

Centre  
for Information  
on Literature  
Bratislava



# Books from Slova- kia 2013



# Balla

## *In the Name of the Father*

*A cheating husband, bad father, and a small-towner is the hopelessly biased narrator of this bizarre philosophically-absurd story about how, together with his wife and two sons, he gradually falls victim to a mysterious house which affects the lives of its tenants. An ironical and controversial view on modern family.*

In this book, the narrator, a middle-aged former hardware store worker, muses over his life looking for someone else to blame for his failed relationship with his two sons and parents, his serial adultery and the breakup of his marriage and his wife's descent into madness; all against the backdrop of the stiflingly grey provincial lives the narrator and his neighbours live and the mysterious forces emanating from the cellar of the house he and his brother had built.

In the basement, there grows the mythological tree Yggdrasill, toxic fumes rise from the bottomless well, half-naked female neighbours peek into the kitchen, and the relationship between the father, his sons and their increasingly mentally unstable mother rapidly worsens, all the while this concisely and briskly written novella filled with sarcasm and absurd humor, where also the totalitarian era plays a considerable role, irreversibly heads towards its shocking antiending.

*“From the very beginning, I have only written about what I would like to read myself, as a reader, and I write how I myself would like to see it written, as a reader.”*

### **Balla (1967)**

A highly original voice on Slovakia's literary scene, the author of absurdist short stories populated by a gallery of lonely, alienated and weird individuals unable to relate to other human beings and undergoing bizarre, often creepy experiences. A recipient of several literary awards, Balla shuns the spotlight and continues to live in the provincial town of Nové Zámky. He has published eight short story collections. In 1996 he received the Ivan Krasko Prize for his debut *Leptokaria*. In 2011 Balla has published a short prose work with autobiographic features *V mene otca* (In the Name of the Father). He won the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize for this book in 2012. Balla's latest book is a collection of three short stories under the title of *Oko* (Eye, 2012).

### **Translated titles:**

POLISH:

#### ***Podszepty* (Prompting)**

A collection of short stories.  
Biuro literackie, Wroclaw, 2012

#### ***Swiadek* (The Witness)**

A collection of short stories.  
Biuro literackie, Wroclaw, 2011

#### ***Nepokój* (Anxiety)**

A collection of short stories.  
Pogranicze, Sejny, 2008

CZECH:

#### ***Naživu* (Alive)**

A collection of short stories.  
Kniha Zlín, Ing. Marek Turňa, 2008

SLOVENIAN:

#### ***Dvosamljenost* (Double-loneliness)**

A collection of short stories.  
Apokalipsa, Ljubljana, 2005



PHOTO (C) ELIŠKA BALÁŽOVÁ

### **Balla**

#### ***V mene otca***

Published by:  
Koloman Kertész Bagala  
a literarnyklub s.r.o.,  
Levice, 2011, 109 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8108-027-2



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# Jana Beňová

## *Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)*

*A book about the importance of cherishing the loved ones and seeing them off. Especially along the ways of the Petržalka labyrinth. Especially after the Minotauros has discretely vanished from there.*

*Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)* is a novel, an unusual mosaic of observations, perceptions, self-reflections and memories. It portrays two couples living on a peculiar stipend which allows them to live however they want. With some exceptions. Its heroine Elza lives in a huge apartment building in the borough of Petržalka where all the walls play music and talk. And where time plays no role. Here you can find creatures the rest of the world believes no longer exist, the moribund species that flourished during the communist period when Petržalka was erected in the middle of the fields across the Danube as a satellite of the city of Bratislava. The main thematic strand of the novel is a love story of Elza and Ian, local desperados who instead of seeking jobs at advertising agencies, join the class of carefree people who buy only what can be “peed or pooped or exhaled” – recycled within twenty-four hours. And philosophize. Having met at Café Hyena, they would see each other off; “seeing people off” is the means to protect them, to share the journey even when it leads to madness or death.

