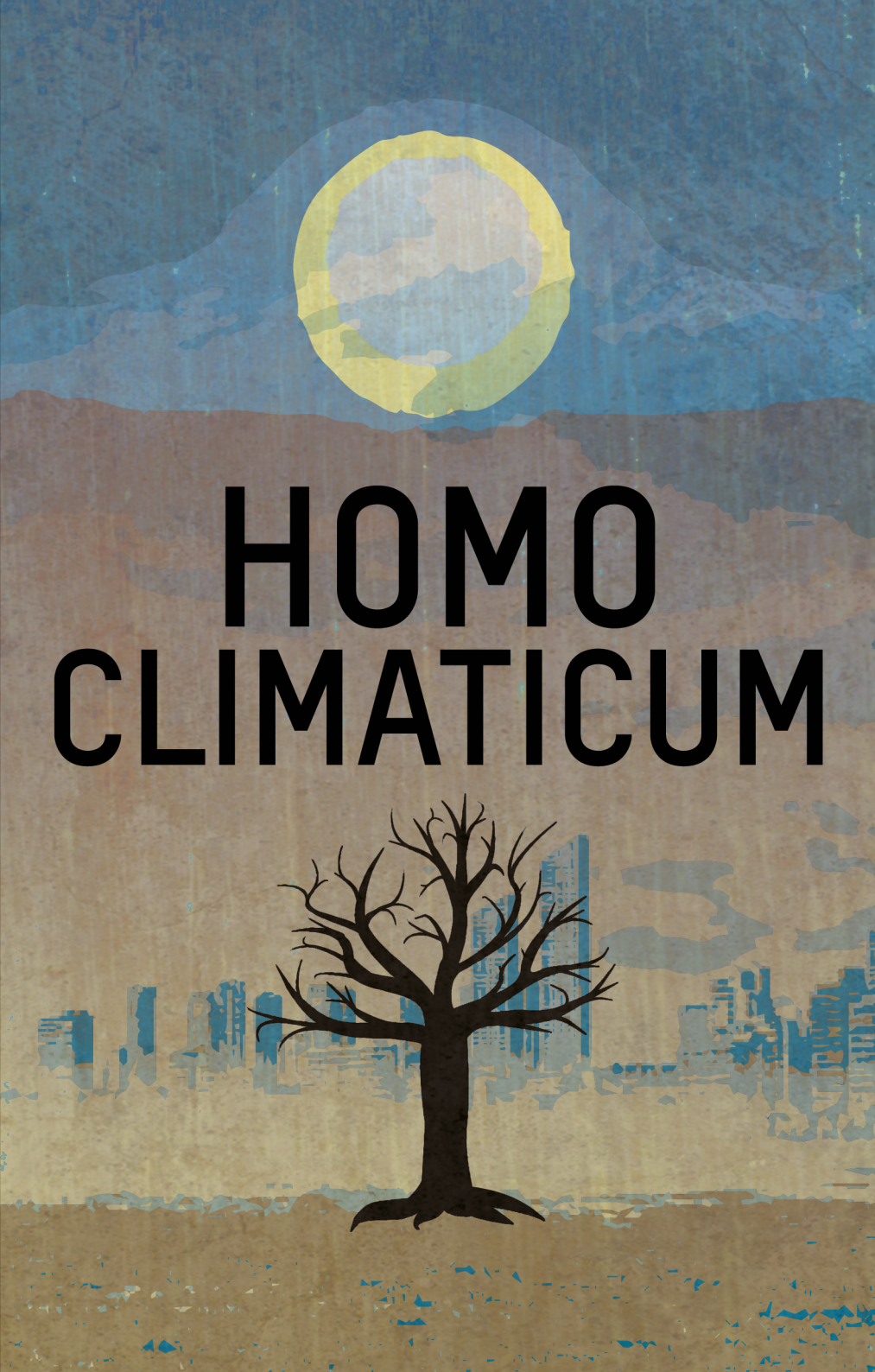




HOMO CLIMATICUM

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‘Zelena akcija/FoE Croatia’s and Booksa’s climate fiction competition 2017’

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Foreword to the English edition

Releasing material to an international audience is a daunting endeavour. For one, you are putting the product of your work in the hands of many more readers who can appraise and critique it. The more hands the product changes, the more impacts it makes. This was the main reason why this English edition of “Homo Climaticum” came to be.

Climate change, as it’s becoming more apparent looking at media reports from around the world, is becoming a tangible, visible phenomenon in many countries, making it more and more difficult to ignore. Though many still try to. One would think that with its negative effects becoming so much more apparent, we wouldn’t still need to raise awareness among the population that we, humanity, are the root cause of these climatic shifts. But we still do, precisely because there are still those who don’t know that – either through wilful ignorance, or being deprived of education and information that they should be getting as their fundamental right.

“Homo Climaticum” (as we have named this book, taking the liberty to give the word “homo”, Latin for “human”, a gender neutral, and not a masculine characteristic) exists precisely because we have to make climate change awareness, climate change battle and climate change adaptation, a fundamental element of our societies, even our entire civilization. If we don’t, that society or civilization may soon cease to exist. And one of the ways that we wish to communicate these issues is through “climate fiction” or “cli-fi”, which is the material that forms this book. The stories and poems herein reflect a present perspective of many different authors (some amateur, some professionals, some activists, scientists, or experts, some lay people...) on what climate change, and its many, many factors, might mean for our society. And though climate change is a global phenomenon, we can’t help but see what is in front of us - the way that climate change affects, or might affect, our immediate surroundings. And this is precisely the point of this English, or rather international version of the book.

Non-Croatian or non-regional readers might find it curious how certain climate futures might be presented. While some stories and poems, have a dislocated, universal quality, others have a very specific regional context, whether it is the Croatia sea coast of Dalmatia as its geographical and cultural context, or some other part of Croatia that has formed a unique culture and mentality due to centuries of different historic and national influences it has received. Some of this, of course, is lost in translation, but we, due in most part to our excellent translators, Armin and Matea, have made an effort to make these things easier to understand for international readers. Why? Because by sharing these specific perspectives, we make two things clear.

One, climate change has a very specific geographical and cultural context for each and every people. It's important to keep these specifics in mind when we look at the big picture of the global fight against climate change. And two, despite the specifics, the basic problems that we all face have a universal quality to them. They transcend national borders, culture, language...

So what we hope when you read this book of collected stories and poems is that you take away two things: something new that you discover about a place or people you haven't met before, and something humanly relatable, which brings us together in preserving our world and protecting it from the destruction humanity has caused. And while these things are not a big step in fighting climate change, they are something that makes it possible to share our visions of the future, both sunny and grim, though the medium of the written word, makes our combined struggle easier, and makes us feel closer to each other. And really, that, in itself, is something worthwhile.

Sven Janovski

Foreword

Do you know what our current geological epoch is called? This is a question that has left even scientists baffled. Some of them have suggested that the Holocene, the geological epoch in which a temperate and stable climate created favourable conditions for the development of the human species, should now be replaced with what is often called the Anthropocene, an epoch in which human activity has become a crucial factor in shaping the future. What are the two defining features of these two epochs? Climate and humans.

This planet and its temperate climate set the foundations from which humanity was able to reach its full potential. We maintain the belief that our civilisation will continue to develop in a linear fashion, failing to realise that the structural conditions have changed – that we were the ones to change them. The phenomenon most indicative of this fact is climate change, proven to be a result of human activity. Climate change is a threat which shows how little we understand the world we inhabit and, at the same time, how strongly we depend on it. Indeed, climate directly affects all areas of human life. The current global increase of 0.8°C since the pre-industrial age has already had as its consequence a rise in unpredictable and extreme weather, e.g. long periods of drought and floods. The melting of the polar ice has led to increases in sea and ocean levels, which poses a long-term threat to the majority of cities, villages and settlements in the world's coastal regions. Furthermore, food production and water availability, soil and air, flora and fauna, human health, safe homes, national and continental stability, mass migrations, global political upheavals and intolerance – all these aspects of life have already been affected by a seemingly “insignificant” increase measuring but a few degrees. To make matters worse, recent research has shown that the increase in global temperatures could by the year 2100 amount to values between 4.7°C and 7.3°C , thus exceeding the limits of all currently existing analyses and placing the issue within the domain of speculative

science fiction. Who could even begin to imagine what the world might look like then?

The aforementioned facts have been confirmed through scientific consensus. However, facts alone cannot tell the whole story. They are but a collection of numbers, statistics, abstract graphs, words and images that often fail to get through to us since they seem to be so distant from our everyday lives. How to explain to the general public why an increase of just 1 °C is so problematic? How to present the effects of climate change in Croatia, where, hopefully, its true effects have yet to be experienced? Will a 30-second clip on national television of an unnamed person from the Philippines wading through their flooded home after a typhoon truly be enough to touch us and incite us to think and act?

For some, yes; for the majority, most likely no. We rely on traditional media to continue reporting on climate change in a familiar format. However, we also believe that the current state requires a reaction from the world of art. The rapid rise of the relatively new genre of climate fiction, or cli-fi, shows that artists have embraced climate change as a worthwhile issue which needs to be addressed. Literature, as always, has the potential to play the key role in forming a new consciousness. Climate fiction is capable of transferring abstract graphs and intimidating statistics into the domain of emotions and imagination. It can paint a picture of how our everyday lives, from minor routines to great individual, national and international projects, might be shaped by the context of radical changes brought about by shifts in the climate. Literature, unlike news, reports, analyses and facts, leaves a more subtle, but certainly a more profound mark. A good story sticks with us: its characters and their decisions, its symbolism and various layers of meaning, the abundance of interpretations – all of these elements help change our perspective on reality as they become part of our mind-set and are later disseminated through our words, attitudes and actions.

We decided to hold this competition with these thoughts in mind. We are aware that, as a species, we are con-

stantly surrounded by stories. It is from these stories that we create our ideas, ideals, opinions and worlds. Our goal was to supplement the stories told by politicians, economists and ecologists with those of poets, writers and activists. By holding this competition for short stories and poems belonging to the cli-fi genre, Zelena akcija and Kulturtreger (“Booksa” club), within the framework of the School of Sustainability project, wanted to extend an invitation for cooperation and dialogue to all who are interested in these forms of expression. The invitation was extended to all those who dared to cast a gaze over the fence and into the future, confront the things they see therein and express their reaction, interpretation and solution in the form of a story or poem.

The beauty of imagination lies in the fact that it is completely unpredictable and uncontrollable. It knows no limits. We would like to sincerely thank all those who participated in the competition! We received a lot of excellent, creative works, which we truly enjoyed reading, but which also made our task of selecting the 21 visions of the future to be included in this collection that more difficult. They cover a wide spectrum of extraordinary situations: a mutant iguana surprises a couple from Split; a migrant sacrifices himself to save a mute girl; a polar bear turns out to be the reincarnation of Martin Luther King Jr.; the small town of Delnice in the cold, mountainous region of Gorski Kotar becomes Croatia’s top tourist destination, while chocolate and coffee become more valuable than gold; and finally, a spaceship carries the last thirteen people on Earth into the unexplored depths of space. With *Homo Climaticum* now in your hands, we invite you to turn on your reader’s imagination and truly try to envision the scenarios described here – this is the first step.

When we envision things, we also experience them, if only for a moment. This was precisely the aim of this publication, and this is what it offers to you: 21 scenarios for you to step into and participate or simply observe from a safe distance. This is the first collection of Croatian climate fiction – a collection of ideal, apocalyptic, surprising, dystopian and surreal short stories and poems, 21 scenarios for our near or

distant futures shaped by climate change.

What else is there left to say but – enjoy! And after that, think and, hopefully, act.

*Dora Sivka,
competition judge*

Disclaimer: some content of this book may include strong and graphic language, which may not be suitable to all ages.

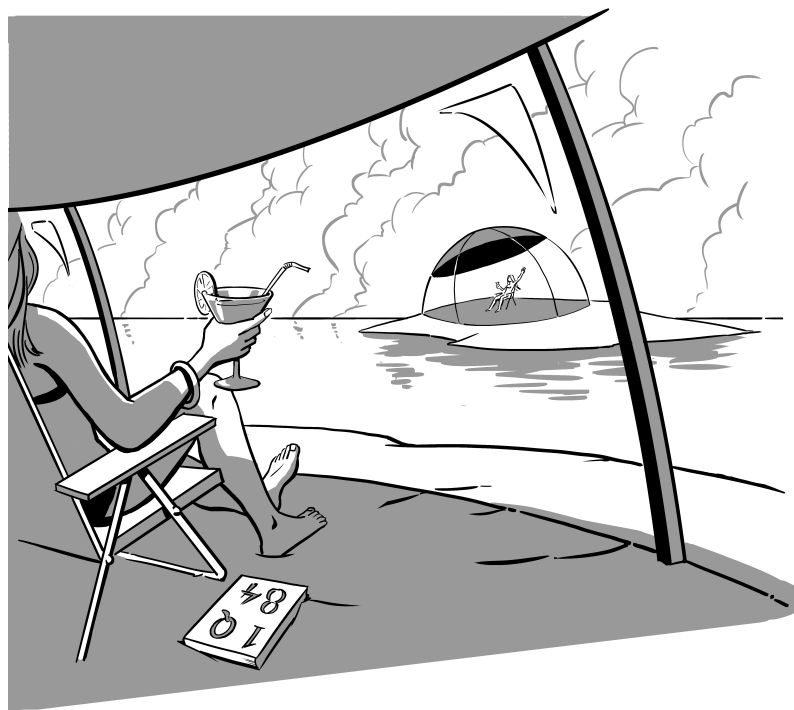
I



Nada Topić

**

the two never touch by accident
they live on opposite sides of the world
and splash their feet in their own tepid oceans
if thirsty, they carve away at the pointy tip of an iceberg
and toast each other from afar
the sea level then rises and drowns a couple of tiny islands
which they used to rest their white elbows on
when a slice of the Amazon jungle or the Russian tundra
disappears
nobody suspects their acid hunger
humanity takes a plane to Japan
sits around the table in Kyoto
and solemnly swears to reduce gas emissions
meanwhile
the two tour the Japanese temples
they chat with Murakami and drink rice wine
lying on the shore on a Sunday evening
they whisper in both of his ears
Haruki, do not be afraid of global warming
the Earth is a woman in love
and no one can stop the rotating fiery ball
at the centre of her body



Book of Genesis

Denis Perićić and Anita Perićić

BEFORE

Stefan Sokolich, the holder of two PhDs – one in physics and the other in theology – was never a creationist. Ever since he was little, he considered science to be the study of measurable things. Faith, on the other hand, meant knowing that which could not be measured. Although he accepted the Bible as Holy Scripture, he did not think of it as factually true, but rather as an attempt at interpreting the spiritual, divine universe. And an ancient, very ancient attempt at that: the question remained how much has changed since the original version, how many different traditions were combined to create the official version which we have been reading for the past few millennia, particularly in the Old Testament, but also in the newer texts, as evidenced by the abundance of various apocryphal gospels or the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

After all, he was not the first – but might be the last – to realise the significant compatibility between biblical teachings and scientific theories. Are there not episodes in the ancient biblical tradition in which modern science has only recently been able to discern something greater than mere traces of truth, in, for example, the great flood narrative or that of the Nephilim, Biblical “*giants*”, those “*mighty men that were of old, the men of renown*”?¹

And the creation of the world in seven days, described in the first book of the Bible, at the very beginning of Genesis?

If we did not think of the seven days as a literal, but rather a symbolic representation of the various different phas-

¹ Genesis, 6:4 (*All quotes from the Old and New Testament are cited according to the King James Bible.*)

es of a very long process, would we not find remarkable similarities with the famous Cosmic Calendar of Carl Sagan? According to Sokolich, such an interpretation would neatly accommodate even the Big Bang. Some denied the existence of God on the basis of the idea that He, as the Creator, would necessarily had to have existed even before the creation of time, and since nothing can exist outside of time, there could be no God; this, however, Sokolich thought, was just a variation of the typical “the chicken or the egg” dilemma, as their argument failed to take into account that the Creator was the originator of everything, including time, and that He himself existed outside of the dimension of temporality, in eternity, always and forever and in every moment, as the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

And now, when this world founded on science and facts was facing all but total collapse, doctor Sokolich could only truly rely on God and His divine mercy. And in this, he was not alone. From behind his reinforced window he could see droves of deformed pilgrims as they passed by, crawling on their knees or whipping themselves, not knowing where they were headed and all the while shouting: “Repent!” and “The end is nigh!”

And this was true.

He wished the Bible was factual. He hoped that Revelation, the last book of the Bible, was not just a symbolic representation of a long process, and that the Apocalypse, predicted to last for ten days, would not go on for an unthinkable amount of time, for more than the seven days of Genesis. For this was, indeed, the Apocalypse, Ἀποκάλυψις, the Greek word for *Revelation*.

He hoped *the great day*² would come as soon as possible, that the agony would finally be brought to an end by the Lord, our God, *Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*³, that the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of

² Revelation, 6:17.

