Hungarian, Macedonian and English. His short story 'Rejmond je mrtav. Karver je umro, rekoh' ('Raymond is No Longer with Us – Carver is Dead') was included in the anthology *Best European Fiction 2011*, published by Dalkey Archive Press in the USA. In 2007, he was a resident writer at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. In 2011, he was the recipient of Romania's Ovid Festival Prize awarded to a prominent young talent. *Puna glava radosti* is Spahić's most recent work, his fourth book of fiction to date.

Synopsis

Puna glava radosti (Head Full of Joy) by Ognjen Spahić, published this year by the Podgorica-based publisher Nova knjiga, presents a corpus of 16 unusual tales featuring episodes from the life of each story's hero. Each story is told by an omniscient narrator or the hero himself, and they paint a picture showing the collision of the outer and inner world of modern man, providing a distinct interpretation of the universal values of life. This peculiarity of style contains a range of genres, a diversity of themes and abundant associativity, which gives much pleasure to the modern reader, making them feel like they are privileged participants in the book's events.

Puna glava radosti

Ognjen Spahić

1.

Dok gledam kroz špijunku, čini se kao da ta žena pridržava koplje, ono drveno, dugačko, nefunkcionalno i aljkavo zašiljeno koje bi jedan vitez trebao da, jašući galopom, razbije o grudi isto tako galopirajućeg konjanika. Pridržava ga stišćući za sredinu, te tako balansira nezgrapnim predmetom dok u drugoj ruci drži kesu punu crnog grožđa i paradajza.

2.

Ta žena, moja je majka, a zvono ne radi već nekoliko mjeseci. Da bi skrenula pozornost, prinuđna je da čelom lupa o debelo drvo. Moj sluh je u redu. No tupi udarci koje sam čuo sjedeći u fotelji i ne radeći ništa, činili su se stranima, nepodobnim za ovaj svijet. Jednom kratko i snažno, a potom tri puta u nizu, čelom, ispostaviće se. Jer kad sam primakao zenicu vratima, to čelo se zalijetalo da još jednom viteški raspali lakiranu i crnu površinu. Pustio sam da udari i tek onda otvorio. Zamirisalo je na majku. Njen dah ima aromu cigaret-filtera, a graške znoja isparavaju uz šištanje koje ja ne mogu čuti ali koje se širi haustorom pogađajući rezonance sluha pritajenih glodara, velikih muva i vrabaca što čuče u potkrovlju.

3.

Lift...

Da mama... Toliko čuda iznijeti do četvrtog sprata...

Lift ne radi...

Nečuveno. Žao mi je. Grožđe ide u frižider. Dozvoli da ti pomognem.

Prvo ga operi i pusti vodu neka teče. Želim hladne vode, to je sve što želim.

Razumijem gospođo. A čim sjedneš, želim da saznam sve o tom koplju.

Gluposti. Možeš da pretpostaviš. U školi su insistirali da je odnesem sa sobom. Projekcija nekog sentimenta, šta li... Vjeruju da taj predmet pripada meni i samo meni.

A taj predmet je...

Čašu vode, molim te.

Stiže. A taj predmet je...

I stavi krišku limuna. Jedan je ostao u vratima frižidera.

Taj predmet je... Daj...

Mapa svijeta. Promaklo ti je nekoliko košpica. Glupava mapa svijeta koja je trideset godina visila iznad moje glave. Natoči još jednu, molim te.

Kojeg svijeta?

Ne podsmijevaj se. Uostalom, htjela sam da te zamolim... Odesi je u podrum, spali je u dvorištu, pokloni gladnoj i nezbrinutoj djeci jer ne želim da je imam pred očima. Taj miris u kući. O ne! Penzija, kraj. Za školu više ne želim da čujem.

Velika mapa svijeta iz kabineta geografije u kojem si provela neke od najljepših trenutaka tokom dugogodišnje karijere srednjoškolskog profesora? To je ta mapa? Zaboga mamice! Spaliti? Baciti? Moje ruke neće biti umrljane krvlju i tačka.

Kakve sad ruke, kakva krv. Patetičan si na oca. Tačno mogu da zamislim te iste rečenice u njegovim ustima. A da je možda uokvirimo pozlaćenim ramom i zakačimo evo ovdje, iznad trosjeda?