*“Beňová’s (fictional) vision of Petržalka is probably for that very reason the first prose treatment of that ‘concrete continent’ beyond the Danube and beyond the city, which has colour, atmosphere and subjectivity, even if those qualities are actually missing over there.”*

ALEXANDER HALVONÍK

#### **Jana Beňová (1974)**

Poet and prose writer, graduated from the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Bratislava.

Her debut, a collection of poems, *Svetloplachý* (Lucifugous), appeared in 1993. Next came out two collections of poems, both in 1997: *Lonochod* (Wombokhod) and *Nehota* (Loveful Naked). Just as her debut, these, too, are a “travelogue” of interpersonal relationships, loves, details and life observations. Prose work, *Parker* (A Love Story, 2001), and a collection of short stories, *Dvanásť poviedok a Ján Med* (Twelve Stories and Ján Med, 2003), followed.

The book of short stories is marked by sensibility bound with a poignant, peculiar insight into the human mind and behavior. Her next prose work, *Plán odprevádzania* (Seeing People Off, 2008), subtitled *Café Hyena*, is a peculiar mosaic made of mini-stories, observations, perceptions, self-reflections and memories amidst of which emerges a relationship of a young woman and an ageing man. The second edition of this novel with reversed title: *Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)*, published in 2012, received the EU Prize for Literature. The same year Beňová’s latest prose work, *Preč! Preč!* (Away! Away!), appeared.

#### **Translated titles:**

CZECH:

***Café Hyena (Plán vyprovázení)***

***Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)***

Nakladatelství Paseka, Prague, 2010

GERMAN:

***Parker***

***Parker (A Novel)***

ERATA Literaturverlag, Leipzig, 2008



PHOTO (C) VLADIMÍR ŠÍMÍČEK

**Jana Beňová**

***Café Hyena (Plán odprevádzania)***

Published by:

Marenčin PT,

Bratislava, 2012, 147 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8114-128-7



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# Ondrej Štefánik

## *Fingerless City*

*Step 1: Negation of everything and everyone.*

*Step 2: Contempt for everything and everyone.*

*Step 3: Action against everything and everyone.*

*I do not offer an idea for a new model of society.*

*I offer a revolution without a concept.*

*Fingerless City* is a contemporary urban novel with a detective-story plot. Edo, the main character, jealously guards his personal freedom and so-called wellbeing, ignoring the claims of the wider world. His relationships founder on his immaturity and inability to fulfil any kind of obligation. He spends hours philosophising in his beloved armchair, or alternatively conversing with the mafioso Pauli as an habitué of a certain Bratislava pub. Following a series of senseless murders, he becomes one of the chief suspects and starts his own investigation. Depression, confusion and stress begin to steal into his outwardly carefree life, until eventually he is caught up in the toils of conspiracies and his own paranoia.

The book is full of tension, humour and insights, reflecting the hopes but also the failures and frustrations of thirty-year-olds today. The novel creates a panopticon of interesting characters, crazy minor figures, and above all, people who are losing orientation in the world.

*“Such is the time – confused, scarcely legible, lost, surfeited with information, conspiracies, unsolved cases, and the disintegration of semantics, and at the same time desperately crying out for a concept and a rediscovery of free will. Which is not to say that the book must be like that too...”*

**Ondrej Štefánik (1978)**

A graduate of the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava made his debut with a book of short stories, *Pštrosí muž* (Ostrich Man) in 2011. Novel *Bezprsté mesto* (Fingerless City) followed in 2012 and has been shortlisted for the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize 2013. For some years Štefánik has been professionally involved in advertising and holds many awards for creativity.



**Ondrej Štefánik**  
***Bezprsté mesto***

Published by:  
Tatran,  
Bratislava, 2012, 344 p.

ISBN: 978-80-2220-620-4



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# Monika Kompaníková

## *The Fifth Boat*

*Story about fear and loneliness in a family. About a young girl creating a strange kind of family, because she never had one.*

The novel, *The Fifth Boat*, tells a story of a twelve year old girl Jarka who lives with her very young mother in a suburb. Jarka feels the lack of love and attention of her mother whom she cannot call mother, she has to take care of herself, to be alone in the apartment very often, wandering around commuterville. One day she steals six months old twins and takes them in a carriage to garden house, dedicated to take care of them. To this house she brings eight year old boy Kristian, good boy on the run and they make a "family".