³ Revelation, 1:8.

the world, would appear and say: *Fear not! I am the First and the Last! I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.* Christ had said: “Ye shall have tribulation ten days.”⁴ But the ten days of tribulations had long passed; years have long passed...

...the weather became extreme, storms ravaged the Earth; the seas rose and water became polluted, the soil dried up and hardened; communication systems collapsed; satellites came crashing down, servers broke down, screens went dark; industry destroyed itself and everything around it; volcanoes erupted, and somewhere, even terrifying bombs; diseases spread and contaminated the world; crops withered, animals languished and died, as did people; solar radiation deformed all living things; one of the few thriving organisms was the stubborn, inedible, and even toxic vegetation, along with reptiles, insects and all manners of hypertrophic vermin which formed its own simple, prehistoric food chain.

“And there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. And as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. And there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood:⁵ and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.”⁶

“I can see that from my window,” thought Stefan Sokolich. He saw the pilgrims run away screaming when a reptile similar to a Komodo dragon emerged from behind a huge anthill and bit at the scabby, limping body of one of the

⁴ Revelation, 2:10.

⁵ The Russian word for Wormwood is *chernobyl'* (Чернобыль).

⁶ Revelation, 8:7-11.

pilgrims who had suffered less deformation.

Dazed and disgusted, he averted his glance and, with great effort, managed to turn the other way. His cervical spine could barely move; it was bent and twisted from the most unusual malformations, as were the other joints in his body; his ribs were digging into his lungs; all the muscle was gone from his legs so he moved in a crippled fashion, sliding on his knees, much like the pilgrims; his teeth had fallen out and his eyes bulged outwards; despite their appearance, his eyesight was weak; mucus oozed out of his nostrils and mouth, from which he would cough out blood; he had already gotten used to the internal pain: the metastases, which had spread all over his body, had taken on a powerful life of their own, and he was not even worthy of being their host.

He glanced at his books, their pages rotten from microorganisms, and asked for his God to take him.

AFTER

Cuticula and Arthropod, also known as Smidgen and Rocky, were on their way to the theology seminar. Cheerful, young and beautiful, as only the young can be, they looked forward to new knowledge with great interest, and the lecture was to be held by none other than the renowned Professor Shelley, a great authority on Holy Scripture, Genesis in particular.

The things preached by Procrustes Shelley would have been considered heresy up until relatively recently. However, thanks to him, but also to the numerous brave and freethinking individuals that came before him, many of which suffered greatly to preserve the scientific truth, the Holy Scripture has, by way of divine providence, opened the way to understanding the origin of the entirety of civilization.

Professor Shelley stood firmly by the thesis that the Holy Scripture was not necessarily a statement of factual

truths, but rather an attempt at interpreting the spiritual, divine universe. Instead of a literal account, it should, therefore, be understood as the symbolic representation of a long process. This was supported by the recent discoveries of apocryphal versions in different, dead languages, which ultimately leads to the important question of how much has changed since the original version, how many different traditions were combined to create the official version, usually attributed to St. Francis Gnowbone.

In the introductory segment of the lecture, the professor briefly described several comparative linguistic examples. He tried to give the lecture a comedic twist by attempting to imitate how some of the ancient texts would have sounded in long-dead languages, but only managed to produce deafening, ridiculous noise.

Smidgen and Rocky, now settled in a spot on the ceiling, where they managed to find an ideal position to listen to the lecture, chuckled quietly at the professor's humorous efforts. Smidgen winked at Rocky with her beautiful, large eye.

The subject at hand, however, soon grabbed all the students' attention – the name of the Son of God. Procrustes Shelley was deeply invested in studying the etymology of the apocryphal variants and had expressed the bold thesis that the original name of the Son of God was not necessarily SAM-SUNG.

“It is, indeed, highly possible,” the professor explained, “that *Samsung* was not originally the name of the Son of God. There are indications which show that the name *Sam-sung* only became associated with the Holy Trinity as time went by, while the original was based on an earlier version and held a more specific meaning. More recent research has shown that the name Samsung was in use even before Genesis. It must have been used even by the giants, the creatures renowned for their strength since ancient times, also mentioned in the Holy Scripture. After all, they were the tribe of the Son of God, the ones who judged Him and the ones who submit-

ted Him to torture and suffering. One of the giants, as we can see from the preserved fragments of pagan manuscripts, was called Samson. We can assume on the basis of established linguistic regularities that the original name of the Son of God was in fact: *Samsa*. *Gregor Samsa*, to be exact. It stems from this that the first part of the name, *Gregor*, was shortened in use and, by way of epenthesis, eventually became a suffix: *Sams-un-g*.”

Using complex paleolinguistic methods, the professor then explained how *Sams* was the word root of the name *Samsa*, that *un* stood for “from”, and that *Gregur* was the original name of the higher being otherwise known by the more frequent version – *God*. Therefore, *Gregor Samsa*, or the shorter *Samsung*, would literally mean: Son of God.

“Gregor Samsa is God embodied, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit from a giant into a perfect being, manifested in our form, just as we were created in the image of God, and sent among us by the Father to deliver us from sin and lead us into eternal life”, the professor concluded his revolutionary presentation, bringing it into compliance with the known dogma.

The students in attendance clapped their numerous legs and wings in amazement.

Before the audience dispersed, they demonstrated their Belief together with the professor by uttering, as per the teachings of the Church, the first sentences of the Holy Scripture:

One morning, having woken up from an uneasy dream, Gregor Samsa found himself transformed in his bed into a giant insect. He was lying on his hard, shell-like back, and when he lifted his head up, he could see the dome of his brown belly, divided into stiff segments, on which the bed cover could barely keep in place and was just about to slide off. His many legs, depressingly thin compared to the rest of his body, twitched helplessly in front of his eyes. “What has happened to me?”

*he thought. This was not a dream.*⁷

Finally, they all proclaimed happily: “And truly, truly I say: it was not a dream! Praised be the Lord above unto ages of ages, amen!”

After that, Cuticula, also known as Smidgen, a lovely little ladybug, and Arthropod, also known as Rocky, a shapely, handsome dung beetle, and all the others students – various lacewings, wasps, flies and bedbugs – flying or crawling, assembled to enjoy a rich feast of mites and aphids, happy to be living in the best of all possible worlds.

⁷ *English translation based on the original quote from: Franz Kafka, Metamorphosis, translated from the German by Neda Paravić, Šareni dućan, Koprivnica 2012.*

Chepich Valley, Hempwool and the Biggest *Sopela*⁸ in Istria

Utopia – or Maybe Not?! (A Letter to My Ancestors)

Nikica Karas

Introduction/explanation:

A long time ago, in a tiny village in the flatlands of Čepić polje called Blaškovići, there lived an old couple, Marija and Frane Blašković – my great-grandparents. They both died in the distant year of 2016... It is 2108 now and I, their grandson Tonko, am writing them a letter which is going to be sent into the past, because it is possible to do that now – there is a way to send letters into the past...

22 January 2108, Blaškovići

Address in time and space: Marija and Frane Blašković,
Blaškovići 15, Blaškovići, 22 January 2010

Dear great-grandmother and great-grandfather,

In this tiny village, your, i.e. our family home still stands and the fields are still worked on, bringing in a bountiful harvest every year. We no longer keep livestock, neither pigs nor cattle, sheep nor goats, and no chickens either, but they are always somewhere nearby, roaming freely through

⁸ “*Sopela*” is a traditional instrument similar to the oboe and is most often associated with Croatia’s coastal regions and islands.

the surrounding woods and the hills of Učka, sharing this life with us in peace and out of captivity. However, sometimes, when they cannot find food to nibble on, they come down to the village for snacks, and I, like many others around me, am so sensitive of other living creatures around me and their languages that it is perfectly normal to see them – pigs, cows, sheep, goats and chickens – communicating and trading with us. When we feed them, they let us milk them and take just enough to make a little cheese or butter. The chickens even leave an egg every now and then as a token of gratitude. We never milk them when they are feeding their offspring. Of course, there are still people who eat meat, but they are so marginalised and in such small numbers that they could hardly disrupt the harmony and balance of this natural paradise. Likewise, the brown bear, the wolf and the lynx, who have also returned to Učka, are aware of their role in preserving this order. They have the full right to occasionally kill or eat a pig or sheep because that's what they were made to do. However, we managed to learn to communicate with them, too, so they hardly ever attack people. They even stay away from our children! And we've also stopped having children like crazy – every couple has just one, two children at most, to whom they devote great attention, teaching them from an early age the universal knowledge of a successful system of peace and prosperity, taking them to the woods as often as possible and making them learn how to respect this holy place, other living creatures and their cultures, their customs and languages. The bear is the master of the woods, of course!

Back then, in your time, as I've learned from history, big polluters like Rockwool and the coal power plant in Plomin were still operating, killing our and your land. Čepić polje looked sad, empty and unappreciated. However, this has long since changed and has now been reorganised into a self-sustaining and ecological community. All of this was started back in 2016 by two artists from Liburnia: at the initiative of Marko from Lovran and with the committed assistance of Nikica from Opatija, and also with the help of Petra, a young dancer from Jurdani. At the time, they were seen as

fools and clowns because their ideas were too progressive and too forward-thinking. The people in charge laughed at their suggestions and branded them as freaks, weirdoes and lunatics, which was then taken up and further supported by the voters. We still have “people in charge”, but their positions are not paid ones – they perform their duties as volunteers working for the common good of their voters, i.e. their brothers and sisters. If they do manage to complete some genius project which improves the life of every individual, without anyone getting hurt and certainly without anyone dying in the process, or with sacrifices so minor that they hardly merit a mention, then they are given money or some other material reward.

When a house, a road or any other structure is being built, special attention is paid to preserving balance and harmony, and anything that could potentially hurt the environment is strictly avoided! Not a single lump of coal or drop of oil was mined or extracted in the last fifty years. Transportation is now based exclusively on electricity, which is obtained from natural sources or the extraordinary inventions of Nikola Tesla, whose discoveries have now become a public good and are no longer hidden in masonic bank vaults or kept by intelligence agencies. Energy is equally distributed among everyone and is completely free! Sources of drinking water have been declared the greatest treasure for all of Earth’s inhabitants and the decision by which water is designated to be a fundamental right of every living being is now globally accepted so nobody has to pay for it anymore...

Čepić polje has taken the English name Chepich Valley so it would be more recognisable on the world map, since English is still an important language of international communication. This change was made at the initiative of Dejan from Hum, whom Marko, Nikica and Petra visited in his home on the last day of their eco-art tour in December 2016.

The ideas they came up with then would not become reality until the year 2058. Chepich Valley is now based on

synergy and has reached its full potential, without anyone getting hurt in the process... What was once Rockwool is now – Hempwool! A large part of Chepich Valley is now covered with fields of industrial hemp, but also with annabis. Farmers, having held on to their holdings, are now growing it along with food crops. The majority is sold directly to Hempwool, based on the principle “from field to factory”, where they use it to make all sorts of different products which are then exported to countries around the world. Some of it the farmers keep for themselves and then use for medicinal, recreational and other purposes. Not a single worker or manager employed at Rockwool lost their job – after retraining, they simply stayed at Hempwool, which eventually hired even more people to keep up with the increasing workload.

From Hum to Plomin

Mighty hemp's a-growin'!

The coal power plant in Plomin was repurposed and is now making natural-based suppositories which are primarily intended for medical application, but with smaller quantities made in different shapes, sizes, dosages, smells and tastes for recreational purposes... All suppositories use medicinal, indigenous herbs from Chepich Valley, where hemp is once more a local plant, as it once was! The workers and the manager of the power plant also did not lose their jobs. They were all retrained so they could work in the new facilities.

The source of high-quality drinking water below the plant is now available to everyone for free. The same is being done with the drinking water underneath Hempwool, while all the channels and ditches in Chepich Valley have been cleaned and are now used for irrigation. This way, there is no fear of a bad harvest!

And you will never believe what a spectacular thing happened to the chimney of the old power plant: instead of being torn down, it became the largest Istrian sopela. There are holes with mechanised flaps on it and they open every day

at the same time when the church bells start ringing. Wind blows through the holes and creates the finest vibrations of joy and happiness which then travel around Istria and Kvarner, chasing away all evil. This spectacular landmark attracts visitors from all over the world to our region. Sustainable tourism, working in synergy with everything else, is flourishing to an optimal degree and there are now festivals and various smaller events almost every day in even the tiniest villages in Čepić Valley. You can hear singing and music all the time and dancing in the streets is a common sight...

As I end this letter, I can't help but cry tears of joy... but also a few sad tears – I am sad because you did not live to see the plenty we live in. It can never be perfect, but it is very good, we are still growing and developing in accordance with the principles of sustainability, guided by the motto: “Do as you will, but never hurt anyone in the process!”

All in all, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, great-grandfather and great-grandmother, for all that you've left us and all that you've taught us! Without you, but also without us, we would not be where we are now. Write back!

Your great-grandson Tonko

Blaškovići, 22 January 2108

The Little Dark Place

Mile Božičević

Morana awoke gasping for air. Her nose was stuffy. She inhaled and exhaled strongly through her nostrils. No effect. Breathing through the mouth annoyed her. She wondered if she was the only little girl in the world who could not breathe through her nose, and whether this meant she would always have to breathe through her mouth from now on.

She pictured herself as an adult with a dog, or with two dogs – no, with lots of dogs to whom she was desperately trying to explain something, but was not able to because she could not speak and breathe at the same time. She would have to take a very, very deep breath and then say in one go: “You’re not allowed to go outside during the day!” The dogs would listen to her obediently and then go hide from the dangerous UV rays.

In a moment, she was fully awake and right away remembered where she was. She had a blanket over her. It was dark. Quiet. They were no longer on the road. Since the bus crashed into something – at least Morana assumed this was the case – they had not moved. A familiar feeling of unrest came over her. She could not lie still. Her breathing intensified. The Monster was approaching.

She pulled her hair with both hands. As she pulled at the long strands in her fists, clenching her teeth, she could feel stings of pain spread across her scalp like hot wax. After some time, she felt as if she were floating. The pain transformed into something else, becoming like a force that overpowered the world itself. It eclipsed everything else; the darkness, the hunger, the memories. It chased away the Monster, if only for a short time.

Morana began to cry. Tears gathered in her eyes and with little effort she sent them cascading down her cheeks. Her airways immediately opened up and she let out a victorious whimper. She inhaled through her nose, exhaled, inhaled again and then began to cry. The crying came to her instinctively, as if it were unnatural to have tears in one's eyes and not cry.

She no longer had any strength in her fists. As she let go of her hair, she brought her arms and legs close.

She was hungry. There was a can of tuna in her pocket. In her mind, she scooped up bits of fish from the can with her tiny fingers and put them in her mouth. She could imagine herself chewing. Her mouth began to water.

She wanted to believe that everything was different under her blanket; she wanted to believe that here, she would be sheltered from everything, even hunger, in her little dark place. That was what she called it – the little dark place. She even imagined that time had stopped in the world outside the blanket. All the clocks had stopped ticking, some of them even covered with frost and cobwebs. Morana quickly scolded herself for coming up with this ridiculous idea. If time froze, who put the cobwebs there?

She knew that this was not how things worked. Hunger is always hunger and time could not be stopped. Perhaps she was only eight years old, but she had already learned to accept that reality followed its own course and was ultimately independent from her. “The power of your positive thinking can change the world,” she remembered reading on the internet. This was something she truly believed in so she invested considerable effort into actually changing things.

For example, she read a scary piece of news on Facebook once, all about the melanoma and cataract epidemics which commercial media were keeping secret from the public. After reading about it, she told her mum, dad and uncle all about how they should stay out of the sun because the part of

the ozone layer above Europe had been significantly depleted, creating what was commonly known as an ozone hole. They ignored Morana. They had their own, grown-up problems. They talked about mass migrations and money. Money was a very frequent topic at the time.

When Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat were shut down, when there was no more internet and when mobile phones stopped working, Morana became even more passionate about her attempts to change the world. They still would not listen to her. They talked about a new set of grown-up problems, closed borders, food, water. They talked a lot about food and water.

When the power supply was shut off and when yellow water started coming out of the taps, Morana gave up on attempting to change the world. Money was suddenly not as important because supermarkets no longer had any goods to sell. Her mum, dad and uncle were worried because they thought they didn't have "enough supplies".

When their car was stolen, they became very serious. They barricaded themselves inside their house and slept in shifts. One of them would always be looking through the window with her uncle's gun in their hands. As their neighbours left, new people began to arrive and break into the empty homes. Shots were fired. Looting started. People were escaping the city. Her mum, dad and uncle were trying to come up with a plan and decide where and how they were going to escape. They could not reach an agreement. As their food supplies decreased, they were becoming more and more worried. All of this went on for some time, until one day, her mum crouched down beside her and told her in a very calm voice: "Sweetie, we will be going on a long journey tonight."

Morana always wondered if she could have done better. Maybe she should have been more persistent, louder, more persuasive? Maybe she should not have kept quiet? Maybe she should have run away from home so her parents would

have taken her more seriously? Maybe it was all her fault, all because she was such a cry-baby?

Morana's reminiscing was cut short by irritation, nervousness, nausea. She felt powerless, yet wanted to scream at the top of her lungs. The Monster was here.