Pa da mamice! Ja ću se pobrinuti. Što da ne? Tanko matirano staklo i ram od četiri santimetra. To bi osvježilo prostor. Cio svijet na jednom mjestu. A onda lagano, uz jutarnju kafu, možemo da posmatramo sva ta mora, gibraltarske moreuze, amerike, indije, arhipelage, zabačena ostrva na Pacifiku i sve ostalo. Svijet! Naš Svijet! Mama.

Sad si ironičan. Da li je to ironija? Usudio si se, je li?

Ne... Mama... Ja? Kako možeš?

Skloni se od mene. Sklanjaj se, kažem. Odaju te detalji. I donesi još vode. Da posmatramo gibraltarske moreuze? Kao da ih ima šest.

Čini mi se da je jutros mutna i toplija nego inače.

Šta?

Pa voda mamice. Pogledaj.

Voda kao voda.

Da. To si divno rekla. Voda kao voda.

4.

Rijeka dijeli grad. Njeno ime i lik ne postoje na mapi svijeta. To je mikronska, nepoznata geografija i činjenica o ovom mjestu koju je moguće doznati samo na licu tog mjesta.

5.

Dijalog pod brojem tri nikad se nije dogodio. No dogodilo se sve ono zaključno sa trenutkom u kojem moja majka udara čelom o debelo drvo ulaznih vrata. Kurtoazna razmjena pravilnih prostoproširenih i složenih rečenica koja zauzima nešto više od jedne stranice, čista je laž. Nikada nismo razgovarali tim načinom. S mukom razlučiva mumljanja, fragmenti bijesa ili tek najosnovnije informacije o hrani i pristiglim računima – to smo bili mi. Broj tri se nikad nije dogodio no on je i pored toga, veoma važan u cijeloj pripovijesti. Kratkom dijaloškom formom sam želio ilustrovati laž koju sam mnogo puta pročitao u različitim lešinama moderne literature koja pretenduje da predstavlja ni manje ni više do život sam. Razgovori majke i sina, oca i djeteta, prepirka dva brata, najbolja prijatelja, partnera u ljubavi, u zločinu, svejedno, redovi ispunjeni predvidivom i lažnom gorčinom, šuškanje papira i miris plastike, ukus vještačkog praha sa aromom vanile, apokaliptični tonovi i male apokalipse, nedovršene rečenice prepunjene vještačkim cvijećem, napunjene vještačkim očima, vještačkim srcima i vještačkim emocijama, otvoreni krajevi, zatvoreni krajevi, kurčevi, i po koji palac. Tragedija do tragedije, paradoksi na svakom ćošku, svijet je loš zar ne, ti ćeš da mi objasniš prijatelju, ali prije toga, molim te, pokušaj da živiš sa mojom majkom na četvrtom spratu betonske sedmospratnice koja se proteže u pravcu sjever-jug. Ni to nije strašno. O tome ću govoriti samo s vremena na vrijeme jer moj život nije ni bolji ni gori od milijardi drugih života čije brujanje katkad osjećam u kapima kiše koja izvršava samoubistvo padajući na limenu nadstrešnicu zapadne terase iskošenu ka jadranskom slivu. A sve ovo, razumije se, radim tek da bih sebi objasnio kako ova priča nema smisla. Ko u njoj pronađe smisao, zaslužio je moje debelo govno nasred čela. Ako si ti taj, onda čestitam od srca, nasred srca.

6.

Ja sam pisac i imam trideset šest godina. Čelavost, naznake impotencije, problemi sa stolicom, nikotinski kašalj, duboki i tamni podočnjaci, bol u kičmi: ništa od toga se nije dogodilo mojem tijelu. Zdrava i snažna individua visokog čela, prosječnog obrazovanja, privlačan ženama, prihvatljiv muškarcima, ja, volim da napišem to ja od kojeg ništa ne očekujem, od kojeg niko ništa ne očekuje, a ipak, ja, redovi se nižu, pod brojevima kličaju male i ružne biljke koje će se na koncu uplesti poput nižih spratova amazonske prašume u čijem hladu redovito uživam gledajući beskrajno dosadne programe kablovske televizije koji se trude da cjelokupan entuzijazam voditelja i urednika sažmu u još jednu do bola ispražnjenu laž, u jednu jedinu rečenicu: život je čudo. Osjećam smrad.