Monika Kompaníková documented her extraordinary storytelling talent and ability to induce authentic atmosphere. Because of these characteristics and the story itself this book could aspire for "break-through Slovak novel". Some critics also note that *The Fifth Boat* is a modern socio-critical novel which is rare in Slovak literature.



*“The Fifth Boat tells the story of small kids, but targets also their parents, the adults. It speaks about the childhood, and how it effects us all forever. It tells how important and natural love is.”*

**Monika Kompaníková (1979)**

She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava. She was twice a finalist and a jury member of a “Short Story” contest. Her first published work was a collection of short stories, *A Place for Loneliness*, which won Ivan Krasko Prize as the best debut of the year. In 2006 her novel *Biele miesta* (White Places) was published and nominated to prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize. In 2008 she received Tatra banka Foundation award for young artists.

In 2010 her novel *The Fifth Boat* was published and in 2011 it was awarded the Anasoft Litera Prize as a best book of the year.

**Translated titles:**

SERBIAN:

***Bela mesta***  
**(The White Places)**

Agora Publishing, Zrenjanin, 2010

CZECH:

***Pátá loď***  
**(The Fifth Boat)**

Větrné mlýny, Brno, 2012

GERMAN:

***Das fünfte Schiff***  
**(The Fifth Boat)**

Verlag Karl Stutz, Passau,  
to be published in 2013



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN

**Monika Kompaníková**  
***Piata loď***

Published by:  
Koloman Kertész Bagala,  
Levice, 2010, 288 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8108-018-0



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# Peter Krišťufek

## *House of the Deaf Man*

*An ironical historical novel about a house, about fathers and sons and friendship in the turbulent times of 20th century Slovakia.*

The novel *House of the Deaf Man* is set in Slovakia in the period between 1930s and 1990s. Most of the story takes place in a small Slovak town, Brežany, and in the second half of the book it partly shifts to the capital, Bratislava.

The main character, Alfonz Trnovský, is a general practitioner in Brežany and thanks to his profession he is a greatly respected and trusted person. Throughout his life he has tried to maintain the impression of being a happy and contented man, unburdened by history and all its abysses, twists and turns, while the reality is quite different. Pursuing his own egoistic interests, Doctor Trnovský oversteps the moral boundaries – beginning with getting rid of a burdensome Jewish relative of his wife during the fascist Slovak state, as a consequence of which he is later blackmailed and exploited by the communist secret police, and ending with a complicated love affair, which results in loneliness towards the end of his life.

Another important character is his brother, Peter Trnovský, an active member of the communist party holding a key position in society and acting as a “king-maker”. After the fall of the communist regime in 1989 he turns his coat and becomes a successful entrepreneur with right-wing views.

The narrator of the story is Dr. Trnovský’s son, Adam, who views his father very critically and ironically, and finds it difficult to come to terms with the various revelations concerning his father, the person he has idealised for most of his life.

The narrator’s son, Bony, appears in the second half of the novel. His modern outlook on the world prevents him from seeing the past as it really was – he does not want to understand it or even believe it.

The title of the novel – *House of the Deaf Man* – is taken from Goya’s series of paintings from *La Qunita del Sordo* (the “House of the Deaf Man”).

Symbolically, Alfonz Trnovský gradually loses his hearing, because he does not want to listen to any reproaches. Not even from his own conscience.