She imagined an ugly creature scraping her skull with its craggy claws. Her palms were sweating. She became very restless, her mind filled with horrible images and an indistinct feeling of guilt began to grow inside her – all of this made her very nervous. No longer able to lie still, she began shaking her leg and scratching her arm. All of this was the Monster's fault. It would always hit her like a great wave, stun her and then leave whenever it felt like it.

The metallic scratching she suddenly heard frightened Morana. Somebody was sawing through the door from the outside. Between the loud metallic noises, she could hear incoherent voices.

It went on for a long time. Simultaneously, her fear joined forces with the Monster. Morana could feel the protection she found in her little dark place grow weaker. Too many things in this world were working against her.

The door opened. A tiny ray of light pierced the darkness underneath the blanket. She listened nervously to the voices of two men. One of them had the voice of a person who smoked a lot. She knew this since her uncle was a heavy smoker, too. He always sounded like he had just got out of bed.

“Ugh”, the smoker grunted with disgust.

“Poor souls”, the other one added after a long pause.

Morana slowed down her breathing. She was still worried about the Monster. As the men began to rummage through the things strewn about, she remained hidden under the blanket. She could hear them opening the luggage and

tossing out suitcases. They would comment on the contents of the luggage, cursing because there was very little food.

The Monster kept scratching, scratching, scratching. Morana pressed her hands against her head and started growling through her clenched teeth. She winced suddenly. Somebody was pulling at her blanket. Somebody was pulling at her blanket!

“Jesus and Mary”, the smoker exclaimed in bewilderment. He pulled away the blanket. The little dark place was gone and he was now staring directly into Morana’s eyes, hidden behind a gas mask. Morana, with her head between her hands, was still growling worriedly because of the Monster. She felt as if she was going to explode.

“How long has she been in here?” the other man asked.

“No idea. Hold this, can’t you see she’s not in her right mind”, the smoker replied.

They pulled the blanket, which Morana was still clutching relentlessly. Like a heavy sack, she fell to the ground. Clumsily, she got up and found herself beside the bus. The sun was high up in the sky. She looked at the two men.

They were both covered up from head to toe, no skin showed from underneath their clothes. They had scarves draped around their face, gloves on their hands and hats on their heads. The smoker had dirty, greasy hair, while the other man sported a black bandana.

All three of them were silent. Morana turned around and looked at the bus she had been riding on for the past few days. A charred skeleton was slumped over the steering wheel. The whole front part of the bus was twisted from colliding with a wheelless van. Everything was covered in black scorch marks. The bus seats were empty, most of them burnt. Some of them were still occupied by a few more charred skeletons.

The luggage compartment, in which Morana had been

riding, was filled with bags and suitcases, along with a few human figures, lying there with their eyes wide open. Among them, she recognised her mother's hair and quickly looked away. She did not want to look it.

She was right when she decided to look up useful information for the coming period on the internet. She was right when she decided to steal her uncle's gas mask. Her little dark place kept her safe from the other passengers, who would have surely tried to steal it from her. Her little dark place saved her life.

After tinkering with the belts in the back, Morana was finally able to take off the heavy gas mask and, for the first time in days, take a deep breath. The air was humid, yet somehow, still fresh.

She took note of her surroundings; they were in Zagreb – she was sure it was Zagreb, only Zagreb had skyscrapers this tall. The streets were empty. Everything was full of broken glass. Many windows on the nearby buildings were open, and one of the buildings was on fire. The whole sight was grey and dilapidated, like in the old wartime photographs her uncle used to show her. There was a messy pile of clothes and luggage in front of her.

“The license plates are from Split”, the smoker noted.

“Did you come here from Split? Can you hear me?” the other man asked Morana, his voice full of an uncertain sense of hope. She could both hear and understand him, and yes, she was from Split, but why should that be any of his concern? Even the smallest kids know that they should never speak to strangers.

“It's the same everywhere”, the smoker concluded coldly and returned to rummaging through the luggage, taking any items he found potentially useful.

Morana focused her glance on the driver. She remem-

bered the crash. Everything shook so strongly that Morana thought they had drifted off a bridge and into a ravine. As soon as the other passengers realised they could not get out, panic ensued. The doors were stuck. Everyone started cursing at the driver and the naive idea that they would get on the last bus in Split no matter the cost.

Amidst all that chaos, Morana secretly slipped on her gas mask and covered herself with her blanket. She wanted to call her mum and dad to join her in her little dark place, but they were busy trying to open the metal doors. A few hours later, she woke up – nobody was trying to open the doors anymore.

That was when the Monster first started coming.

The smoker began to take off the shoes of the passengers still inside the bus. The other man approached Morana. He lifted up her shirt to reveal her naked body. His gaze studied her flat chest and pale skin, stretched between her protruding ribs. Morana did not feel comfortable, but was not bothered about it much. She wondered why someone would steal shoes without trying them on first. These are not shirts – and it would have been better if they were stealing shirts. What if the shoes turn out to be too small?

“What the fuck are you doing?” the smoker shouted.

“I, uh... I wanted to see how old she was....”

“You idiot! She’s a child!”

The man with the black bandana scanned Morana carefully.

“If only you were a little older...” he said with disappointment. He then searched her pockets, in which he found a can of tuna. Dogs could be heard barking aggressively somewhere in the distance.

“Let’s get going”, the smoker ordered in a frightened

voice, and then, a bag of stolen items from the bus in his hands, started to leave.

The other man examined Morana for a few more moments. He grabbed the gas mask and can of tuna from her hands. Turning away, he left as well.

Perched high up on the sky, the sun began to swallow up the shadow of the bus in which Morana was standing. She had to hide since she knew it was not smart to move about during the day. After nightfall, she could go look for food without fear.

She returned to the luggage compartment and closed the door behind her. She pulled the blanket over herself.



Anita Matijaš

Look at the grey frost
Sheltering the olive tree
From the cement plant.

II



Message Request



Karolina Kliman

Gaia X

Dear Dad, I hope you're doing well! Believe it or not, this is a message from your daughter from your distant island. :)

Gaia X

I am sorry for contacting you like this. Perhaps, it's not the politest way, but we only have Facebook and a few old computers that we managed to get up and running. Nonetheless, we were happy to hear that Facebook is still cool in your parts because not everyone has an account now.

Gaia X

So, mum's holding 'up' well. It was grandma's death that prompted me to write to you. This was the last straw; she was the one who taught me and many others how to write. There's a lot of us here and our parents all spoke different languages. They all speak the same language now, because grandma was one of the few people who knew how to write and that was something many of them wanted to learn. Two whole generations, mum's and mine, learned to read thanks to grandma. UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU.

Gaia X

You son of a bitch, you over there haven't got a clue; you think that we all work for you subserviently, rounded up on this small patch of dry ground, while the few of you enjoy the



great expanses over there. Yes, generations slowly died from the bloody diarrhoea they got from the rubbish mushy food you dropped from the heavens, "as payment" for our work. Well, we got used to it by now, our bodies are new, You eat food that grows out of the ground, well people were never natural beings, they always resisted nature. We got used to your shit.

Gaia X

You think there's enough of us to serve as your work force for generations so you stopped coming over and raping women. You think you brought us in line for ages to come. Thinking that we would just keep multiplying on our own. Well that's over now. Mothers no longer tell their children that if they behave badly, a man from the sky will come and mutilate them.

Gaia X

Grandma said that our ancestors retreated from the water for years. Until you finally chased us into a corner with your weapons. But you see, they took something with them, a few things and many words. Our language is still rich enough to allow us to express our rage, to create technology and improve it. You must be wondering how I know you're my father. Well I know many things. Be afraid, for we are coming soon.

Gaia X

When you came here, on a trip many years ago and raped my mother, you couldn't even imagine that your royal silver liquid contained the seed of revolution.

The Missing Seven

Marija Nezirović

She got up from the table on the terrace, where she had spent the whole afternoon reading, and gazed through the net. She had already noticed the changes in the air, in the wind shaking the acacia trees. Noises echo across the pebbles on the beach. Above the wrinkled sea, the faint glow of houses and palms on the island begins to melt into an intense, distant yellow. It spilled and spread across the sea. In the hills behind her, goats could be heard bleating. Staying ashore after dark can be dangerous, she thought. The terrace was made from wood and the house behind her was abandoned.

She drank the rest of the tea from her thermos and tossed it into her backpack along with a book, her phone, an electronic notebook and a mosquito repellent wristband. Where did all this time go? Clouds of sand were being pushed inward by the wind from the open sea. The wind would eventually burst the clouds open and spill their content across the flatlands – not much has grown there since the last time. Gusts would whip through the hillside, damaging the apples and tea growing on the slopes. With it, there would also come rainfall, weakening the soil and creating strong torrents, strong enough to pull out whole trees.

She ran towards the coast, across the dry stone walls, through the aloe and rosemary shrubs – she could feel the first grains of sand hitting her skin. She crossed the bridge to the artificial island. The waves and gusts of wind were weaker here because the seawall. She slowed down her pace, but could still feel the pulsation in her ears with every breath. With her fingers, she felt the outlines of an apple in her pocket. The layout of the streets was something she already knew by heart. She came to the waters of Zadar a month ago, just after the first summer storm. Since then, the sweltering heat had made all

but her bones sweat, creeping even into the shade provided by the trees. The island was shaped like a snowflake, with a dome for gardens and homes at the end of each branch. Even from a distance, she could see all the new boats moored in the marina, sheltered from the coming storm. She wondered if the owners had brought their own supplies.

The road lead her to the square in the centre of the island. The streetlights were out and there were hardly any people about. She continued down the road, passing by a line of trees and emerging back into the wind, by the closed kindergarten and the dark park, towards the bay stretching between two sections of the town, arriving finally at the circular apartment building at the end of the docks. Strands of hair flapped across her face, tossed about by the wind. The glass door opened and from above, a voice greeted her by name. There was a park in the lobby as well – vines and leaves covered the columns and ceiling like a mosaic. She was alone.

Without looking around much, she rushed into the lift and headed to the second floor. She took out the lab coat from the wardrobe. Heading down the corridor illuminated by tanks of bioluminescent algae, she rushed towards the door at the end. This was the door she was looking for. The light in the room was dim, she could only hear the hums and crackles of the machines and the digital screen. On the other side of the glass wall, the sky had already been swallowed by storm clouds. Sea foam covered the shore. The world outside looked like a pencil-shaded drawing. Muted.

“Haein? Is it you?” The voice was coming from the bed beside the glass.

She realised she could not understand it. Used to storms disrupting the energy supply from the solar cells, she shook the screen and adjusted the cables until she got a reply from the Network.

“It’s me, Mr Ugrin”, she said, trying to catch her breath.

In the bed, a man lay covered with a blanket, his skin wrinkled and his hair white. He turned his head towards her. His smile told her that he was connected to the Network, that he could understand her English.

“I am looking at the storm. Do you know that this sand came all the way from the Sahara? It appeared so fast, just as our guests from the Council had predicted. You did not just now come from the shore, did you?”

“I got here safely! Ana is still being serviced, I am here to keep you company.”

“I told you to call me Ivan”, he said gently. “That Ana, I can survive a day without her. I’m feeling better every day. You’re awfully late, miss. The other volunteers have already left some time go.”

She tossed her backpack on the chair and made a sad expression. “I know!” she said as she went through the contents of the backpack. “I am so sorry, I had been searching for samples, but there was nothing there so I got angry and forgot about the time. This is all your book’s fault!”

She put the book before him, to which he smiled. “Meaning that you chose reading over working? This is nothing new.”

Hacin sighed. She kept forgetting that the permission to stay here was given to her by the Council and that she was obliged to send them weekly reports. Her mentor would be breathing down her neck if he knew how slow her progress was on the plant distribution models. She was allowed to use the equipment on the island to study the various species growing on land and on the underwater reefs as long as she helped in the community. “So, you found The Missing Seven?”

“Yes, the copy you gave to the library. I was the first person to ask for it.”

“It seems that young people don’t read anymore. Books are not even printed on paper. What a shame.”

Haein shook her head. "I like paper books, especially ones you can borrow. It's as if I'm learning about the previous readers by reading them. I found crumbs between the pages and a tea stain in this one. Besides, it has all the things I love: adventure, nature, love" – the old man coughed in an attempt to disguise his laughter. "What is it now?"

"I am sorry, but that was Milica spilling her macchiato." Haein tilted her head. "It was a beverage made from the coffee plant", he continued. "This was the first book I wrote – imagine, turning from a diver into a writer. Of course I gave a copy to her, I gave one to everyone.

"It is a pity your wife died before the island opened", the girl said. "If only I could get to meet her somehow. She is happy you can walk again, I am sure of that."

The flashes of lightning cast flickering shadows across his face. "It was not easy for us after my accident. There weren't that many resources and the frequent floods and droughts were the main issues at the time. Being a diver is a lot like living. No matter how careful you are, there is always a risk. I wasn't lucky that day, that's all. We didn't have these nanomachines, there was no Network. I couldn't live in the sea anymore."

They sat together, looking outside. The book lay on her lap. She studied his profile, the dents in his cheeks and the protrusion of his nose. The curve of the wave. She tried to memorise that shape, one which seemed to unite two opposing intentions into a single stroke.

Every couple of days, she would come to the retirement home and help Ivan get his exercise. In the afternoon, they would take walks outside, play chess with the other pensioners and do yoga in the park. The island was built to meet the needs of the elderly, the people which either could or would not leave the region. In the last year, encouraged by the success of artificial islands, many young families settled here as well.

If the winds were mild, they would go down to the shore and fish. She would tie his hair into a ponytail and put a hat on his head. Sometimes Ana would join them, smiling. The three of them would walk along the beach all the way to the platform from which you could see the islands. Real islands, now deserted, littered with wind turbines almost as old as windmills. He would then arrange his fishing baits and toss the hook into the water. Sometimes he would catch a mackerel or a sole, but most of the time he would just spend gazing into the sea. While Haein collected plant samples, Ana would bring her weeds and corals she found diving in the bay. She could pierce through the water like a dolphin. She even helped her fill out the reports on the Network. Many years ago, Ivan had worked on setting up Network installations underneath the artificial island. He had an accident diving under which left him wheelchair-bound.

It seemed as if they had known each other for a long time, their stories forming a unified whole. She listened to them attentively, but fragments were missing, like pieces of road carried away by a flood, empty in places like the coral reefs devoured by seaweed. The world Haein inhabited was was the same. Some places were inaccessible, others flooded. From the plane, she saw whole forests under water, the sun reflecting on the surface.

Today, Ivan was different, maybe because of the shifts in atmospheric pressure. He kept taking them back to the past.

“Ivan, is this book about your childhood on the islands around Zadar?” she asked.

He remained silent for a few moments, but then replied and took her into his memories: “We, my friends from the neighbourhood and I, discovered seven caves in the archipelago, it was our secret. You could get to them only by diving. I was the only one who could reach the seventh cave, freediving was my only talent then.”

Haein clapped her hands. “In my first home, on the

island of Kiribati, we would go diving for seashells in the lagoon after school. I still have a brown Venus-clam from that time.”

He stopped his story and looked at the book. “How far are you into it?”

Instead of an answer, her stomach started growling. Ivan looked at her, stunned. “Haein, I wouldn’t want you reading my book hungry.”

“I’ll get something from the kitchen. Don’t worry, I have permission on the phone.” She took the apple from the pocket of her trousers. “This is for you, I’ll peel it.”

In the kitchen, she prepared a canned meal for herself. The cupboards were full of plastic items, which she took into her hands to smell. She had not seen plastics since her childhood. Her hands were covered in cuts from the underwater grottoes. Like her mother’s, when they were still living on the island. She taught her everything she knew about the sea.

Her island home was lost back when she was still a child. The land, the people, and then the colourful corals and fish – all gone, destroyed by the heat. Kiribati was now living with the fish, below the surface of the ocean. The sun now sets over a swamp covered in algae, there were no more messy gardens she knew from her childhood.

In the yard, they kept turtles which they caught in the lagoon. Her mother would make them release them back into the ocean. After the diseases broke out, her school got closed down. She could taste salt in the water coming from the tap. When they would be waiting in line for fresh water, she recalled, her mother’s dress would slide up Haein’s leg. They would collect the water in plastic containers.

The floor of their home rotted away during one of the floods, and an empty bank account meant that they were forced to become refugees. Her mother did not seem sad about it; life on the island had become too hard. They had no choice.

It was not until she got to a school with solid walls and a dry floor that she learned that her island was destroyed as a consequence of climate change.

She only returned to Kiribati as an adult and a biology student. What she found bore little resemblance to her memories. She wiped her tears. That lifeless atoll was not her home.

Hacin and Ivan were eating in the room. The storm was waning. She let out a sigh of relief when she saw that there had been no landslides in the mountains. He was still not feeling sleepy. She read the book to him, the part where she last stopped. The hero had just hidden a love letter in the cave. He would only return for it after he discovered the seventh. He would bring his loved one a piece of coral as well. The old man was listening to her, but she could not decipher the expression on his face.