7.

Otvaram vrata, a ona odbacuje veliko koplje. Klima znojavom glavom i nadima podbradak, a zatim kaže: Penzija. Ja kažem: Čestitam, i pripaljujem cigaretu, a ona s gađenjem posmatra dim koji lagano gmiže kroz moje nosnice. Književnost? Opet smrdi. Požutjeli komadi kravljeg sira na trpezarijskom stolu. Ona kaže: Mogao si barem... Otvara kantu za otpatke i struže otpad sa zelenog tanjira. Ja kažem: Da.

8.

Bilo koja vrsta obračuna me ne zanima. Pogotovo ne dvoboj sa samim sobom. Ali to me ne sprječava da katkad preko zamišljenog nišana duge cijevi gledam mater svoju. Gađao bih posred nadutog trbuha ne bih li rasparčao satrule ostatke jajnika koji su me porodili. I ne zbog toga da bih simboličkim činom utvrdio besmisao sopstvenog trajanja i života, već

tek tako. Veliki kalibar praznine, u veliko zamašćeno tkivo. Materija protiv materije, razaranje i smrt. Razmišljanje u metaforama. Zadovoljstvo na klozetskoj šolji. Kratki uzleti lucidnosti koji nestaju kao velika govna nošena mlazom hladne vode. Fragmenti kao rešenje. Govna u djelovima. Minijature, partiture, garniture presahle imaginacije rasute u nečemu što bih mogao objediniti naslovom: Moj gangrenozni život. Ali to nije nesreća. I to nikad neće biti književnost.

9.

Nakon što je sa tanjira otrešla i posljednje komadiće sira, majka je počela da povraće klečeći na malom pravougaonom tepihu kraj trpezarijskog stola. Prepoznao sam nekoliko aljkavo sažvakanih kriški mandarine. Jajnici, pomislio sam i osmotrio mandarine na trpezarijskom stolu. Kad je završila, pomogao sam joj da ustane i opere lice. Nikada više nisam posegnuo za tim voćem.

10.

Tri mjeseca sam proveo u zatvoru zbog nanošenja teških tjelesnih povreda maloljetnom licu. Kazna nije bila duža zahvaljujući vještaku psihijatrijske struke koji je u svom nalazu tvrdio da se moj gest ne smije okarakterisati kao pokušaj ubistva već kao neartikulisana kompulzivna radnja psihički oboljelog lica. A bilo je ovako: stojim i čekam veliki lift ne bih li se uspeo do kafea na drugom spratu tržišnog centra u kojem povremeno ispijam kafu. Nije to ambijent koji me uzbuđuje na bilo koji način: filtrirani vazduh, slatki mirisi i cvrkut vrabaca koji žive ispod metalnih krovnih greda prelijećući s jednog na drugi televizijski ekran duž velikog hola. Boravak u tržišnom centru mi donekle garantuje anonimnost jer u neonsko grotlo ne zalaze lica koja srijećem

za šankom kafea Berlin. Ta galerija ljudi se sastoji od individua koje bi se u terminološki širokom registru mogli nazvati poznanicima, prijateljima u nekoliko slučajeva, manje ili više dragim osobama čije nezgrapne rečenice bivaju prigušene muzikom sa metar i po visokih zvučnika. Vrapci u tržišnom centru su mehaničke naprave koje aluminijski ambijent konzumerističke oaze treba da približe majkama i djeci. Jer šta je dobro za životinje, dobro je i za ljude. U skrivenim zakucima potkrovlja, među suvim gipsanim zidovima, nalazi se radionica čovjeka koji se stara da te ptice rade upravo ono što se od njih očekuje. Njegovo ime je Ferdinand, Fernando, Zigmund ili u najgorem slučaju Esteban. Čovjek-ptica, strogo čuvana tajna, precizni mehaničar i strpljivi analizator čestih kvarova koji su se dešavali zbog jeftinih materijala kojim je radionica opskrbljivana. To što stojim pred vratima lifta ne bih li se uspeo do espresso kafe, nema nikakvog uticaja na fernandijansko-zigmundovsku realnost tako da ovog puta sebi neću dozvoliti slast pričanja jedinstvene i iznimno zanimljive biografije tog čovjeka.