*“The main character, Alfonz Trnovský, a general practitioner in Brežany, is a greatly respected and trusted person. Throughout his life he has tried to maintain the impression of being a happy and contented man, unburdened by history, while the reality is quite different.”*

**Peter Krišťúfek (1973)**

Prose writer, poet, scriptwriter and filmmaker. He is an author of three collections of short stories and three novels. His novel *Šepkár* (The Prompter, 2008), an absurdist parody of social mores, was nominated for the EU Prize for Literature and for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2008, the most prestigious literary prize in Slovakia. His second novel, *Blíženci a protinožci* (Gemini and Antipodeans, 2010) displays an original poetic vision, combined with elements of mystery and collage, and it was short-listed for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2010. His latest novel, *Dom hluchého* (House of the Deaf Man, 2012), brings the turbulent history of 20th century Slovakia through the narration of a father and son. The title has been short-listed for Anasoft Litera Prize 2012. What makes Krišťúfek's fiction particularly attractive is his cinematographic approach and a strong ethical underpinning of his stories.

**Translated titles:**

BULGARIAN:

***Blizki i protivopoložni***  
**(The Gemini and Antipodeans)**

Faber, Veliko Tarnovo,  
to be published in 2013

ENGLISH:

***The House of the Deaf Man***

Parthian, Cardigan,  
to be published in 2014

RUSSIAN:

***Sufler***  
**(The Prompter)**

MIC, Moscow,  
to be published in 2013



PHOTO (C) KATARINA HLINČIKOVÁ

**Peter Krišťúfek**  
***Dom hluchého***

Published by:  
Marenčin PT,  
Bratislava, 2012, 548 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8114-132-4



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# Pavol Rankov

## *It Happened on September 1 (or Another Time)*

*A historical novel from the period 1938 to 1968, and at the same time a story of the friendship of three men who are fighting for the love of one woman.*

The novel, set in Slovakia, is not a historical fresco but rather the intimate tale of three friends – Peter, Ján and Gabriel – who come from the small town of Levice in the south Slovakian region, where the local people, even if they never change their location, are affected by every historical upheaval. Peter thinks of himself as a Hungarian, Ján regards himself as Czech, and Gabriel does not deny his Jewish origin. Their individual fates become fragile links in the wild storm of historical events: the Munich Treaty, the Vienna Arbitration, World War II, the anti-Jewish laws, the German occupation and arrival of the Soviet armies at the war's end, the post-war evacuation of population, the communist takeover in February 1948, the political trials of the 1950s, the attempt at reforms and the subsequent Soviet invasion in August 1968.

But no historical catastrophe or difference of nationality or creed can succeed in destroying their friendship, even when they face one another in the most intense masculine rivalry. All three of them meet, at the very beginning of the story, on September 1, 1938, at the swimming-pool in Levice, to contend for the love of the beautiful Mária. Their “struggle” afterwards continues for a further thirty years, alongside Slovakia's struggle to find its place in the history of Europe.

In the author's own words, *It Happened on September 1 (or Another Time)* is a novel about love, insofar as the higher powers permit that.

*“Everything is invented. Nothing ever was, no one ever lived. There wasn’t even a September the First.”*

### **Pavol Rankov (1964)**

Prose writer, essayist, journalist. Author of three collections of short stories. His debut, *S odstupom času* (At a Distance in Time, 1995), follows up the tradition of fantastic realism. Rankov employs elements of mystery, mystification, irrationality and, typically for him, a startling punchline. This collection was awarded the Ivan Krasko Prize for the best debut and in 1997 the Jean Monnet Premio Letterario Internazionale.

In 2008 his first novel, *Stalo sa prvého septembra (alebo inokedy)* / It Happened on September 1 (or Another Time), appeared. It brings a story of three friends, a Czech, a Jew and a Hungarian, and their love for one girl. The storyline goes throughout three decades (1938–1968), highlighting some of the most important dates and ends in 1968 with the occupation of Slovakia by the allied armies of the Warsaw Pact. This novel was awarded the EU Prize for Literature 2009.

Rankov’s latest novel, *Matky* (Mothers), appeared in 2011. It examines motherhood in the extreme conditions of a Soviet Gulag after the WWII.



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN

**Pavol Rankov**  
***Stalo sa prvého septembra***  
***(alebo inokedy)***

Published by:  
Kalligram,  
Bratislava, 2008, 327 p.