“I can still smell those caves”, he said to her. “When you finish the book, I’m going to show you where they are.”

“Reading takes so long – if only I had a brain made from computer chips, like Ana.”

When she left the retirement home, the wind was still spraying dust across roads and playgrounds. The worst had passed, they were safe in the domes. The sand collected on filling stations and roofs and even entered houses through the spaces between the blinds. It covered the plants in the gardens, the compost and the recycled metal. It covered everything, even the past.

Birds were a rare sight in the sky above the island, it was mostly empty during both winter and summer. The only thing flying was dust. Many were still looking for signs of the future in the atmosphere and the water. The word around the market was that the head of the community had received an important letter from the capital, after which he locked himself up in the town hall and spent many days deliberating. About what? About the sounds coming from the sea, from the bare islands. An omen, they whispered.

An aeroplane carrying Council experts had landed on the runway on the shore a few days ago. You could even hear the noise from the island. It descended with gradual whistles. Its solar cells were half full, but the leader said that the forecasts mentioned unstable storms and that the plane should be taken to the hangar.

They were scientists, foreigners, and the children soon started to make fun of their demeanour and their unusual way of talking. Haein was already embraced as a member of the local community. They enjoyed the dates and lemon cake they served them, along with tea and fruits from the highlands. The reason they were here were the coral reefs. The Council wanted to know how atmospheric particles affected them – many years had been spent on getting coral to grow again in Europe. The schools of fish were beginning to grow in numbers again and the fishermen could return to throwing their nets.

It seemed as if they were going to have to stay here longer than planned. They kept apologising, they only had a weekly borrowing permit.

She was woken up by the chirping of the crickets. It made her nervous on a hot night when getting any sleep was difficult as it is. Haein got up, left the building and went for a walk around the marina. A woman stood leaning against a fence not far from her. The rocking boats made splashing sounds much like whispers while Haein observed the tiny atmospheric particles dancing above them. Each type of particle had a different colour. Despite being smaller than pollen, they were so numerous that they left marks like brush strokes across the sky. The particles combined to form a painting above the Adriatic.

“They say experiments like these will allow us to control the climate.”

The other woman approached her. It was obvious now that the woman was a member of the group sent by the Council. Perched on her nose was a pair of glasses. She refrained

from asking whether they were real.

“Your new particles? I wonder. Ivan says he doesn’t trust them.”

“Ivan?”

She explained how she knew Ivan, how he was more familiar with what lied beneath the surface of the sea surrounding the island than anyone.

“Interesting”, the woman said. “You are here on a Council scholarship, right? Do you know much about coral? Maybe you could help us with our research.”

The night was cold. Haein shivered; she suddenly wanted to return to bed.

“What if these particles are not a good thing? What if they cause storms and changes in the sea?”

“Anything is possible”, the woman replied and flipped her hair back. “This field is making good progress. We want to see how the coral is coming along, come with us.”

“I will come, if Ivan is ready to go diving again.”

Ana is laughing while Ivan is yelling at Haein. She connected the breathing tube incorrectly. How was she planning on getting out of the cave alive? She replied that there was no cave, that they had all collapsed before his accident. We should find new ones, Ivan says.

Haein pressed the mask to her face. She finally returned to the right island.

Written in the hope that the new Paris Climate Agreement will reduce global warming to the lowest possible level and ensure a better and more just world for all.

Fish Are Growing in the Treetops

Durdica Stuhldreiter

Fish are growing in the treetops.
They smile a toothless grin
and mourn with crimson scales.
The lustre is gone from their eyes,
leaving but a longing for water
missing in the twilight
and in sunken dreams.

They only have leaves now,
much alike sickly spiders.
They cannot help them weave their web
because they still remember the anguish of those caught.
Mute, they pretend that they do not care
and that fish can live a perfectly good life
in the scraggy treetops, underneath the sky
that drank the sorrow of missing waters.

Only sometimes,
when the rain falls,
they still hope
to be picked from the branches
by their nonexistant waters.

Invasion

Gabrijel Barišić

– And then he tells me he's Santa Claus! He might as well have said he was a dragon... His voice, however, did sound like the dragon from that commercial. I mean, we know they're people, right... But Santa Claus!

– And what happened next? – Marijana asked me, a red striped straw in her mouth, as we sat under a big parasol adorned with the same striped pattern.

– He says: "Santa will take care of you this Christmas!" And what am I supposed to think, other than that he's just some pervert calling people randomly?"

Here, in this place which less and less people still call Split, there was never much snow, but now, this December... We were drinking an icy cocktail on the roof surrounded by mud, worrying less about mosquitoes and more about amphibians. They still present no threat to us, these salamander beasts which ancient humans once expected to see in a fire, but they are not much of a pleasant sight on a bed or cupboard either... We were planning on retreating to our air-conditioned havens in the afternoon, when suddenly – a bell rang!

– A package for Mrs Ljerka Tobijas! – the postman's voice called out from the intercom.

Oh, well. I rushed down to mud level. I signed for the package and returned upstairs to Marijana. What a big package!

– Well, let's see! – I said, speaking for both myself and M.

We were left frozen in shock.

– I'll be damned! – Marijana said.

In front of us was a half-metre long iguana with metal-

lic, pistachio-coloured skin. To top it all off, it had a Santa hat on its head.

– Oh, God! Santa from hell! – I blurted out, referring to the phone call, not the creature in the cage. This really escalated. Some damned pervert has it in for me! I hope it doesn't get to a point where I'll have to call the police... – And with what should I feed this devil, for goodness's sake? Will I be forced to take up fishing now?!

I should just let Darko deal with it when he gets here. And with that lunatic, too.

We sat at the table, staring at the reptile in silence. Suddenly, having checked the time, Marijana sprang up from her chair.

– Darko will be here soon so I'll be off now...

– Alright, dear... You'll hear about this thing... I mean, especially if the Santa story isn't over yet... – I said and let her out. And just when I closed the door, Darko showed up.

– Anything to eat? – he called out over the doorstep.

I almost asked: "Who?"

– There's lasagna, but come see this first...

Darko appeared from behind the terrace door and froze in place.

– What... What's wrong? – I immediately realised something was wrong. Darko sat down.

– My grandfather told me a story once, about how they, when they were children, used to pick the yellow flowers of some meadow plant and suck the nectar out of them. And then they were told that the plant was poisonous... That's how I feel now.

– And? What happened in the end?

– It wasn't the nectar that was poisonous...

– Well, see! – I tried to console him. – Now, explain it to me.

You know I work at the institute – he checked whether I was paying attention. – There are stories which, of course, originate in circles like these. They seem to be looking for something like this – he said and pointed at the lizard.

– Does the colour make it special? – I asked.

– There’s something about that, but I don’t know... It’s only a matter of time before they begin a public search.

– And then? What are we going to do?

Darko got up and began pacing nervously around the room, occasionally casting a fearful glance at the lizard.

– Give me some time... So, how about that lasagna?

Seeing that this so-called “Venusing” began at the Equator, taking on the pace of Change, migrations were an entirely understandable phenomenon. These migrations were mostly towards the north.

Strange paths lead the gypsies and their traditional tents and animal circus across the Peaks to the sea and a place supposedly called Split. Nobody could forbid them from keeping animals. Not in this chaos of entropy. The star attraction was, of course, Medo the Bear.

And then, just as Darko had expected, there was an announcement on local TV.

“And finally, an announcement from Biological Control Station Split: An unusual variant of the common Mediterranean iguana has been sighted. The specimen is roughly half a metre long and has light green, metallic skin. If you happen to see it, do not scare it away. Please call 0800 The finder will be rewarded 100,000 roubles.”

And then he called again.

– Take care of that fellow. Yes, it’s a he. Emanuel is his name. Why would you hand it to them, even if there was money involved, when they haven’t told you anything? This is the truth: if he reaches a certain place in the north, and I mean a fjord in Norway, in one piece, then there might be hope for all of us and not just for these boys of yours who can already see

gold glimmering before their eyes.

– But will I ever get to see you? – I asked childishly.

– When it happens, you’ll know, but you first have to run away with the circus! Bye!

I did not know anything about any gold, but how could you not trust Santa Claus? Although I did think he was a pervert at first.

This time he did not shout out: “Anything to eat?”, which was suspicious enough, but only said: – Honey, I know!

And he even had the stupid Santa hat on his head!

– You idiot!

– What?

– Ah, I thought you were... Never mind... What is it... that you know? – I asked more cautiously.

We sat close to each other as if we were afraid someone might hear us.

– The iguana. It’s not just some curiosity. It’s the result of a combination of mutation enhanced with genetic engineering. The iguana uses chlorophyll and a modified cascade chain for electron transport which relies on gold extracted from seawater. That iguana is using gold for a specific type of photosynthesis! Its colour comes from a combination of chlorophyll and gold. It can, therefore, feed in two ways, but it also needs seawater.

– Look at it, it does seem like it has withered a bit! – I said.

– Their new method for extracting gold ran away from them! – he continued like I hadn’t said a thing. – No wonder they’re looking for it. If they can copy and instrumentalise this process, they’ll have energy, food and gold! In this age of sun and seawater, what could possibly match that?

So, he was right about the gold!

“Sahara Circus – this weekend only!”, a voice an-

nounced over a loudspeaker outside. “Catch the last train to see the wonders of Africa in our zoo!”

– Listen to that! – I said. He was right about the circus, too.

– What, you’d like to go? – Darko asked, almost as if surprised. He could be such a killjoy sometimes...

– Of course I would. Even if leave alone one day and save ourselves. Those who have already left will never get to see it.

The First Santa Claus

Darko stormed into the apartment before noon.

– They’re here, they’re coming! Let’s go! – he shouted. – Get the lizard and let’s go!

Downstairs, Santa Claus and a SWAT team in black uniforms were entering the lift. “Is that him?”, I found myself wondering. As we ran down the stairs, we noticed Marijana standing by her door, looking rather remorseful.

– I’m sorry – she said. – I needed the money to save myself...

– Do anything you can to make sure your life isn’t shit! – I shouted, already on the floor below.

All of a sudden, a car key dropped from above.

– Ah, conscience...

That was how we escaped the apartment.

The Second Santa Claus

– Where to? – Darko asked, driving fast.

– To the circus. – I replied after a brief pause.

– You really loved it there... – Darko looked at me sus-

piciously.

- They had their own Santa Claus, remember?
- Yeah, so?
- I somehow feel that they are a sign, a waymark.
- Well, OK then!

...

– I can't really say I've ever seen a lizard with metallic, pistachio-coloured skin – the second Santa Claus said to the first one, scratching his beard. Upset, the first Santa walked away, leaving the object of his search hiding practically under Mrs Claus's skirt. "Is that him?", I wondered again. I told Darko everything after that. Darko was still the same, kind man I married.

The Third Santa Claus

Wasteland. A wasteland in which the metallic grinders of the soil refinery peel away at the thick layer where they have not yet run into stone. The vegetation was long gone, distilled during the fuel shortage. The sea had turned into a new type of forest of algae, mangroves and seaweed. There was an internment camp for transportation to the north here. For those who could afford it. Those who couldn't went on foot, surrendering themselves to the mercy of nature and bandits. The supervisor was dressed as Santa Claus. And then, when he talked!

– And how do you plan to pay your ticket to the North?
– That was the voice! It was him. And I knew immediately, even without the help of the second Santa, who had just appeared with Marijana and said loudly: – You can give it to him!

We slowly took the sheet off the cage.

– They wanted to stone her – the second Santa explained Marijana's presence.

– If you ask me, this slut is going to have to walk! – I

said, turning my back to her.

– And what happened to the Santa who was chasing us? – I asked.

– He stopped for divination at the Old Gypsy's place so Medo decided to play with him a little... In any case, I can confirm that he is dead organic matter now – the second Santa Claus responded concisely.

– And what will happen to Emanuel? – Darko asked.

– Ah, he's going to be transported in a container with warm sea water and UV lamps, and then, when he gets there, the usual: DNA, physiology, biochemical analysis... If we're lucky, the Saviour is finally here!

III

It's Alright

Dejan Šiptar

New Centre. New wire. New spikes. New limitations, control, surveillance, checks, interrogations, instructions. This is what we are looking for. This is what we need. Something new. New plenty, new accommodation, new safety, new life. New world. Escape from the ruins, the drought, the poverty, the emptiness, the fear, the persecution. Escape from death, which has crept into everything around us, and which, having drained every trace of life from our environment, is now going after the only thing left.

We are many. We are always many. The first day in the new centre is always spent in line. The lines are long, space is scarce, and resources are always insufficient. The only thing which by some miracle survives is patience. We seek salvation in the Centres. Actually, in that which is behind them. Despite their name, they are located as far as possible from the centre of anything. And these centres safeguard from the crowd looking for salvation. Those who withstand the travels see the Centres as a symbol of order, places of hope in which their travels will finally come to an end and allow them to get back to the way things were before. Home, work, supporting your family, security. And they get disappointed every time. And they continue further every time. Most of them.

The further I travel, the more different languages I hear around me. They used to be variations of Arabic and related languages, and were spoken by dark faces filled with hope for a better future and security offered by the new land. Now the image has changed and there is no predominate colour. We are all on the same pile, and Romance and Slavic languages, as well as many others, have joined in. And the more languages there are, it is getting more and more difficult to differentiate between them, and easier to understand them. Everything be-

comes an amalgam of voices which all, each in its own way, send the same message.

“Please.”

“I am begging you.”

“The children.”

“Food.”

“Fear.”

...

“Water.”

Everything is different. Everything the same. All the diversity we were proud of in the previous years and which we pointed out at every possible opportunity melted away into a pile of dirt, misery and hope. And now it can be recognised only in the few raised voices.

Itfa is standing in line next to me. Silent as always. She hasn't said a word since I found her and decided to take her with me. She eats when I offer her food, she drinks when we have water, she never asks for anything, never complains. I would like to hear her voice once, although I wouldn't understand a word. Since the very beginning, the only feature defining her was empty catatonia, as if I am dragging along a child drawn on a piece of cardboard. If she would only make a sound, even in her sleep, I would know that she still lives, and feels, and has willpower left inside her. This way the only hope I place in her is my personal salvation.

Leaving home wasn't easy. For any of us. But growing poverty, the paleness which crept into nature and the death which permeates it were a big incentive. The only thing that is easy to choose is the direction. South is out of the question from the start. Everyone is leaving from there. A glimmer of hope for remnants of a moderate climate exists only in the North. And when the North becomes unbearable, there are the

East and West. Both equally miserable, both with the same possibility of continuing to travel North.

I have been traveling for months and I was refused entry in a few Centres when I came across Itfa. She was sitting among the tents next to her mother's motionless body. Even then she wasn't crying, didn't make a sound. Maybe she had, until my arrival, gotten everything out of her system and there was nothing left anymore. I stood next to her and confirmed her mother is dead. For some time already. She probably managed to save one last valuable possession, which she intended to exchange for a pass to the Centre for the two of them. She probably told someone about it. The news spread, the desperation grew. One life became more important than the other. Someone obtained value, Itfa lost her mother. I took her hand and took her with me. She didn't resist. She didn't raise her head. She just came along. Without looking back, without looking ahead.

That time I had hoped I could use her. Having a child with me, an orphan nonetheless, must get you some additional points in the Centres. She will surely soften hearts and open these golden gates we yearn for and give us both a new chance. I have been traveling with her for four months and we were denied entry in three Centres. In the beginning, I thought the reason was her state of catatonia and I started considering just leaving her somewhere. But I saw that even families with more children were denied entry, even those who trained their children for hours on how to behave during the interviews. Some tried crying, some tried being happy, some tried faking diseases. All of them are in the same line with me. As is Itfa, whom I have no strength to leave, because I still hope that someday I will manage to do something to get through to her and because of which she will finally look at me and make a sound. And I don't regret that I'm sharing the little I have with her. I don't regret the hunger, the thirst and fatigue. I don't regret any of it, because she gave me a new goal. She turned my selfishness into willpower. She gave me the strength to continue and a wish I want to fulfil, for the both of us.



Today, the gates will open for us. I know it. From today, there will be no new Centres for us. Here, in this one, whichever it was, we come to the end of our road

We are finally directed to one of the clerks in charge of registration. The usual procedure. They look at you briefly, and that is the only look they will give you during the whole conversation. After that, their heads are focused on the screen and the only thing that matters is obtaining the data as soon as possible and sending you forward, at the same time ignoring any persuasions, appeals and begging.

– ID.

I give him my documents and the quick registration continues.

– The child's ID.

– She doesn't have any.

– You are her father?

– No.

– Where are her parents?

– Dead.

– If you are her adoptive parent, you need to have a certificate.

– I am not her adoptive parent, I found her – at this point, the clerk stops automatically entering the data and listening to my answers carelessly. He shifts his attention to the two of us.

– Where did you find her?

– In one of the Centres, next to her mother's dead body. – Now we get a second look, the girl first, then me.

– Did you try to find the relatives or friends of the child's mother?

– No, why would I? She is mine now. – Now his gaze is fixated on Ifta, who is only staring blankly in front of her and doesn't look back.