Cupkam u mjestu. Široka čelična vrata se zatvaraju negdje u visinama betonskih pročelja. Kutija sporo silazi. Elektronski pisak objavljuje dolazak i vrata se otvaraju, a na sredini velikog lifta stoji petogodišnjak spreman na krik i suze. Zagledao se ravno u moje oči kao da će tu pronaći nuklearnu energiju potrebnu za histerične izlive koji će uslijediti.

Počeo je da urla u trenutku kada sam zakoračio u namjeri da ga izvedem vani i utješim. Pretpotstavio sam da njegova majka tumara po drugom spratu zaražena iracionalnim pretpotstavkama o nestanku sopstvenog djeteta te sam s toga samo želio da ga prigrlim uz sebe i sačekam da se žena pojavi. No kada sam nježno obgrlio sićušna ramena, kad sam primakao lice njegovim crvenim obrazima, ta mala bogato

nazubljena čeljust se otvorila i šćepala me za nos. Bio sam iznenađen demonskom snagom ugriza koji je učinio da hrskavica zaškripi, a da iz očiju poteku suze zasoljene oštrim bolom. Sve što se potom dogodilo, zamagljeno je bijesom. No izjave dvojice svjedoka bile su gotovo identične. S toga i ne sumnjam da sam malog uhvatio za glavu i odbacio desetak metara izvan lifta, u pravcu prodavnice intimnog rublja. Vjerujem da sam oči držao čvrsto zatvorene pa je to još jedan od razloga zašto se taj nevaljali trenutak svodi na zvučne impresije. Jer dok sam slušao svjedoke u sudnici, misli su dozvale udarac tijela o besprijekorno ulaštene keramičke pločice tačno u trenutku kada je sa zvučnika postavljenih duž hodnika shopping-malla David Bowie podvriskivao Lat's dans. Sve to sam rekao pred sudijom i roditeljima djeteta, a moj advokat je kazao da je tih nekoliko rečenica upropastilo njegov posao te da su one razlog zašto sam umjesto šest mjeseci uslovne kazne, dobio dva mjeseca zatvora. Mama je samo tužno vrtjela glavom.

11.

Veliku mapu koju je dovukla iz škole, skupa sa rješenjem za penziju, prislonila je uza zid spavaće sobe, pored daske za peglanje. Predstava svijeta smotanog u dugačkoj plastičnoj kutiji mirisala je naftalinom. Kada sam prvi put skinuo poklopac zapahnuo me je taj cmizdravi miris koji me je natjerao da razmišljam u metaforama definišući besmisao egzistencije sopstvene majke u odnosu na besprizornu glupost tog predmeta. Plastična kutija bila je prekrivena potpisima kolega među kojima se isticao nešto veći natpis sa uskličnikom: Sretno!

12.

Zbivanja pod brojem deset su izmišljena. Nikada nisam imao probleme sa zakonom, a u tržišnom centru uvijek koristim pokretne stepenice. Godine književnih pokušaja su me uvjerile da se moj intelektualni mehanizam sastoji od nekoliko modela čitalaca-imbecila koji od proze uvijek očekuju krajnosti. Ti, reći ću, ljudi, su dotukli pisca u meni. Jer više niko ne pristaje na uobičajene nesreće koje se žive u sobama nevelikih ali sasvim udobnih stanova poput ovog u kojem boravimo moja majka i ja. Potrebno je gurnuti stvari ka ekstremnim vrijednostima shodno lažnoj logici književnog djela. A kad kažem laž, nije to visokokalorična riječ koja predstavlja gorki opozit istini. Ne. Mislim na besprizorno pretvaranje, ponizno i podlo skrivanje iza blago uljepšanih maski jezičke stvarnosti koja za cilj nema predstavljanje estetske ideje u književnom djelu, već brblja, umnožava i množi najbanalnije tragedije trudeći se da saopšti kako je naš svijet loš. Laž kao stanje svijesti, a ne kratkoročna namjera. Podilaženje pametnima, nerviranje glupih. Književne nagrade i poza zabrinutosti nad haosom svijeta. Stil kao inercija. Zato sam i odlučio da prvo ponudim maglu iz tržišnog centra: nagovještaj mračne estetike koja s jedne strane plijeni pripovjedačkom vještinom, a s druge strane zadovoljava čitaoca informacijom dostojnom crnih stubaca u žutoj štampi. Jer čovjek može kvalitetno lagati samo kad govori o sebi. Želim izgubiti sa književnosti tu vječitu deklaraciju istine koja se presijava poput markica na satrulim bananama. Želim biti neko drugi, a ne ovo što sam sad.