ISBN: 978-80-81010-69-9



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# Silvester Lavrík

## *Zu*

*A novel on interpersonal relations, inner experiences and the hidden worlds of sexuality.*

After writing three books of fascinating stories, as well as dozens of plays and theatre pieces, many of which gained him awards both at home and abroad, Silvester Lavrík is now embarking upon his first novel. Here he also bets on his abilities to tell an interesting story, which like a mosaic of hidden connections, leads to a surprising denouement. His language is alive, modern and rich, his sense of montage humorous and his narration tempo fast. All this creates a real launching point for an enjoyable, full-blooded experience for the reader. Sexuality features as an important theme within the book. It has not faded out of the novel itself, but has only moved where it belongs: in the hidden layers of our lives. And yet it is this unrealized sexuality that becomes all determining. Like the English say, 'Sex is fine, even if it's bad. It's worse when there is none at all.'

*“I began writing with gusto and indeed invented the two-some (Zu and Pejo), but when they behaved so irresistibly unreasonably, there was nothing left for me to do, but save them, systematically.”*

**Silvester Lavrík (1964)**

Well-known as prose writer, poet, playwright, script writer, text writer and director, Lavrík has worked in various environments. Currently, he serves as the director for theatres in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. He also works as a project manager for Radio Litera and Radio Klasika in Bratislava. Lavrík has written nine dramatic pieces. His first novel, *Zu* (2011), was nominated for the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize, among ten other finalists in 2012. Lavrík has also received numerous awards for his dramatic works.

**Translated titles:**

HUNGARIAN:  
***Irina és az ordog***  
**(Irina and the Devil)**  
 Kalligram, Bratislava, 2010



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN

**Silvester Lavrík**

***Zu***

Published by:  
 Kalligram,  
 Bratislava, 2011, 280 p.

ISBN 978-80-8101-561-8



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# Jaroslav Ruml

## *Crop Circles*

### *(A Short History of Death Metal)*

*An untypical book about searching for truth, which no longer actually interests anybody, about books which no one reads anymore and about the freedom to invent a story that probably could never take place.*

This book is not about what it seems to be. It is not about crop circles and not about death metal either. You can learn more about juggling, chronic failures of kidneys or transplants. But it is not about that either. In fact, it is about truth and when truth exists like that, it does not even have much in common with truth itself anymore. So you will not discover any definitive truth in this book. Maybe you will even get the impression that nothing like this actually even exists. Because truth is like crop circles. We cannot see them from Earth, yet from above we do not understand them either. No one really understands what they are. And no one is even interested in them anymore.

The same goes with books. They have their fifteen minutes of glory behind them already. There is no reason to assume that someone would be interested particularly in this book. In essence, it is really only about one, single sentence, everything else is just threshed straw... It is only then that you realize that books are not about truth, but fantasy. About the freedom to represent things as they could only happen when you screw up both of your eyes. But primarily, it must be about writing itself.



*“To be a writer in Slovakia means a lot less than not being one at all. I consider my official name, as connected to my own work, like a pseudonym. I consider my own work, in terms of my official name, as a threat to the good reputation of my family.”*

**Jaroslav Rumpli (1971)**

Writer of the younger middle generation. Given his first two books, many people consider him an author of disillusionment, nihilism and postmodern decadence. His literary debut was *Svet je trest* (The World is Punishment, 1999). Ten years later, his second novel, *V znamení Hovna* (Sign of Shit, 2008) won him a nomination for the final round of the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize. *Kruhy v obilí* (*Krátke dejiny death metalu*) / *Crop Circles (A Short History of Death Metal, 2010)* is his third book, which was also nominated for the Anasoft Litera Prize in 2011.



**Jaroslav Rumpli**  
***Kruhy v obilí***  
**(*Krátke dejiny death metalu*)**

Published by:  
 Slovart,  
 Bratislava, 2010, 446 p.