– What's your name? – No answer, no reaction. The clerk tries to communicate in a couple of different languages, but there's no reply.

– Do you know where she's from? What language do you use to communicate?

– No. We don't communicate. I made sure to teach her it is better she kept her mouth shut. – Now I have his full attention. The clerk turns his head back and eye contact is made with one of the armed guards guarding the door. Now two pairs of eyes are watching me. Great success when compared to the previous centres.

– Are you trying to say you molested the child?

– I merely taught her how to behave.

– Why did you bring her with you if you didn't want to help her?

– For company.

– What do you mean? You said you didn't talk to her.

– Not that type of company. – I see the clerk holding his breath. The way he looks at us changes. He turns his head back once again. The guard makes eye contact with one of his colleagues. New eyes are focused on me. The clerk is looking at Ifta carefully; he waves towards her and tries to get her attention.

– What did you do to this child?

– Saved her from death, that's what! If it weren't for me, she would be lying dead in the dust! Or doing exactly the same thing she's doing now! I at least keep her belly full! And I deserve something in return. I'm not going to drag her along for free, am I? She has no one and nothing, she can at least

pay up lying on her back. Or on her knees. – I winked at him with a smile. And almost threw up, but I managed to restrain myself. I had to. Because of Itfa. This was the first time we got this much attention in the Centre. This was our last chance. I had to go through with it

The next moment, the guards were standing right beside me, each of them taking one of my hands and lifting me up. At the same time, the clerk took Itfa into his arms and took her away from me. The rest of the people around us had been looking at what was going on for some time and now they moved aside in order to make space for the guards. While they were taking me away, I tried to break free so I could turn my head and see what was going on behind me. I saw the clerk taking Itfa away. I saw the doors open and the two of them walking through. I saw Itfa looking towards me across her shoulder. I saw her eyes open wide with fear as she extended her little dark hand towards me. I saw her mouth open and, despite the noise around me, before the doors closed, I heard her scared sigh.

They threw me out among the tents. They didn't do anything else to me. They knew there was no need. They know how it works in the Centres. They already started to gather around me. The news spread, the hatred grew. One life became unwanted among the others. Someone lost value, Itfa got a chance.

It's alright.

It's alright.

The Last Ship

Anamarija Helena Milardović

Vilma stormed headlong into her mother's dim room, stepped skilfully over the dog and then jumped enthusiastically onto her sleeping mother.

"No! No jumping...!!" the father yelled in an attempt to catch her.

Flora moaned painfully, and the sight of her mother's face scared Vilma. With a scream, she leapt into her father's arms.

"Jesus, Flo, are you alright?!", Robert yelled out in fear.

"You haven't warned her...", Flora moaned quietly.

"I didn't have the time! I'm sorry...", he apologized while standing helplessly over his wife.

Vilma hugged her father's leg, looking away from her mother.

"Vilma, come to mother, just a little more gently", Flora barely utters.

"Mum left rehabilitation so she could come to your birthday party", Robert scolded her.

"Leave her alone, Robert, we have the whole day ahead of us", Flora sank back into her pillow.

The little girl slipped away quietly and went back into her room, with Žuži running behind her, barking.

"I'll leave you to rest a bit, I'll come back soon," Robert said as he closed the door behind him.

"Is anybody theere?" at that exact moment a voice called out from the stairs.

Lobel snuck into the room carefully and his eyes fixated on his mother's scaly skin.

"They did you up real good!" he joked.

"Yes, they did. Again. But we are getting close to finding a solution", Flora uttered with a painful smile.

"You already said that...", Lobel said in a serious voice.

"Son, we have no other choice, we have to leave this place."

"There's always a choice, and it is up to us to make it", Lobel said nervously.

They remained seated in the silence of the half-dark room when a soft knock was heard at the door.

Robert had returned with plates filled with food: "Breakfaaaast! And a birthdaaay one at that!"

He pushed the door of the adjacent room open with his foot, and Vilma peeked through, her face hidden behind the dog's fluffy ears.

"Come on, celebratory dog lover, let's have breakfast", the father said and entered the mother's room.

Vilma stared at the bandaged figure covered in scars and scabs. She used to think mother was the most beautiful woman in the world. Now she looked like a patched-up rag doll.

"I'm sorry", she forced herself to look at mother, but failed to do so.

"It's alright, it's normal you're scared. It will heal", the mother caressed the daughter, and the little girl frowned because of the smell of her mother's bandages.

"Just one question, Vilma. What happened in school yesterday?" Robert asked.

"Nothing special...", Vilma replied nervously.

"That's not what the teacher said", her father scolded her.

“Honey, what happened? I heard you hit Egon. But he’s your best friend”, mum asked in surprise.

“I didn’t hit him! He hit me... He said...” she stuttered, frightened.

“What did he say? You can always tell us everything”, Robert comforted her.

“He said we were on the list for the New World just because mum is working for the Government.”

“So what?” Robert asked.

Vilma’s eyes opened wide in shock. As if father confirmed Egon’s words.

“Vilma, the priority list was made a long time ago. Hundreds of thousands of people already left, and we were not among them”, Robert explained to his daughter.

“Yes... But... This is... The last ship!” Vilma yelled.

“My darling. There is always the first ship, and there’s always the last one. It’s simply how it is”, her father calmed her down.

“But Egon says it’s because of your connections! And that other families will die because of us!!” she said through tears.

Robert drew her close and embraced her. He did not have an answer, at least not one that would comfort her.

“So, I heard they decide who can go according to weight. Like with cattle! And that they lowered the maximum weight again!”, Lobel cut in.

Mum stopped eating, and Vilma took the opportunity to put a fistful of food under the table.

“Where did you hear that? That’s classified information”, Flora said in a serious voice.

“Come on, mum, nothing is classified, everybody knows everything”, Lobel rolled his eyes.

“It’s not funny, Lobel. Where did you get that information?”

“Word gets around...”, the teenager said while chewing on his food.

“And where were you the whole night?” the mother asked him, staring into his eyes.

“What’s this now?? What kind of a third degree is this?! You’re not the Government’s agent now, you’re mum!” Lobel put the plate on the nightstand.

“Lobel, you’re talking to your mother!” Robert replied angrily.

“I’m sorry son, you are right. I’m paranoid and taking it out on you for no reason... More and more groups are organizing with the aim to sabotage the last ship’s departure. You could say everything descended into a state of anarchy”, Flora admitted.

“What?! For God’s sake, are they crazy??” Robert screamed.

“Why do you think they’re crazy? There’s no justice! Or common sense! Who’s making these lists, who is writing these approvals?! I’ll tell you who! Those who have already ensured a comfortable life for themselves in the New World with the money of the rich who are buying a New Life!” Lobel started yelling.

“Departure is imminent and urgent. They will even change the take-off date in order to minimise the chance of sabotage. A putsch will be put in motion here soon, and anarchy has been reigning out there for a long time now, ever since it became clear that the last ship will depart soon. A lot of people will be left without their loved ones...”, mother explained.

“We have already covered all of that. The lists exist because there has to be some order to the whole thing. What’s bothering you is the fact that Gabi isn’t going and I understand that”, Robert said.

“You don’t understand anything! You only care about us go-

ing, you don't care about others!!" Lobel screamed at his father.

"Son, if you were in our place you would do the same... Vilma, you've barely touched your food again", the father scolded her, trying to change the topic of the conversation.

"That's not true, I had a lot, actually... As if it was my birthday!" Vilma tried to joke her way out of the situation.

Mum pushed a small bundle into her hands. Vilma unwrapped it happily and took out a grey little stone. She looked at it with amazement and then at her mother for confirmation: "From... the New World?"

"Yes, my darling. From your new home. The situation there is stabilising", mum told Vilma, but was actually trying to convince herself.

"That's why you have such burns", Lobel interrupted her.

Flora slumped for a moment and Robert immediately appeared by her side: "Honey, are you OK?"

"Yes, yes, just a bit tired. The ice on Ice Home cracked and I got exposed to radiation while we were repairing it. But they are just surface burns, I am merely exhausted", she said, looking at her son.

Lobel sneered and stuffed a piece of meat in his mouth.

"How can you eat that meat?!" Vilma screamed all of a sudden.

"And what would you like me to eat? Those greens of yours?" Lobel mocked her.

"That's how this planet was destroyed, and you are still eating meat! Mum, tell him!" Vilma cried out, tearing up.

"I don't care about your meat and your mass production and greenhouse gasses. I don't care and do you know why?" he got into her face "Because meat exists to be eaten, and not to

be taught tricks!”

Vilma flinched and choked in tears.

“Of course, when you think permafrost and Bofrost are the same thing! Glutton!!” Vilma yelled uncontrollably, waving her hands in the air.

“Stop with the yelling! Stop it immediately! Mum’s not feeling well and you are arguing! Always the same!” Robert yelled.

Without an expression on her face, Vilma hid a piece of pie under the table.

“And what are you doing, feeding that mutt under the table? What are you doing feeding it when there are hungry people in this world?!” Lobel enjoyed provoking his sister.

“She’s no mutt, don’t insult her”, Vilma replied.

“You are fattening her up, and millions of people will stay on Earth who won’t be privileged as you are to move to the New World! Because your dog is too fat!” Lobel screamed.

“I hate you!!” Vilma jumped from the table and ran out of the room, followed by a confused Žuži.

Lobel grinned mischievously and bit into a piece of fatty meat, pushing in into his already full mouth with his fingers.

“Son, the situation is excruciating enough as it is! We don’t need you to make it worse!” the father said angrily.

Vilma took advantage of their argument and slipped away with her dog to the living room on the ground floor. A pile of papers and drafts lay before her. She quietly closed the door and started to rummage through every piece of paper. She did not understand much, but she decided to look for something about weight. Very soon she came across a Certificate in her mother’s name. It was new, from yesterday, shorter and clearer than the previous one, and said the following: Loading of cargo up to 250 kilograms is permitted.

“They lowered...!” Vilma muffled her scream and then started to add the numbers furiously.

“At Christmas, dad said that he weighed around eighty and that he should go on a diet. Mum has a flying license and must not weigh more than seventy kilograms, and she said while she was devouring the cakes that she had five kilograms to spare. So sixty... and five kilograms! Lobel... How much fat did he say he needs to turn into muscles? Yes, he said seventy. I lost weight in the last three months and now I weigh... forty kilograms!” she looked at Žuži and then rolled her eyes.

“OK, come on, I weigh thirty-five kilograms... Why are you so strict with me?” she smiled and hugged her dog.

“Two hundred and fifty”, she concluded and the expression on her face froze with the realisation.

Vilma burst into her parents’ bedroom yelling hysterically: “You have to ask for a higher weight limit! You have to ask for an additional fifteen kilograms!! I can’t lose any more weight!” Vilma stood there paralysed, red-faced, and her parents were looking at her in horror.

“What for God’s sake are you talking about?! Lobel was joking about the weight”, Flora uttered in a distraught manner.

“Not true! Not true!! I found SpaceX’s new certificate and it was written there, black on white, two hundred and fifty kilograms!! I’m not going without Žuži!! And I can’t lose any more weight“, Vilma screamed as her vision turned dark.

Flora got up in bed with great effort. “My daughter, settling the New World is a carefully planned process. Nothing happens topsy-turvy. That’s why there are limitations. The listed weight is not something to bargain with.”

“So Žuži is not going to be included in the weight limit?” she asked as a feeling of nausea filled her throat.

The mother looked aside.

“Animals are not included in the weight limit” Robert said.

Vilma's face lit up.

"So this means..." she began to understand.

Robert interrupted her: "No, it doesn't. Vilma, honey, pets are not going to the New World."

Vilma listened, completely stiff, unable to utter even a single word.

"Just for grub!" Lobel was making faces.

"Vilma, what are you saying about losing weight? You are not eating on purpose?!" mother asked in shock.

"You heard me! But I can't lose any more weight", Vilma slumped down until she was left lying on the floor unconscious.

The smell of disinfectant woke Vilma up in the hospital bed. Tubes were sticking out of her arm, and her throat was completely dry. The room was lit too brightly, and then again, the little window in the wall seemed too small. Suddenly, a doctor appeared at the door.

"Good morning, young lady!" the man in white said cheerfully.

"God morning... Where are mum and dad? Where is Žuži?" Vilma asked immediately.

"Žuži?" the doctor asked.

"My dog. Why aren't mum and dad here?" Vilma was worried.

"The two of us are going to have a little chat first, OK? Vilma, mum and dad tell me you are starving yourself", the doctor said as he sat down next to hear.

Vilma wasn't paying attention to him. She knew mum and dad would come in to see how she was doing. Something is going on, she thought.

“I want to see my parents, not talk about kilograms”, she brushed him off.

At that moment Vilma noticed her parents walking hastily towards her room.

“Vilma, my love!” mum put her heavy arms around her.

“I’m sorry, mum!” Vilma cried out.

“No, no, we’re sorry... You know... Vilma... Something happened...”, Robert could barely utter it.

“I think we shouldn’t burden her with that yet”, the doctor cut in.

“We have to tell her”, Flora looked at the doctor with blazing eyes.

“Vilma...”, dad took her hand.

Vilma could feel her heart beating in her throat.

“You are a big girl and mature enough so we can tell you. Lobel is hurt, honey. He was a part of the Righteous Fraction and they tried to sabotage the Falcon... He didn’t want the last ship to take off“, Robert fell apart and started to cry loudly.

“Well, will he recover until the flight?” Vilma asked fearfully.

“Lobel decided to stay”, Robert said through tears.

“He did it for me! For Žuži!” the little girl said in delirium.

“Darling, Lobel will come on a different flight... If he gets a permit after this thing he pulled, but mum will use all the connections she has. It could be as soon as next year”, Robert stammered.

“I don’t understand anything. This is the last flight. There’s no new one after the last one”, Vilma said, confused.

“He wanted to stay anyway. Because of his girlfriend and everything... And we had to make a decision. For your well-being”, Flora said sadly.

“Where is Žuži?!” Vilma asked.

“Come on, honey, rest”, Robert said.

“Dad!! Where is Žuži??” the little girl yelled madly.

“You have to let her calm down and rest”, the doctor scolded them.

“I know I’m little, but you taught me to act mature. You also taught me to point out mistakes. Well, now you are making a mistake. We shouldn’t go. No one should. That world over there does not accept people. We have our own world, our one and only!” Vilma said, hiding how much her hands were shaking.

“Vilma, it’s the only chance to survive”, Flora said.

“Survive? You are my life and I am your life. Life underground and in porous Ice-homes is not life. We are not going anywhere! Where is my dog?!” Vilma screamed.

“Honey, we are already mid-air. As we speak”, Flora said and stroked the child’s messy hair with her fingers.

The doctor came closer to the bed and adjusted Vilma’s infusion. To Vilma, it looked like that single miniature window was turning into a kaleidoscope. Fatigue overcame her and she finally heard the most comforting bark in the world.

The End of Days

Tihomir Dunderović

The Scandinavians believe
that the world's final battle
will be waged over a birch tree,
and the survivors will be
those who hide
under its treetop.
Igor's grandmother,
somehow just before she died,
told us in confidence
that the end of days is near
and that those who will save themselves
will be those who find themselves under a walnut tree.

She heard,
that this walnut tree is in Ivankovo,
in that long street
leading to Vinkovci.
This is why I always keep my guard up
and I never travel far away,
because, who knows, maybe
it will be tomorrow that I will have to say:

*Please,
one-way ticket to Ivankovo!*

*

Goran Đurđević

A penguin chatters
May of tw' thousand one hundred
On Palagruža

IV



Barnabas



Igor Milković

Barnabas the bear looked around the office nervously. It was a big and nice office, quite bigger than the closet in which he usually dwelled. A kingdom of wood and faux leather as far as the eye could see. Killing animals has been classified as murder for decades under the criminal code, but old habits die hard. Barnabas, the third generation of *friends*, couldn't help but shiver quietly as his fur slid down the cold synthetic material of the couch. Strategically arranged photographs which surrounded his hunched figure only added to the impression. Tovlin&Lee were the best in the business, and you could clearly see that. The photographs of smiling, white, middle-aged men shaking hands first with Tovlin, then Lee adorned the walls. He recognized some of them: politicians, athletes, entrepreneurs. He was, however, sure that even those he couldn't recognize were important figures. Everything emanated an aura of grandness and importance. It was a foreign world, a world that could exist only within a certain framework. The irony was lost on Barnabas. At that moment Lev Tovlin finally entered the room. The bear barely had time to take the lawyer's outstretched hand.

"Greetings, *friend*."

It was a formal greeting. A "polite" greeting for sure. Racism towards animals was, in this highly advanced age, still a topical issue. The lawyer's greeting was nonetheless devoid of any noticeable attitude.

"I apologize we kept you waiting. Please get comfortable."

Barnabas had had enough of sitting down, but he complied with the request. With hastened gestures the lawyer closed the window, jumped to the desk and started going

through the drawer randomly. He finally found the remote control so the air conditioners on the ceiling came to life with blunt buzzing. The smog cleared to a safe level so both of them took off their gas masks. They spent the next couple of moments in silence. The filtered air always caused a rush of dizziness. Tovlin was the first to get on his feet and started to go through the papers.