Head Full of Joy

Ognjen Spahić

Translated from the Montenegrin by Celia Hawkesworth

1.

As I watch her through the peephole in the door, it looks as though the woman is holding a lance, one of those long, wooden, non-functional, sloppily sharpened ones which a knight was supposed to use, at a gallop, to break against the breast of another similarly galloping rider. She is holding it in the middle, balancing the awkward object while carrying a bag full of black grapes and tomatoes in her other hand.

2.

That woman is my mother, and the bell has not worked for several months now. In order to attract my attention, she is obliged to bang her forehead against the thick wood. There's nothing wrong with my hearing. But the dull blows I heard as I sat in an armchair, doing nothing, struck me as strange, not quite of this world. One short and hard one, then three in a row with her forehead. Because when I put my eye to the peephole, that forehead was just preparing for another knightly assault on the black, varnished surface. I let her hit it and only then opened the door. There was my mother's smell. Her breath had the aroma of filter cigarettes, while beads of sweat evaporated from her with a hiss I couldn't hear but which spread through the hallway, setting up resonances in the hearing of hidden rodents, large flies and sparrows twittering in the loft.

3.

“The lift...”

“Yes, Mother... Humping all this stuff to the fourth floor...”

“The lift’s out of order...”

“You don’t say. I’m sorry. The grapes go into the fridge. Let me give you a hand.”

“Wash them first and let the water run. I want some cold water, that’s all I want.”

“At your service, madam. And, once you’ve sat down, I want to hear all about that lance.”

“Idiocy. You know the kind of thing. People at school insisted that I take it with me. Projecting emotion or something... They think this object belongs to me and no one else.”

“And this object is...”

“A glass of water, please.”

“Right away. And this object is...”

“And put a slice of lemon in it. There’s a piece left over in the fridge door.”

“This object is... Come on...”

“A map of the world. You’ve left some pips. The stupid map of the world that hung over my head for 30 years. Pour me another, please.”

“Which world?”

“Don’t mock. In fact, I want to ask you... Take it to the cellar, burn it in the yard, give it to hungry, neglected children, because I don’t want ever to set eyes on it again. That smell in the house. Heaven forbid! I’ve retired, it’s over. I never want to hear anyone mention the school again.”

“The big map of the world from the geography room where you spent some of the finest moments of your lengthy career as a secondary-school teacher? This is that map? For heaven’s sake, Mama! Burn it? Throw it out? My hands won’t be tainted with blood and that’s that.”

“Hands? Blood? You’re sentimental like your father. I can just imagine the same words coming from his lips. Maybe we should put it in a gilt frame and hang it here, over the stool?”

“Why, yes, Mama! I’ll sort it. Why not? Fine matt glass and a frame four centimetres wide. It would freshen up the space. The whole world in one place. And then, slowly, over our morning coffee, we can examine all those seas, the Straits of Gibraltar, the Americas, the Indies, archipelagos, the far-flung islands of the Pacific and all the rest. The world! Our world! Mother.”

“Now you’re being ironic. Is that irony? You’ve got a nerve!”

“What, me? No... Mother! How could you?”

“Get away from me. Get lost, I say. It’s the details that give you away. And bring me some more water. Study the Straits of Gibraltar, indeed? As though there were six of them.”

“It seems cloudy and warmer than usual.”

“What does?”

“The water, Mama. Take a look.”

“Water’s water.”

“Yes. You put that well. Water’s water.”

4.

This town is cut through by a river. Its name and shape don't exist on the map of the world. That's micro, unknown geography, and a fact that can only be ascertained on this very spot.

5.