ISBN 978-80-8085-838-4



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# Pavel Taussig

## *Hana*

*An entertaining story about sad times around an unnamed publisher of artistic literature in Bratislava. The book is mainly about family bonds and the perfidious dodges which can even destroy these relationships for ideological reasons.*

The heroine of the book is 18 year old Hana, a postwoman, through whom the author describes the absurdities of his own youth. The story is set in the fifties, a time when you could end up in prison pretty quickly, as happened to Hana's father. The young Hana is left without her father who ended up in prison for mysterious reasons. She and her mother have not received a single note from him, they are worried, and additionally, financial problems appear – Hana has to quit secondary school immediately and start work. She decides to fight for her father and has to apply methods which she would not have considered at all under other circumstances. She plays on her attractiveness as a young woman and uses this as a weapon. Taussig describes a certain reality in a way as he would just experience it. He is not bitter although this period affected him too. That is why he developed his excellent humoristic prose. The novel is written in simple language and many stereotypes are used; this allows easy and clear communication. The girl's point of view, the process of her mental growth, at the end the long awaited reunion with her father, by then a broken man – that all, masterfully pictured, adds up to the quality of this text. Collages and photographs by Jakub Dvořák complement the text in a coherent way. For witnesses of this time period this book is a welcome document but sad reading at the same time.

„I wanted to write about serious matters in a humorous way. To mock those absurd times.”

### Pavel Taussig (1933)

Writer, publicist, and artist. In the sixties he worked as an editor for the humourist magazine *Roháč*; after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 he emigrated to Frankfurt am Main where he still lives. There he cooperated with the satirical magazines *Pardon* and *Titanic* and later with the medical magazine *Ärzte Zeitung*. His main artistic field is collages which he first published in the Czechoslovakian emigrant press and after the fall of communism in Slovak and Czech magazines, too. Collections of his collages have been published in Germany and Canada. His works have been shown at several individual and collective exhibitions in Europe and Canada. His collection of short stories *Jedinečná svätá* (The Unique Holy) with the subtitle *Unreal Stories From the Real Socialism* was first published in 1985 by the publishing house 68 Publishers in Toronto and then in 1992 by LITA in Bratislava. The title story was adapted into a film by Slovak Television the same year. In 2012 his satiric novel *Hana* was published by the Budmerice based publisher Rak. The book has been shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera Prize 2012. At the International Festival of Humour, Kremnické gagy 2012, Taussig received a lifetime achievement award.



### Pavel Taussig

#### *Hana*

Published by:  
Vydavateľstvo Rak,  
Budmerice, 2012, 184 p.

ISBN 978-80-85501-55-1



#### Translation Rights:

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# Marek Vadas

## *Healer*

*Fascinating and magical book influenced by African folk narration as well as by dark, existential stories based on cultural tradition of modern Europe. Rituals, myths, spells and magic do not function as exotic decoration in the text, but surprisingly aptly fit into our racional context and reveal more about our past and subconsciousness.*

African spirits and voodoo doctors are brought to life. Equatorial Africa enchanted Marek Vadas so much so that after completing several stories, he put together *Folk Stories from Black Africa*. After this successful book, he came out with a collection of thirty-one stories entitled *Healer*, once again inspired by the voodoo doctors and spirits of the virgin forest. The book has come out in its fourth edition now.

Vadas links the world of fantasy and reality together in an interesting blend, the dream world and the actual, the magical and the quotidian, life and death, exotic spatial otherness and intimately universal familiarity. In Marek Vadas' version, fantasy is completely natural, it does not change the shape of reality. Quite the opposite. It uncovers its formerly invisible, hidden layers and overlooked meanings.

In this world of his, Vadas brings the reader back to the border where sacred and profane are indivisibly intersected: fantasy is completely natural, an everyday occurrence, just as it is in folk stories and myths. By doing so, Vadas-the-author aims even further: he returns the secrecy and mythical aspects to prose and moreover, does so in a linguistically and stylistically, creatively expert narrative (yet is likewise able to continue with his writing style known from his previous books). An answer to the de-semanticization of texts. An answer to the call for a return to values. An alternative world in the face of today's consumer culture where taboos no longer exist.