“I’m sorry for the window. Another intern committed suicide today by jumping through the window, and changing the use of the building is out of the question due to existing cityscape regulations. It’s not like windows have had any real use for a long time.”

He continued going through the papers when, suddenly, he raised his head with a rapid twitch and looked pensively outside the window which was now closed. The polar bear had been looking in the same direction for some time now. Everything on the outside was the colour of ochre. The colour of rust.

“But I don’t want to bother you with this anymore. The case is very complicated, Mr Barnabas. Very complicated. Challenging would be a more appropriate word, Mr Barnabas...?”

“Atol.”

“... Mr Atol. You will understand if I ask you to elaborate on your motivation. I would really ask you to do this. You will make it easier on us.”

“I want justice.”

“We all want a lot of things. You understand, *friend*. (‘That word again!’) In court that will get you nowhere.”

The bear was taken aback by the change in tone. The following sentence needed to be chosen carefully. The lawyer looked at him with interest.

“I want that which rightfully belongs to my genus.”

“Genus *Ursus*?”

Barnabas took a deep breath. The intoxicating effect of the air was still strong. Everything pointed to the possibility that this was going to be a long day.

“Genus *Ursus*, species *maritimus*...”

“You are limiting yourself for no reason. You should stop at genus. It sounds better and allows for some space.”

He took another breath and looked up at the ceiling for salvation.

Legally speaking, the minority question has always been a hot issue. Even today, in the age of melanoma, when a black child is the greatest blessing a parent can get, people are getting sicker. *In both meanings of the word*. You don't have to look further than the daily press for an article about an African-American sperm bank being burned to the ground to pop up. Luther King certainly did not envision such a bleak version of everyday life, if anyone ever has. Now only a few dare to dream. All because they are too focused on readying themselves for the next idiot that might come by. And there are idiots. At every step. What about animals?! The animals are a different story.

“What is it that you actually want? And for what reason, if you don't mind me asking? Your and your peers' status is much better now than it ever was.”

He was speaking the truth. Besides, animals had not been used for food for a long time. Since the great perishing. Those which remained were completely inedible or dirty. The shyster lit the cigarette with his bionic hand. The plastic of various implants cracked throughout his body. Science still had a long way to go, but luckily for humans, Coca Cola contained a sufficient amount of all necessary vitamins; the primary drink of the nutritional manifesto.

The lawyer's question echoed in his head. Really, what does he want? Barnabas pictured Alaska. The whiteness



bathed in sunshine which continues to exist only in archival photographs. He pictured himself running. Just running. Without a goal. In the monochrome distance you could barely make out the silhouette of a female looking after her cubs, white and furry, just like him. Everything seemed so simple. Unfortunately, the ice kept melting, so it wasn't simple at all. The third generation of *friends*. The third generation of the lucky ones who were, after the exodus, sentenced to an existence within the damp and decrepit walls of the remote city neighbourhoods. He had had enough. They had all had enough. The companies didn't ask them anything. They just loaded them up on the trucks and drove them into the unknown. Ordinary, dirty marketing trick; a textbook example. The victims of global warming saved; the corporations humane. The bear saw enough of this *humanity* not to have a high opinion of people.

He finally knew what he wanted. Revenge. And if revenge wasn't possible, he wanted loads of money. So much money that he could spend the rest of his short life bathing in the icy waters of a private Olympic pool, a cocktail with a small umbrella in his hand. He deserved it. They owed him and they will pay. He took a deep breath for the third time and spoke.

The bear was already sailing on his gondola towards the suburbs of New San Francisco when Lev Tovlin stepped away from the glass of the office window. He was visibly excited. Outside, everything was still the colour of ochre. However, maybe there was a hint of something gold in this colour of ochre.

...

The seventh day of the tour was underway and Barnabas was lying below the deck, hammered from a combination of gin and Prozac. The lawyer was already waiting for him at his destination in the port of Boston. The sunglasses dimmed the artificial light, but he was having difficulty dealing with the swaying and the sounds the ship made during the journey. He was sorry that he had to leave Maša and Olga on the bed of

the hotel room, but they wouldn't understand the seriousness of the situation. They were ordinary Russian circus bears; the nimble benefits that came with fame. And the assembly was extremely important. The ship's swaying suddenly stopped. He was lying like that in silence until the shyster's long and ugly head finally peeked through and interrupted the party.

...

Darkness.

...

Light

...

Darkness.

...

The oxygen mask was scratching his snout. Tovlin was yelling at the paramedics. This was his golden hen; they can't do this to him. Not now; not like this. Barnabas was thinking as hard as he could. It required genuine effort and it hurt. A lot.

He could remember the podium. The endless wave of *friends* before him. A little man next to the podium was wiping his sweaty nape with a handkerchief. He gave a good introduction. Praises and tangible enthusiasm. It was a big moment. He moved toward the microphone and the words started pouring out.

"I have a dream..."

Thunderous applause.

"A dream of green fields and transparent water. A dream of a blue horizon; vast and proud. A dream of a world where our young ones will be safe. They took away our Earth, but mother, don't despair!"

They were standing at the tips of their toes. The strong pathos worked.

“Your sons are coming back to you.”

Deafening noise.

He had them right where he wanted. At that moment Barnabas Atol was at the top of the world. Such a pity that at that moment the bullet came.

The emergency ambulance ship was rushing through the city canals. They still haven't caught the sniper shooter. A madman, an interest group hit man? Who cares? The press conferences were called, the bigwigs photographed. The paramedics were still resuscitating him. Lev Tovlin's bionic hand was shaking a pack of cigarettes. The sanitary android did his best to ban smoking. To no avail. Anyway, the smoke couldn't worsen the bear's condition. Barnabas succumbed. To the deafening whiteness, to the female and the cubs as white and furry as he was.

He smiled. It wasn't as bad as he expected.

The machines stopped clunking and the bear drew his last breath.

Zagreb, 2067.

Dorotea Đurić

Do not get addicted to water. It will take hold of you, and you will resent its absence.

The last couple of years that line from an old *Max Max* movie would often cross my mind, so the same happened on the day when war was declared over the radio.

No one was particularly surprised. On the contrary, Croats have been preparing for such a turn of events for a long time. When it turned out that Croatia was one of the few countries in the world still in possession of vast quantities of drinking water, our situation became very favourable. All of a sudden we could say who to, at what price, and how much water to sell.

The Western-European Bloc worked on perfecting the method of desalination of ocean water so its taste could resemble spring water as much as possible. The process was slow, but they could afford the water at our unreasonably high prices anyway. At last, *at last* life in Croatia was normal. And that came with a cost for us.

Not everybody could meet our demands, and we were cheap in comparison to Norway, for example. The Chinese Bloc first offered its companies in exchange for water, and when they didn't even have that anymore, they started to offer their national assets. We were at the top of the world. The biggest economic giant on its knees before little, pathetic, weak Croatia!

And then they got sick of it.

"We ask all citizens to respect the evacuation sequence", the radio host was saying during breaking news.

It was known that, if it came to war with the Chinese Bloc, anarchist and terrorist groups which attacked our water reservoirs and hydroelectric power plants several times a year, would take advantage of the situation. Sometimes they demanded certain amounts of water, and if these demands would fall on deaf ears, they would attack our cities. Every year, more people die in their attacks than from natural causes.

“Please take only the necessities and head towards the nearest underground shelter”, the radio host said.

The shelters were first filled by those belonging to the higher class who had at least one designer child. The rich without children were called in on the same day.

The following day I was woken up by an explosion followed by screaming. We went out, dressed only in underwear and nightgowns, or in robes and jackets, depending on what people managed to grab. It was drizzling, as always, and it was hot and moist as usual. I immediately regretted stepping foot outside, and the feeling of regret intensified when I saw what had happened. A couple of houses were blown up, and there were dead bodies lying in the street. Two houses were engulfed in flames, one person was screaming and running among the dead bodies. They were in flames. A man quickly pulled himself together and ran into the house to get the fire extinguisher, but by the time he got back, the person had already died. I don't know who it was. I rarely go outside. It's simply too hot.

“It's your fault”, somebody told me. I snapped out of my state and looked at the girl standing next to me. She was probably my neighbour. She was looking at me with so much contempt that I started to feel uncomfortable.

“Gran, let's go inside”, Mihael, my grandson, said and hugged me. “And you *chillax*, OK?” he told the girl.

“Listen you”, she got angry. “Why are you defending her? You should be on my side. Her generation is to blame for all of this! People are dying, Mihael! Dying because they

didn't care, and you..."

She screamed out the rest of the sentence at our closed door. Maybe I wasn't completely honest when I said I don't go out because it's too hot. It's true I'm used to cooler days and that I can barely breathe because of the humidity. I am actually shocked that I survived all these years as an asthmatic. But the thing I really can't stand when I go out is the hatred in the young people's eyes. I can't stand it because I understand them. This is not the future I imagined. I don't want this either.

"Are you OK, gran?" Mihael asked me. I smiled with gratitude. He handed me one of those projection glasses. "Now they're going to announce who's going to the shelters next. I hope they are big enough. I really hate crowds", he frowned and shook his head. "Mom, dad! Are you watching?" he yelled. They responded from upstairs with a positive answer.

We put on our glasses and an image appeared in front of our eyes. The news started. The anchor man quickly recited the places where explosions occurred and which places we need to go around on the way to the shelter. He said that families with children under the age of 16 will enter the shelters today.

Next in line were young people under the age of 35.

"See you soon", Mihael said on departure. He put his backpack on and exited the house.

I heard sirens and gunshots outside. Three hydroelectric power plants were blown up. It was still drizzling.

Then my son and his wife left.

"See you tomorrow", they told me, and I heard a child cry outside.

The news said that the Western-European, Northern-European and Russian Bloc joined the war. It was confirmed that the Middle-Eastern Bloc, where a single drop of rain hadn't fallen in years and from which the majority of the

population moved out, as well as several other Asian blocs, joined the Chinese. Those who did not have water wanted to get it at all costs, and those who had it wanted to preserve it.

I packed all of my things in a small bag and put it next to the door. They will probably announce that persons over the age of 60 were being admitted tomorrow.

But they didn't.

They didn't do it the day after, not in one week, nor later. I realized they wouldn't. There are a lot of people, and little space. There's probably no more space left. I sat on the bed. No room anywhere. At least not for old people.

The news said that the terrorist infiltrated several shelters and that a lot of people died, and that there were so many injured that the doctors didn't have enough time to treat everyone. They talked about nuclear weapons, but then I didn't want to listen anymore. I can't do anything. I'll focus on my survival and ignore the horrors around me. I was always good at that. I will eat something and hide somewhere.

I took the meat and potatoes out of the fridge. All of the food is kept in the fridge and looks wonderful, looks perfect, but for those of us who know how real food tasted, this one tastes disgusting.

I sat at the table when someone rang the doorbell. I put on my projection glasses and said:

"Camera one."

There was a little girl at the door. I took off my glasses and opened the door.

"What are you doing outside?" I asked her. "Why aren't you in the shelter?"

"Some lady killed my mom and dad", she said.

"What did you say?!"

"Some lady..."

“I heard you!”

I looked at her carefully. A designer child. She was beautiful, although dirty. Her facial features and blonde curls were perfect. She was also probably very intelligent, but she gave me the chills, all designer children did. That’s probably because they looked and acted like people, but they were totally soulless. Like robots.

“She is coming, you know”, she said.

I raised my head and saw a woman running.

“She is mine!” she yelled. I hid the kid behind me. “I was fir... She’s...” She was old and short of breath that she could barely speak. She had a strong Dalmatian accent. She probably came to Zagreb in 2061, when the sea levels rose and some places in the South became uninhabitable.

“You killed her parents”, I said. “What do you want from her?”

She looked at me. There was a gun in her hand.

“I wanna find a shelter. I’ll die here. If I bring her to them, they will let me in. Y’all can come with me, if you want.”

“I don’t want to come with you. You killed my mom and dad”, the little girl said.

“Why, you little! Like you care about ‘em!” the woman screamed.

The little girl huddled up behind me.

“You should get out of the streets. You could get hurt”, I said.

“Well that’s why I want her, to get outta here. That’s why you should either come with me, or give me the kid, or...” She raised her gun and pointed it towards me. “You’re not gonna die for a robot, are ya?”

“No, that doesn’t make sense. After you killed me, you would take her anyway. But there is no more room in the shelter.”

“Well, they’re gonna find some extra space for me!” She wasn’t lowering her gun. “But that’s nonsense, listen to what I’m sayin’. No room! There is room, there is, but they left us here to die and free up some space! I bet that’s the reason they started this effin’ war. To make some room in the world, there, that’s it! Come on, move it!”

A plane flew above us. It dropped two bombs a short distance away from us. I heard explosions. More than half the neighbourhood was already destroyed.

“I also want to go to the shelter, but only if this lady is going”, the little girl said. She was still hiding behind me. “I’m not coming alone with you.”

“We can also take shelter here”, I said.

“No. The lady is right. We can’t survive here”, she replied.

“Why are you saying that?” I asked. “If we lay low and with a bit of luck...”

“We don’t need luck”, she said indifferently. “We need shelter. This is a nuclear war. My father said so.”

“Not *nuclear*, it’s *nuclear*. And what do ya know what does nuclear mean, eh!”

“I know you die from it.”

The woman lowered her gun and shivered.

“You’re no child. Children don’t talk like that. I offed ya mom and dad, d’you understand? Why are you so calm?!”

The little girl shrugged her shoulders.

“Then? Are we going, lady?” she asked me.

I took my bag and raincoat, and told the woman to

leave the gun. I wasn't comfortable in the company of a murderer. She threw it into the sewer. On the way we stole a couple of bottles of water from an empty local store. The price of one bottle was one hundred and fifty kuna. Before, I would have fainted on the sight of the price, but that was normal now.

I held the little girl's hand. We tried to take the alleyways as often as possible. The woman talked incessantly. I didn't listen too much. She was either talking to the girl or to herself anyway. A couple of times I thought she must have escaped from a hospital, if not an asylum, after they became deserted.

"Lady, what do you think the odds are for surviving this war?" the little girl interrupted her at some point.

"Listen kid, don't ya start here... A'right? If I kick the bucket, so will you."

The little girl shrugged her shoulders.

Planes flew over our heads frequently. I could hear explosions. I was thinking whether there was any point in our going to the shelter. I knew they wouldn't let us in. My legs hurt. The rain was falling on my raincoat and its drops were creating weak, blunt sounds. I tried not to think about how hot I felt.

We reached the shelter after a 45-minute walk. It wasn't difficult to conclude that we were at the right place because there was a huge crowd in front of it, mainly old people, who demanded to be let in.

"Make room, make room!" the Dalmatian woman, whose name I hadn't even bothered to learn by then, yelled. She was pushing her way through the crowds, and the little girl and I were following her. She was banging on the heavy, metal door. "Listen here! I have a child made according to your design here! I know she was expensive, so if ya want her, y'all will let me and another woman in!"

The crowd began to murmur with disapproval.

“Me, too! Me, too!” you could hear from all sides.

After a couple of minutes, the speaker above the door sounded with a high-pitched tone and we could hear a man’s voice:

“We’re sorry, there is really no more room left. Please, let the girl come inside.”

“Ha?! There’s room for her, and not for me?” the woman yelled. The crowd was protesting alongside her.

“There must be enough room for everyone”, they were saying. “Why aren’t you letting us in?”

“Please, we really can’t accommodate everyone. Maybe you could try the shelter in East Zagreb...”

“They told us there to come here!”

“What are you up to?”

“The kid is going in with me or isn’t going in at all!”

The people around me were yelling, throwing things at the door, crying in frustration and anger. I felt helpless.

Then the loudest, deepest explosion up to that moment was heard and the ground shook. We were blinded by light. From the other end of the crowd a different kind of murmur spread. One by one, all of the people turned around and fell silent. We saw a cloud of smoke and fire making its way towards the place where we were standing.

“That’s nuclear”, the little girl said quietly.

I couldn’t look away from that sight. I took two bottles of water from the bag. I handed one to the little girl. I opened mine and took a sip.

My head filled with complete silence.

Samples and Causes

Tamara Lövey

University of Zagreb, spring of 2017

The name of the professor of anthropology was written on the little plastic name tag – one side of the tag was fixed to the door with a screw and the other glued relentlessly onto it with pieces of tape of various lengths and widths, with each piece leaving numerous sticky traces across the surface of the door. The faded typewritten letters on the tag read “prof. Basta, PhD”.

There was no reaction from inside the room to the first couple of knocks on the door. He mustered the courage and knocked with more force this time. Just as he was about to grab the handle, the door suddenly opened. The professor, dressed in a plaid jacket and wool vest, sporting a bow tie, looked at him with bloodshot eyes, as if he had just woken up.

– Well, young man, where have you been? I don’t have my whole life in front of me as you do.

– I’m sorry, but I came as we agreed – the young man looked at his watch fearfully. The watch showed the exact agreed-upon time, without calculating in the academic quarter.