The dialogue under the number three above never happened. But everything ending with the moment when my mother banged her forehead against the thick wood of the front door did happen. The courteous exchange of correct simple, compound and complex sentences that occupies a bit more than a page, is a complete lie. We never conversed like that. Barely intelligible mumblings, fragments of fury or just the most basic information about food and recent bills – that was us. Number three never happened but it's nevertheless very important in this whole story. I wanted to illustrate in short dialogue form a lie that I have often read in contemporary literature that purports to represent nothing more or less than life itself. The conversations of a mother and son, a father and child, a quarrel between two brothers, best friends, partners in love, in crime, whatever, lines filled with predictable and false bitterness, the rustling of paper and the smell of plastic, the taste of fake powder with a vanilla flavour, apocalyptic overtones and small apocalypses, unfinished sentences overflowing with artificial flowers, filled with artificial eyes, artificial hearts and artificial emotions, open endings, closed endings, pricks and the occasional thumb. Tragedy after tragedy, paradoxes on every corner, the world is bad isn't it you'll explain my friend, but first, please, try living with my mother on the fourth floor of a seven-storey concrete building stretching north-south. And that's not so terrible. I seldom mention it because my life is no better or worse than billions of other lives, whose hum

I sometimes hear in drops of rain committing suicide as they drip onto the tin porch of the west terrace angled towards the Adriatic basin. And I do all of that, of course, only in order to explain to myself that this story is pointless. Whoever can find a point in it has earned a great turd from me in the middle of his forehead. If you are that person, then I congratulate you from my heart, right in the heart.

6.

I'm a writer and I'm 36-years-old. Baldness, hints of impotence, bowel problems, nicotine cough, deep, dark bags under the eyes, back pain: none of that has happened to my body. A healthy, strong individual with a high brow, of average education, attractive to women, acceptable to men, I, I like writing that I from whom I expect nothing, from whom no one expects anything, but still, the lines keep on coming under the numbers; small, ugly plants germinate to twine eventually like the lower levels of the Amazon rainforest in whose shade I regularly delight as I watch endlessly tedious programmes on cable television, that attempt to condense the entire enthusiasm of the presenter and producer into one painfully hollow lie, into one single sentence: life is a miracle. Something stinks.

7.

I open the door, and she throws the big lance down. She nods her head, lifts up her chin, and says: Pension. I say: Congratulations, and light a cigarette, and she watches in disgust as the smoke worms its way out of my nostrils. Literature? Something stinks again. Yellowing pieces of cheese on the dining room table. She says: You might at least... She opens the rubbish bin and scrapes the scraps off the green plate. I say: Yes.

8.

I'm not interested in any kind of score settling. Particularly not a duel with myself. But that doesn't stop me sometimes looking at my mother through an imaginary sight on a long barrel. I would aim for her swollen belly to shatter the putrid remains of the ovaries that gave birth to me. And not in order for that symbolic act to confirm the pointlessness of my own existence, but just for the hell of it. A large calibre of emptiness into large larded tissue. Matter against matter, devastation and death. Thinking in metaphors. Satisfaction on the toilet. Brief onrushes of lucidity, which vanish like large turds swept away by a spurt of cold water. Fragments as a solution. Crap in sections. Miniatures, partituras, garnitures of a dried-up imagination scattered into something that I could put together under the title: My gangrenous life. But that's not hardship. And it will never be literature.

9.

After shaking the very last crumbs of cheese from the plate, my mother started to vomit, kneeling on the little rectangular rug beside the dining room table. I recognised a few sloppily chewed slices of tangerines. Ovaries, I thought, considering the tangerines on the dining room table. When she had finished, I helped her get up and wash her face. I never reached for one of those fruits again.

10.

I spent three months in prison for causing grievous bodily harm to an underage person. That sentence was not longer thanks to a master of the psychiatric profession, whose report affirmed that my action could not be characterised as attempted murder, but as the unarticulated compulsive