*“Africa is just at the backdrop scenery in my texts. It is the story that is important and this could happen in any corner of the globe.”*

### **Marek Vadas (1971)**

Born in Košice, now lives in Bratislava. He is involved in canine therapy. Over the years, he has visited Africa seven times, with long-term stays in the central and western parts of the continent (Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Nigeria). He has received numerous prestigious awards for his books, including the Literary Foundation Prize for his collection of stories entitled *A Short Novel* (1994) and the Bibiana Prize for the Best and Most Beautiful Children’s Book of the Year for his *Folk Stories from Black Africa* (2004). His book *Healer* (2006) won him the prestigious Anasoft Litera Prize in 2007. His newest collection of stories is entitled *Black on Black* (2013).

### **Translated titles:**

UKRAINIAN:

***Vidčajdušno garne žimmje***  
(**Healer and Why the Grim Reaper Laughs**)

A selection from the books.  
Timpani, Užhorod, 2011

HUNGARIAN:

***A gyógyító*** (**Healer**)  
Magyar Napló, Budapest, 2013



PHOTO (C) PETER ANDEROVSKÝ

**Marek Vadas**

***Liečiteľ***

Published by:  
Koloman Kertész Bagala,  
Levice, 2006, 163 p.

ISBN 978-80-8108-049-4



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# Pavel Vilikovský

## *First and Last Love*

*These two novellas describe two different loves, yet they are not perforce about the physical or the passionate type. The search for love, as a universal principle of humankind, links the stories of a photographer who is doubting the meaning of his own work and of a person in retirement who wants to record people's fates via an oral history project.*

There are many types of love and the kind about which Pavel Vilikovský speaks in his new novellas does not completely correspond to the image associated with that word. It may be, in fact, that no love motif is even noticed in the story of the successful photographer who doubts the meaning of his work in this quickly changing world. The same holds true for the story about the retired person who, when working on his volunteer project, has to come to terms with dramatic fates, such as those prepared for mankind by the 20th century – a time when the search for an erotic kindling would have been in vain. However, these stories main theme is in fact love, hidden love, love not confessed and often not requited, love for which the heroes of these novellas never stop fighting, despite all their failures and mistakes. This is a love for life – for their own lives and for the lives of others, without which our own life would have no meaning.

*“I am often not in agreement with my narrator.”*

**Pavel Vilikovský (1941)**

Prosaist and translator, Vilikovský is currently the Slovak writer who is translated most often. His early work depicts the feelings, desires and attitudes of the young, post-war generation, their attempts at finding a source of human happiness and understanding the meaning of human endeavor. He has worked as an editor at the Tatran Publishing House, as well as for the literary monthly *Romboid* and at the Slovak editorial branch of Reader's Digest. His work is characterized by stories which are well thought-through, by delicate parody and ironic skepticism. He was awarded the Anasoft Litera Prize 2006, and was shortlisted in 2007, 2010 and 2011. Vilikovský's books are regularly translated into all the most important world languages.

**Translated titles:**

CROATIAN, SERBIAN,  
ARABIC, MACEDONIAN:

***Krutý strojvodca***  
**(The Cruel Engine Driver)**

BULGARIAN, ITALIAN:  
***Kôň na poschodí, Slepec vo Vrábľoch***  
**(The Horse on the Steps, The Blind Man  
in Vráble)**

HUNGARIAN, SERBIAN,  
ENGLISH, MACEDONIAN:  
***Posledný kôň Pompejí***  
**(The Last Horse of Pompeii)**

ROMANIAN, POLISH, ITALIAN, FRENCH:  
***Večne je zelený***  
**(Ever Green Is...)**

ITALIAN:  
***Slovenský Casanova, Čarovný papagáj  
a iné gýče***  
**(The Slovak Casanova, The Magic Parrot  
and Other Kitsch)**