Frightened by the professor’s attitude, he entered behind him and stopped right in the middle of the office, surrounded with numerous piles of chaotically stacked books, illuminated by the few rays of sun that managed to pierce through the dust-covered curtains.

– Come on, sit down, what are you waiting for, an invitation? – the professor snapped at him.

The young man obediently sat down, feeling each and every growth ring of the wooden cover of the chair as if he were sitting on a bed of nails. He expected the professor to sit opposite him, but the old man was busy going through the pile of papers behind the young man's back.

The silence brought additional pressure to the already tense situation and the young man almost jumped out of his chair when he caught sight of the professor with the corner of his eye and when the old man's breath, laced with a subtle scent of mothballs and heavy liquor, burned his nostrils.

– And where are these gills of yours? – the professor asked with contempt.

– I beg your pardon?

– As long as you are writing this nonsense, I expect that you will at least be able to back it up with some evidence.

– Well, that is the theory I tried to develop – the young man replied carefully.

– What you are writing about is pure fiction. You can take these theories of yours to my colleagues at the department of literature – the professor finally gave up on examining the young man's ear and sat down at his desk.

– That's not fiction. A lot of scientists believe that before the last period of big climate change, the Earth's atmosphere was saturated with water mist and people needed to have gills in order to survive.

– And you truly believe that? According to you, these little holes in the ear are a proof of that? Well, today, people pierce holes in all kinds of places on their bodies, not just the upper part of the earlap.

– Preauricular sinuses are not regular piercing holes. It was scientifically proven that they are a congenital abnormality, and not the result of subsequent piercing. Some believe they are the evolutionary remnants of gills.

– People are born with both male and female genitalia, two hearts. They extracted a tooth from my mouth that was supposed to have two roots, and it had three. As you said yourself, these are congenital abnormalities, deformities, not scientific proof at the expense of evolution. The next thing you will say is that Klingons are real.

– Klingons? – the young man asked, confused.

– Oh! – the professor sneered at him and shrugged him off, staring angrily at the working draft of the diploma thesis. He then started to leaf through it nervously.

– Scientists believe that the hiccups some people experience are also a consequence of the connection between the nervous system of the digestive tract and the respiratory system which can be traced back to amphibians.

– Oh, yes, I noticed that you referred to some scientific papers, I could even use that to accuse you of plagiarism.

– They are listed in the works cited. And I did not use more than five percent of other scientists' research.

– Okay, but where did you get the idea that the atmosphere was saturated with water mist?

– That's not my idea. That story can be found in many myths and legends. Specifically, the Nibelungs can be directly translated as the people of the mist. Nibel – nebel – mist.

– So, you still claim that people used to have gills?

– Due to everything that was listed, I believe I can support that theory. Besides, I thought that was clear from the conclusion.

– Are you questioning my competence?!

– No, on the contrary. I consider you one of the biggest experts in the field of anthropology.

Despite a seemingly satisfied look on his face, the professor scanned the young man suspiciously. Suddenly, his

face went grim.

– You won't get far by trying to butter me up. The fact remains that your diploma thesis doesn't carry any weight, especially from the point of view of anthropology. I suggest you consider a different mentor, and a different topic for your diploma thesis.

– But that way I won't be able to graduate in the summer – the young man cried out in shock.

– Why limit yourself. You can graduate in the autumn, winter ... Why you are in such a rush?

– But...

– Thank you, that would be all. You are free to go – the professor motioned him out of the room. – Come on, come on. After all of these fairy-tales of yours, I have to deal with serious questions.

While he was leaving the professor's office in silence and disappointment, a dark stormy cloud formed above the young man's head. Just one of the many climate changes that were yet to follow.

Third sphere, Follicle 5, 2nd quarter of the 4th global

Solo didn't like it when they would put up the main energy shield to protect from the sun storms. The energy level would shrink significantly. Although familiar with all the risks of sun exposure, he considered himself a being of the sun. The sun was still the main source of energy, but they couldn't directly use its concentrated energy.

Their cell was equipped with various sources of energy fields. You could say he had a refined taste. He didn't settle for fields of the same type. Although a regular field could also satisfy his basic needs, he was a gourmet of sorts.

After waking up, he preferred to consume sound energy. Unlike his colleagues, he enjoyed the lower frequencies without the interference of sound waves, perhaps with just a small dosage of light. During the work period, he would take a portion of vibrations to get himself started when the supervisor would warn him that his radiation level had decreased. Before he would settle into his phase, he would particularly enjoy a dosage of warmth.

But above all he liked to secretly take in the energy of the sun. He thought that was the biggest treat. He knew such things were forbidden. He used to hear about it only when they would point out the bad examples. Persons caught in the act were considered outcasts, they would be held in violation, and in the worst case scenario their fields would be shut down.

When he activated in that period, he couldn't imagine in which direction his life would go. Although unplanned, returning to his cell, he overheard a piece of information shared by a careless youth with persons close to him. Then he also found out that the traditional personal shield can be altered so mysterious thoughts cannot reach the supervisors by accident.

His first thought was to notify the first controller he came upon, but the idea he overheard appealed to him to the extent that he decided to try it out himself.

He found a spare shield in his work unit and adjusted it according to the instructions. He decided to try it out the first time a supervisor reprimanded him. He put the shield on and thought about the worst things. If it weren't for the shield, he would have been reprimanded by now. But on the contrary, the supervisor mistook his silence for careful attention and even commended him.

A couple of more periods went by before he decided to try out the sunlight. That morning he took only a small dosage of sound energy, and he completely skipped the air energy. He wanted to be almost completely empty in order to fully experience the energy of the sun.

Then he put on his shield and went to the most secluded

ed part of the follicle. He was blinded by strong light and the warmth instantly washed over his whole being. The colours intensified, especially the purples and reds. He experienced a vibrant, beautiful feeling. Such joy came over him that he pushed himself from the lower surface and almost glued himself to the upper membrane of the follicle.

Disillusionment and fear that someone might find out what he did followed the initial enthusiasm. He carefully returned to his cell. That was the first time he couldn't enter the phase. When the activation time ensued, he felt as invigorated and eager as if he had slept through half the period.

After that first time, he was too afraid to repeat the process. After the second time, he became addicted to sunlight. It soon became more and more difficult to hide the glimmer.

During one of the periods his supervisor's question surprised him.

– Solo, you're particularly lively today?

– Thank you for your question, the phase has been exceptionally revitalizing, and I also took a big portion of sound.

– I'm glad you're in good shape because you have been assigned to the exploration tour. And charging on the road is difficult, as you know yourself.

– What happened?

– We were informed there was some anomalous activity on the surface.

When he was little, he would listen to horror stories about the beings which, a long time ago, two globals ago, inhabited the surface. The point of the story was to warn the little ones how not to behave – not to be selfish and irresponsible.

They never explained where these beings came from. The only thing mentioned was their disappearance, which they caused themselves. They would supposedly produce en-

ergy by decomposing the layers beneath the surface, destroying the layers on which they lived little by little in the process. The energy was useful, but various compounds formed during its use and gradually destroyed the layer which protected them from cosmic radiation. Probably similar to the sphere and shield Solo's community had to turn on sometimes. Solo couldn't understand why these creatures hadn't done something when they realized they were facing extinction. If they had technology that could use the sun's energy, why didn't they build a sphere just like theirs?

This was Solo's first official exploration of the surface.

During the training period, the surface was shown to the group. During history lessons, they learned about the things which happened many global periods ago, but these were merely lifeless facts. No one bothered to connect the facts and explain the cause or the reason something happened. Solo was always interested in how or why something came to be. But that kind of thinking was met with disapproval and he quickly gained the reputation of a rebel.

The activity on the surface had to be investigated so the pollution wouldn't intensify, or rather, so the level of CO₂, nitrogen and argon would be reduced. Or to prevent too many of the sulphur particles that were damaging the atmosphere from rising to the surface.

The aircraft finally penetrated the heavy grey cloud and a series of grey-brown wrinkled ridges appeared before them. Yellow-green clouds occasionally formed in the cracks.

He checked the settings on the protective force field and, together with his team, began collecting samples which could help explain the reasons behind the activities.

The ground shook occasionally and the team leader warned them that they were flying just above the ground. They should anchor to the surface for just a short time in order to collect the samples.

In the distance, Solo spotted a patchwork of colour in

the nondescript mass of greys and browns. Drawn by the colours so different from their surroundings, Solo wandered in that direction without telling anyone. As he was approaching the colourful mass, his shield started pulsating and the beeping signalling the pollution level became louder.

When he reached the colourful hill, the alarm was beeping so intensively that it was draining the last atoms of energy Solo had left, cancelling out everything he amassed during the last exposure to the sun.

He opened his tank and took a piece from the top of the colourful pile.

Then he heard – alongside the deafening noise of the alarm – the team leader’s warning. The shaking intensified, and a sudden heat wave threw him back. All of a sudden, from all sides, he could hear his team’s panic-stricken thoughts.

A huge pillar of fire erupted from the crack in the surface and covered the colourful pile, pushing it back into the depth. The surface, glimmering-orange in colour, darkened very fast, turning again into an amorphous mass.

Due to the sudden loss of energy, he went into shock and couldn’t recall the team dragging him into the aircraft.

He woke up in his cell a couple of periods later; all the energy fields were set to intensive care. When he felt ready, he reported to his team leader.

– The tank is waiting for you, unopened – the team leader explained – Since you had already been contaminated, we came to the conclusion it was best if you analysed it.

– I appreciate the trust bestowed upon me. I will get back to you with the first results.

In the first period, he analysed the artefacts collected on the surface. In the majority of objects he found matter which had been banned for a global period: polystyrene, polyamide, polyvinyl chloride and antimony.

But what confused him the most were the hieroglyphs he found on some of them. The conclusion completely confounded him and he decided to share his discovery with his team leader.

The team leader listened carefully and then burst out laughing.

– So, you think that the beings on the surface used to take in energy in solid and liquid states? And that they had special organs to process that? And that they needed oxygen to survive? I always knew you had a wild imagination, but this is pure nonsense, not scientific facts.

Solo left the team leader disappointed. He used the first chance to get his forbidden dose of sunlight, wondering if the surface beings used to enjoy the sun like he was at that moment.

Salty Plains

Goran Paladin

We all know who the Pannonian sailor⁹ is.

We all know what the Pannonian Sea is.

Nagykanizsa and global warming,

Yesterday a shopping arena, and today a marina.

⁹ *The Serbian singer-songwriter Đorđe Balašević is known as the “Pannonian sailor”, after his song “Panonski mornar”.*

V

Means of Production

Goran Čolakhodžić

She was climbing up the slope from the coast to the apartment. She had to stop occasionally to rest in the shadows of enormous false indigo-bushes blooming by the side of the road. As usual, the sun was shining like crazy. Looking from here, the water looked much more beautiful than from that place they called the beach. The glare from the sun on the surface of the water turned it into a silver stain, erasing its real, green colour.

In her hand she was carrying a worn-out mesh potato bag, the faded colour of orange, and inside it freshwater snails so boring that even Marjan's laughably expensive broccoli seemed like a better lunch option.

There's Marjan, in the garden again: she didn't know whether to say hi or not. The indigo-bushes are thick enough for him not to see her, but then again, she should play it wisely. It would be better if he saw her, if she said hi. After all, he is *Growing*.

- Ciao, Marjan!

He probably couldn't hear her.

- Hey, Marjan!

He was now getting up from crouching beside the little bush; she couldn't quite figure out what it was, but guessed they were eggplants. She couldn't remember if she ever had them, however. Sometimes, when it comes to Marjan's merchandise, it's better to stick to snails - Oh, Lovorka!

Just that, not even a "good afternoon". He wiped his forehead with his muddy hand, and put the other one on his hip. He was wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt with "EST.

2017” written on it. No one knew where he got it or how he managed to hold on to that old rag all this time.

- What are you doing, Marjan?

- Look here, the same thing as every day. Thinking about what to do next.

- Do next?

- Well, yeah. Doesn't last longer than a few years, whatever I get my hands on. The whole story changes, it either rains too much, or there's not enough rain, then it freezes in June, then it blooms before Christmas, fuck it. Sometimes I would like to grow a bit of bananas, a bit of cabbage, and sometimes it would be best if I bred mosquitos.

Lovorka listened, but did not share his opinion or enjoy the lame attempt at humour at the end. She looked at Marjan's garden. Her eyes widened and she began to think about what and how much she could afford.

- Yeah, yeah, I know.

Marjan looked at her and read her mind. That was not difficult: every day someone would come over with the same expression on their face.

- What are you going to have today?

Lovorka looked up and smiled.

- Nothing, Marjan. I have some left at home.

All lies.

He bent down, took two eggplants and brought them to the fence. The fence was at least six meters high and was assembled from pieces of mesh used for reinforced concrete. Loads of it could be found all over the city, first after the war, and then after the earthquake. Barbed wire extended across the square openings in the fence, lined up in endless amounts around his huge parcel so they looked like boring technical

circuit grids.

Marjan found a place known only to him where the wire was less tight, and the opening wider, he lifted it up carefully with his hand and pushed the eggplants to Lovorka through the opening.

- How much are you asking for it?

- Nothing, Lovorka. That's a gift from me.

Lovorka came closer with suspicion and, as Marjan handed them to her, took one, then the other eggplant out of his dry hands. She put them in her mesh bag, on top of the snails, and reminded herself to shake the bag regularly on her way home so the snails wouldn't devour the produce as soon as they smelled it.

- How come?

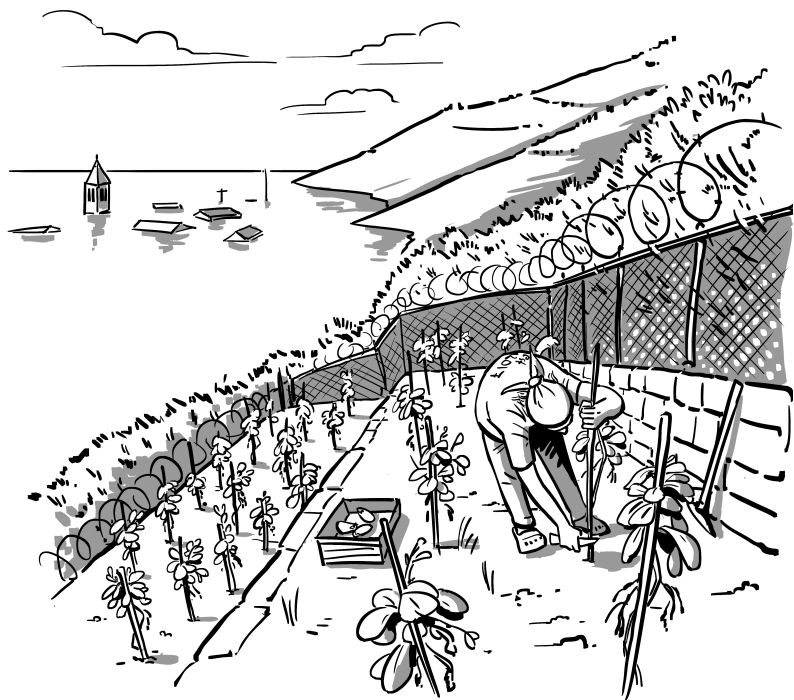
Marjan shrugged his shoulders and gave his usual restrained smile. He looked as if he would gladly say his good-byes now and withdraw from the conversation. And it seemed he went a bit overboard. It wasn't smart to give the products of his garden to just about anyone he might be at least somewhat acquainted with. Okay, Lovorka was his cousin. But then again, in this small village separated by the hill from the rest of the world, he couldn't tell anymore who *wasn't* his cousin.

- OK, Lovorka, see you.

- Thank you, Marjan. Thank you.

Biting her lower lip, she turned around and left. Marjan did the same, content because he had done a good deed, and at the same time ashamed just for having the opportunity to do so, to be the hand giving the eggplants through the steel and thorns, for which he did not know whether they were bitter to the point of being inedible.

He then went to the end of the garden, up the slope, onto the plateau with the big rock from which he usually



looked down at the great, muddy green waters. It's been down there as long as he can remember. False indigo-bush seeds floating on the water, reflecting the thick monoculture patch of the plant, generation to generation, on the coasts of the lake. The water is strange, neither fresh nor salty. The sea is nearby. It is known that it arrived gradually, from the sea onwards, that the sea pushed the river back and then mixed with it, that in the process it destroyed the harbour and everything around it. It was gradual, so the people left little by little, and on time, but the houses and cranes were still down there. When he would squint – because the lake was in the South, and the sun blinded the view – he could see weird, rectangular islands in the distance, thick lines just above the water level, low and flat. The roofs of submerged buildings. The birds nested there and whoever had a boat (and had enough for a boat) went there to look for eggs and hatchlings. The eggs were more nourishing than anything else Marjan grew for himself. And he was *Growing*, no one else was. That had its advantages, he was protected from the infections and parasites in those damned eggs. Some of the birdmen knew about this, but they didn't care, hunger presented a much bigger problem.