act of a psychologically disturbed individual. This is what happened: I'm standing, waiting for the big lift in order to reach the café on the second floor of the shopping centre where I occasionally go for a coffee. These are not surroundings that excite me in any way: filtered air, sweet aromas and the twittering of sparrows that live under the metal roof girders, flitting between television screens the length of the large hall. A spell in a shopping centre to an extent guarantees me anonymity, because the people I meet at the Berlin café bar never enter that neon abyss. That gallery of people consists of individuals I could in a terminologically broad register call acquaintances, friends in some instances, more or less agreeable people whose ungainly sentences are smothered by music from the metre-and-a-half-high loudspeakers. The sparrows in the shopping centre are mechanical devices, intended to bring the aluminium surroundings of the consumer oasis closer to mothers and children. For, what is good for animals is also good for people. In hidden crannies of the ceiling, between the dry plaster walls, there is a workshop where a man endeavours to make those birds behave exactly as expected. His name is Ferdinand, Fernando, Zigmund or at worst Esteban. A man-bird, a strictly kept secret, a meticulous mechanic and patient analyst of the frequent glitches that occur because of the cheap materials with which the workshop is supplied. The fact that I am standing in front of the lift door on the way for an espresso coffee has no bearing whatever on Ferdinand-Sigmund's reality and so this time I shall not allow myself the pleasure of telling the man's unique and exceptionally interesting biography. I shuffle from foot to foot. The wide steel door closes somewhere in the heights of the concrete façade. The box slowly descends. An electronic whistle announces its arrival, the door opens, and

in the middle of the big lift stands a five-year-old ready to scream and cry. He stares straight into my eyes as though he was going to find in them the nuclear energy required for the hysterical outpourings that are to follow.

He began to yell just as I stepped forward with the intention of bringing him out and comforting him. I presumed that his mother was roaming round the second floor, infected by irrational assumptions about the disappearance of her child and so I wanted to hug him to me and wait for the woman to appear. But when I put my arm tenderly round his tiny shoulders, when I brought my face close to his red cheeks, that little richly-toothed jaw opened and seized hold of my nose. I was taken aback by the demonic power of the bite that made my cartilage creak, and tears salted with sharp pain spring from my eyes. Everything that happened next was blurred by fury. But the statements of two witnesses were almost identical. So I have no doubt that I grabbed the boy by the head and threw him some ten metres away from the lift, in the direction of the underwear counter. I believe I had my eyes tightly closed and that is another reason why this unfortunate episode is reduced to aural impressions. Because, as I listened to the witnesses in the courtroom, my thoughts conjured up the thud of the body against the faultlessly polished ceramic tiles at precisely the moment when David Bowie began to scream *'Let's Dance'* down the length of the shopping-mall corridor. I said all that to the judge and the child's parents, but my lawyer said that those few sentences had ruined his case and they were the reason I got two months in prison instead of a six-month conditional sentence. Mother just shook her head sadly.

11.

She leaned the large map she had dragged from the school, together with the document about her pension, against her bedroom wall, beside the ironing board. The representation of the world wrapped in a long plastic box smelled of mothballs. When I first removed the lid, I was struck by an aroma that made me think in metaphors, defining the pointlessness of the existence of my own mother in relation to the unutterable stupidity of that object. The plastic box was covered with the signatures of colleagues, among which one rather larger one stood out followed by the exclamation: Good luck!

12.

The events under number 10 are invented. I have never had any problems with the law, and in the shopping centre I always use the escalator. Years of literary endeavour have convinced me that my intellectual mechanism consists of a few models of imbecile readers who always expect prose to deliver extremes. These, let's call them people, have put paid to the writer in me. Because no one any longer accepts the commonplace unhappiness lived out in the rooms of small but perfectly comfortable apartments such as this one in which my mother and I live. We have to push things to extreme values such as the false logic of a literary work. And when I say false, that is not a high-calorie word representing the bitter opposite of truth. No. I mean unutterable dissembling, obsequious and abject hiding behind a wealth of beautified masks of linguistic reality which do not aspire to the representation of an aesthetic idea in a work of literature, but prattles, multiplying and proliferating the most banal tragedies in an attempt to communicate how bad our world is. Falsity as a state of consciousness, and not a short-term intention. Pandering to

the intelligent, irritating the stupid. Literary prizes and a pose of concern at the chaos of the world. Style as inertia. That's why I decided to present the fog from the shopping centre first: the hint of a dark aesthetic that on the one hand snares through its narrative skill and on the other satisfies the reader with information worthy of the crime columns of the gutter press. Because a person can produce high-quality lies only when talking about himself. I want to claw out of literature the eternal declaration of truth that glistens like the labels on rotten bananas. I want to be someone else and not what I am now.



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