That night, lying in bed in a sheet-metal shack he assembled himself, he was tossing and turning for a long time. He had actually decided to think in bed, not sleep. It was getting more and more difficult to bear the status he enjoyed. The whole relationship, the tension, the feeling that he was like a squire in a castle, handing out gold coins every now and then, like in ancient times, while the commoners sat waiting outside the bulwarks and moats, hoping that something would, on purpose or by accident, fly over that firm border. Which they could break, if they wanted.

He got out of bed, took the big wire cutters from the pile next to the door and went outside half-naked. The nights were unbearably hot.

He was going to cut through the fence and try to invite others into the garden, teach them everything he himself knew. How to tell the salad and spinach apart, sowing from

plating. The basics. He's no longer young. He can't do it alone anymore, he doesn't want to be the only keeper of knowledge so important that it is absurd and wrong that everyone does not own it. Even if they don't want to learn. He will make them understand that they have to.

He was walking along the hawthorn hedge, his mind somewhere else, swinging the cutters, so he didn't hear the silent voices or see the pale lights of a hand-held LED lamp someone used to light the same weak spot in the fence through which Marjan handed over his present to Lovorka this morning.

All he heard was a bang, something flashed before his eyes first, and then under his ribs. He fell on his back and thought what a load of bullshit it was to kick the bucket at night in the open, without as much as a clear sky to make the evening more beautiful.

- Lovorka! Lovorka!

He hissed, calling out to her, trying to get her out of her shelter made of thick false indigo-bushes down the path. His hands were shaking, his hands and his thighs, he had already dropped the gun on the ground.

- Lovorka, he's dead! I ... him...

Lovorka ran to her husband, but she didn't look at him, she got closer to the steel fence and looked inside to see.

Marjan was lying on his back, cutters under his ass and blood pouring down his dark body onto the thin grass.

- Fuck you, Josip. Fuck. You're insane. Goddammit.

She grabbed her head and turned towards the path.

Josip was looking at the ground, rubbing his pants with his hands, as if he wanted to get rid of the gunpowder smoke on his hands, and as if at the same time he was trying to find the words to say next.

- Lovorka...

- What?

She looked towards the darkness in which the dead body lay and then at her husband, although, she thought, there was not much difference between the two.

- Why did he come, he startled me with that crap in his hands, and we could have done it normally, like normal human beings...

- Be quiet now. I know where the eggplants are, I know where everything is.

She raised their blunt cutters from the ground and got working on cutting the fence. Josip was groaning and sighing somewhere behind her, in the dark. She was also groaning while cutting the thicker pieces, sweating and biting her tongue. Her fists ached terribly, but she didn't spare herself.

They put Marjan under the compost, and before dawn they patched up the spot in the fence where they entered.

- Lovorka, now what? People know he was here, everybody knows him. Why are we here now, who will buy into this being normal?

Lovorka was looking somewhere behind him. It was beginning to dawn, the heat became heavy, and bugs, remembered by the hill no more than the lake buried beneath it, were buzzing and singing on the false indigo-bushes, on the ambrosia and on the goldenrod stems, grey from the powdery mildew.

- Be quiet now. I'm his cousin. He asked us to come over because he wasn't feeling well, he died tonight, and we took over so everything wouldn't go to waste. So it wouldn't disappear.

- Well do you know how to plant or anything?

She didn't know what to say. She was thinking.

- I don't fucking care, we have enough until autumn. That's enough. I don't want snails every night. Do you?

He didn't reply. She thought again.

- We'll make enough money for the boat.

- And then what?

- Then the eggs and birds, on the islands.

Josip's face lit up.

Even before noon struck regular customers started coming.

Notes from the Waters

Monika Herceg

the territory of old Mexico, year 3125

by the fences in the shadows of the algae-covered houses
fish bodies shiver differently
and the sea currents are not the reason that planktons fearfully
disperse near open windows
with gills we sense the primeval presence
of the ancestor fisherman that hasn't yet been washed away
they say we used to be down there
but who would believe
monstrous buildings hum under the surface
moving our eyes into little rooms
filled with crabs and unknown objects
and jaws tear apart every attempt at understanding
the creation of the world

the domes have risen, and with them life in boats
that cannot be laid bare or rendered still
cities on water float to the places
where the windy blade turns numb
no one can remember
a taste other than salt
and the sun is a fiery circle known only
to disappear from the sky
every few years
we hunt each other
we hunt big, strange fish
we hate the people with scaly feet

we, whose arms are covered in scales
the night is spread between tiny spots
and with the nightfall they
descend in swarms
into my mouth
and when I dream, my gills fill with darkness
my home is an endless aquarium
full of salty skeletons and salty beds
but I am not a fish
a tsunami gushes out from below my navel
taking us to places where feet firmly touch the ground
the wise woman of the prayer boat
relates to me the ancestral warning from the deep
who tell me to be careful as I dive in
because the ones with scales on their feet are coming
with their harpoons
but who would know

Holidays

Tisa Vizek Borovina

She was sitting in a small cafe in Delnice, not caring enough to remember its name. The soundscape of the room resembled a big swarm of bees thanks to the air conditioning in the corner of the room. A foreign singer's old ballad of broken hearts and unrequited love was playing on the radio.

Sanja was drinking mint tea and thinking about love in a Proust-esque way.

"I wish there was coffee. I miss coffee", she was day-dreaming. She pictured this black, hot, bitterly stimulating liquid in front of her. Closing her eyes, she could almost smell that wonderful, comforting aroma. But coffee has, for a couple of years now, almost a decade, been beyond her means. Since most of the plantations disappeared, coffee became more expensive than diamonds. Actually, most of the food got expensive, and she could only dream of the exotic foods she ate as a kid. Bananas, for example. They used to be a staple of her diet. She remembered how once, when she was five or six years old, for three days she refused to eat anything but bananas and rusk. And today it would be easier to buy a kilo of gold than a banana.

Today food is generally the main currency. What is all the gold, and all the diamonds, and all the platinum worth if you don't have anything to eat? Everybody used to think farmers were poor, uneducated, illiterate and unskilled workers, and today... Let's just say the wheels of fortune have turned. OK, it is true that computer scientists are still rated highly. As well as engineers and doctors. Especially dermatologists.

The door of the cafe closed with a loud thud, rousing her attention. She looked over the edge of her glasses to the entrance.

“Hey, girl, have you been waiting for long?”, a good-looking brunette yelled from the door. She was dressed in a white, wide-sleeved caftan trimmed with orange thread and a wide-brimmed hat styled like glamorous actors from the 1970s. A huge striped beach bag was resting on her shoulder.

Sanja though how weirdly circular fashion is.

“If I’m not mistaken, Frida’s clothes could be dated to a period around the end of the 20th century. It’s really interesting how even now, almost a decade later, fashion designers are drawing inspiration from the 1940s to 1990s”, her mind was wandering while something completely different was coming out of her mouth. She was always able to think one thing, and speak about something completely different. Multitasking all the way.

“No, Frida, I’ve just ordered tea. I didn’t know what to order for you so I waited for you to arrive.”

“Oh, you could have ordered the same thing for me, too. You know it’s all water to me compared to coffee... Ah-hhh, how I miss coffee... Damn that global warming! I will never get over coffee. Or chocolate”, she took off her hat dramatically and sat on the chair on the opposite side of the table with a movement worthy of any soap opera diva.

“Mmm, yes. Coffee. I also really miss coffee. I was never much of a chocolate fan, however. I miss bananas more.”

“Well, what would you know about it anyway? Chocolate was the best. Really, that those geneticists can’t think of a way to make coffee available again for us little people”, Frida hissed.

“I really don’t know what those people are doing. I’ve had enough of mint tea, nettle tea and teas from other herbs you can find by the side of the road. They only focus on wheat and corn. Like a man can enjoy polenta prepared in 1,001 different ways that much. Okay, okay, they adjusted potato and

cabbages a bit, but they could really work a bit on coffee. And cocoa beans... Chocolate, oh, dear chocolate ...”, sighed Frida shrugging her shoulders dramatically.

“She was always theatrical”, Sanja thought with a smile. “She should have been an actor, not an engineer. Although, you had to hand it to her, she was pretty good at fixing ventilation systems.”

The waitress, a frowning, older woman carrying a few extra pounds and sporting a loud red lipstick, put another mint tea on the table. She looked down at Frida, turned on her heel and left, mumbling to herself. The mint was obviously picked in their garden and placed in a little, brass cylinder with holes. A bitter smell was emanating from the cup.

“I’m no geneticist, but despite the general public’s opinion, I wouldn’t say it’s that simple. The climate changed greatly. The plants went extinct. Thousands of species. Puff. Gone. If we had listened to the warnings more, maybe the catastrophe wouldn’t have been so grand in scale... I remember when as a child, we went to the sea in Rovinj. In the year 2020.”

All of a sudden, Sanja’s eyes sparkled. Frida rolled her eyes, she knew that meant her friend came up with another one of her crazy ideas.

“What do you think about us going to Rovinj for a bit?”, said Sanja with undisguised enthusiasm.

“Oh, come on, I’m really not in the mood...” Frida sighed.

“Come on... I could show you where the house I used to spend my summers was. We could also go visit the church...” Sanja was persuading her.

“Oh, yes, that beautiful church. It was at the top of the hill, right? I remember I always cursed that hill while I was climbing it”, Frida laughed.

“What was it called... Saint Barbara, Saint Teresa?”, she tried to remember.

“Saint Euphemia”, Sanja replied enthusiastically. “You know, people believe that Saint Euphemia sailed to the old coasts of Rovinj in a stone sarcophagus.”

“These ‘ancient people’ really believed anything”, Frida smiled sarcastically.

“Come on, the story is in some ways romantically-traumatic. They supposedly threw the woman to the lions. And do you remember Grisia?”, Sanja asked mysteriously. “The more memories I evoke, it will be easier to win her over”, she thought.

“Sounds familiar”, Frida thought. Her face lit up in a second. “Grisia was that open-air exhibition, right? On the other side of the promenade... You had to walk on those stairs, right? Oh, that painting I have in my bedroom, with that ship in the harbour – I think my folks said that painting was bought at Grisia”, Frida remembered.

“There you have it. Come on, let’s go to Rovinj, when we are here already”, Sanja was persistent.

“Oh, but then we have to rent a boat, the diving equipment... I almost drowned the last time you had a similar idea. Remember when we went to Opatija? And this is even further away...”, Frida half-heartedly resisted the idea.

“Come oooooon... We don’t have to go today, today would be too late anyway. We can rent a boat for tomorrow. From that cute guy. The dark one. He was flirting with you yesterday, don’t think I didn’t notice. We’ll take some wine, a little bread, we’ll catch a couple of fish and then put them on the grill... Come ooooooon.. Pleeceaaaaaseeee.” Sanja was now begging. Mentioning the cute captain was the last trick up her sleeve, but she could see Frida was crumbling. She needed to push her a little bit more...

“Well, yes, you see, we could do that. That one was

really good looking. That might not be such a bad idea”, she started to give in under the pressure of Sanja’s begging.

“Well just picture it – bikinis, swimming, a bit of underwater exploration, you get really tired (you know, very ladylike of you), I discreetly retreat to my cabin to read... Or the other way round. You know how it goes. Well, we’ll think of something on the spot. Come, I’m actually doing you a favour with this”, Sanja winked, nudging her shoulder. The cracking of Frida’s defence was as visible as the cracking of the rocks during last year’s earthquake.

“Well, OK. Come on. But I’ll ask him. You only live once. We’re not going to see sun until November anyhow. We have to take advantage of it now. OK, but this round is on you. And you owe me”, Frida decided and winked naughtily. She then drank down the remains of the cold tea in a dramatic manner, frowning as if she were drinking fish oil. She grabbed her hat and bag, and stood up from her chair.

“Let’s go, Sanja, to new adventures.” She lowered the huge sunglasses which had been resting on her head to her nose in a very ladylike manner and, swinging her hips, exited through the door.

Sanja began to get up, turning around herself and trying to get all her things as soon as possible – beach bag, sunglasses case which currently held her sunglasses, hat. She was satisfied she managed to persuade Frida to go on this trip. Who knows when they’ll have a change again for such a trip down memory lane.

“It will be nice to go back to my childhood again”, she thought and went to the counter to pay the bill.

Strangely, Delnice were still pretty cheap, although they were experiencing a real tourist boom, considering the circumstances.

Turning on her heel, she replaced her eyeglasses with large black sunglasses which protected her eyes from

the slightest ray of sunshine, put the hat on her head, opened the door and went outside. A warm, moist wind immediately swept across her skin. She could smell the sea. She stopped for a moment, deeply breathing in the heavy sea air.

“Thank God I managed to get holidays in March. Already in April the temperatures and insolation become unbearable. And then back in the tunnels by November... Well, what can you do... That’s life”, she shrugged her shoulders and went after her friend towards the nearby marina.

The ships in the distance were swaying in the breeze.

Az'ani **- or, Memories of Waking -**

Matija Panić

White light and silence. First moments filled with fear and instinctive movement. There is more of us, we have the same lost eyes. The sense of history is stable, but changed, interrupted. Putting fear aside, we came closer to each other and extended our arms. The words coming out of our mouths lacked meaning, but served to remind us that this was reality and not a dream. Our mutual efforts lead us to the conclusion that we were on a moving transport vessel somewhere in space. Not much for those of us who were afraid, but a lot for those who had just woken up. I remember us feeling so alive. Every bit of that ship's interior attracted our attention. Lost in the images, we suddenly felt fear again when we heard a sound, indistinct at first, but then morphing into familiar words. Scared as we were, we barely heard or understood parts of what it was saying. We listened to the recording many times since then. It seems to be gaining somewhat of a holy status, the totem of our essence. This is the full recording:

“We are the A'tenulu, Those Who Are.

Why, we do not know. What we do know is that we serve the Order. It has given us responsibility over your Andes, your cosmoses, so that we may maintain their equilibrium. Further than that we cannot see. Yes, there is more than one cosmos – multiverses or parallel universes, you say? We congratulate you on that discovery. Some would say: *They needed it*. We do not. We look at you as part of the Order. Those who are, where they are – Az'ani.

If this sounds vague, we are sorry. It is what it is. The four-way linguistic-phonetic-physiological-transitory communication we use, the dimensions in which we exist,

are more complex than yours. Therefore, the experience of a smooth exchange of opinions, we would call it oōnga – the dance of the waves, is not possible. This is the best we can offer. Please understand.

You declined fast. Soon after the first intervention, a second one was required. It finally seemed as if everything was following its course again. Sadly, nothing was. Destroying yourselves and all around you all over again. Poison instead of a home, bitterness instead of peace. Lost unity. Wandering. The Suffocated, Hokt – your new name, your epitaph. Suffocated in the excrement of your own alienation.

What happened to everything we achieved, you might ask. Everything is recorded. The completed archives are ours, the archives of all those we once called Az’ani. Your species is but one of them. All the molecules of your Gee would not be enough to convey to you the multitude of lost Hokts. The thirteen of you are on a long journey to sector Pi-6a and are now listening to a message prepared for you a long time ago, which means that you are approaching the end of your journey. Your new home awaits you there. Do not repeat your mistakes. You have been chosen according to a specific prediction pattern in order to ensure the necessary cohesion for you to take your first steps successfully. The rest is up to you. The last of your species. The first of your species.

Loneliness, sadness, lack of understanding. We understand, but there are limits to our understanding. We do our part, play our role. We are all part of the Order. Az’ani often create chaos, but Az’ani often create great things as well. The Order requires us to oversee you, two chances for each species. The third brings the Harvest of Energies and the sparing of the thirteen. This is you, the new chance, the new Seeding. The energies of those who came before you now feed our Order. Do not judge us, we are merely doing what we have been doing for aeons. The Order needs energy, you gambled away your chances for being spared, got carried away, overestimated yourselves, disappointed and forgot.

All of this is a lot to take in at once. We understand.

Do not ask what all of this is. You cannot understand. However, ask whatever you would like to know about your species. The answers are in the archives of transporter. Access code: A1121210Z. Learn from stored knowledge so that you do not succeed at learning from your mistakes. That is why you are here. Learn. Live now. Not shutting away inside. Being open to all that is. The new cosmos and your New Gea are awaiting, listen to her as well. Observe, observe, listen, listen. Not closing your eyes, you are short-lived as is. You came from the Order and to the Order you shall return. Live in unity and you will live fulfilled lives. Beware of what you find value in. You can always hear the rhythm of the Order if you listen. You are it and it is you.

Farewell, you will say to us. Goodbye, we will say to you. We wish you wisdom, Az'ani."

Farewell, indeed.

I can feel fear and hope every time I listen to it.

Two years have passed since then. New Gea is healthy and fertile. We keep it close to our hearts – this is a saying we found in the archives of Old Gea. Our numbers have grown. I consider myself the thirteenth one – the One Who Observes. When I read about the Old Gea, I feel great sadness; then I hide from the gazes of others and cry. When the sadness subsides, I sit, observe and listen. Sometimes I record my thoughts. It keeps me grounded. Perhaps someone might find my thoughts useful one day. Perhaps.

The outcome is uncertain. Love and the unity of all things – this is what we teach our children. This is what we teach ourselves.

We are the Az'ani, Those Who Are.

We are the Az'ani, Those In Love With All.