CZECH:  
***Čarovný papagáj a iné gýče***  
**(The Magic Parrot and Other Kitsch)**

HUNGARIAN:  
***Vlastný životopis zla***  
**(An Autobiography of Evil)**

CZECH:  
***Pes na ceste***  
**(Dog on the Road)**



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***Prvá a posledná láska***

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XK BAGALA






BALLA  
V MENE OTCA

JK BAGALA

I don't understand why I should give preference to a person, just because he is my son. Fine, I won't kill him. But that's it. To me he is a foreigner. I give a shit about sentiment, and I'm proud to do so. I didn't see my sons for years, we didn't talk with each other for years, all we had vanished, disappeared, evaporated, gone. Maybe they are similar to me, but is that actually a quality? I'm a mediocre man. Mediocre people are entirely mediocre. One of my friends told me that I reminded him of the Pink Floyd guitarist. What of it? When that guitarist dies, I won't shed a tear. When I die, that guitarist won't be crying over me. And he even could find out about my death since everything is on the internet these days. The internet is a pontifex, a builder of bridges, on the whole, it's like the pope. Why shouldn't I kill my sons? So that my genes can live on? What do I care about them? Not even Abraham hesitated; he raised a knife over Isaac. Good, he had an idea. He thought: God commanded me to. For many people, God is a great authority. Alternatively it may be that Abraham was losing it. No one noticed that Grandpa was fucking around with a knife? But maybe I'm being fucked with and that's why I don't communicate with God. It's enough that my wife does. In any case, I admit that resorting to Abraham is no argument at all. Still: what good are my sons to me? It's expected that the parents will automatically end their lives when their children are born. Then you have to live for them, to fashion their existence for them exclusively. Am I supposed to be ashamed of my trying to further my own, personal happiness? And joy? Yes, without even taking into account how the kids have arranged life for themselves. Am I supposed to be ashamed of how I still feel good as a man, as a partner? Am I supposed to live only for them? They live, I go on and also live. Of course it's only from my retirement money now, but I live. Throughout history, there were also times – on our own continent – when parents did not play with their children: there were so many of them that there was no reason to play with them. One got injured and died, one was handicapped from birth, they sold off the third one and they lost the fourth one somewhere. We'd have to say that those were not the best times. But the fact is that even like that, people existed. In that way, I'm probably old-fashioned, medieval, in the way I think. I know that my youngest son doesn't love me. I haven't given him any reason to love me. And if I did, then that was a very long time ago. Maybe his memory is poor. Did he forget about the kite I made for him? He broke it in the door leading to the hen-house and the garden. The kite never even got the chance to fly. Gosh, and I suffered over that junk! Fine, one kite for an entire childhood is too little. But maybe there were more of those kites. How many kites did that jerk actually break? He does not have the right to expect emotions and love from his father, as if they were some sort of matter of course.



Jana  
Beňová

cafe  
Hyena

Plán  
odprevádzania

MARENČIN PT

## Kalisto Tanzi

**Elza:** Together we ate grapes and washed them down with pink wine. The next day I discovered a damp grape stalk in my pocket. It looked like an upside-down tree.

Kalisto Tanzi disappeared from the town, which was gripped by a heat wave. The heat radiating from the houses and streets burned people's faces and the scorching town seared its mark on their foreheads.

I stopped in front of the theatre's display case so I could read Kalisto's name on the posters and reassure myself that he actually did exist. I derive pleasure from uttering the name that had tormented him throughout childhood and puberty and only really stopped annoying him after my arrival. I slowly walk to the other end of the town, the muscles in my legs tingling slightly in the hot air. It is noon. Drops of perspiration are the only thing really moving on this planet. They run down to the bridge of my nose and spurt out again from under my hair.

I'm going to buy poison.

Yesterday Ian saw a rat in the lavatory.

The rat-catcher has a wine cellar under his shop. We go underground to escape the unbearable heat and sip wine. He tells me how intelligent rats are.

"They have a taster, who is first to try the food. If he dies, the others won't even touch the bait. That's why we use second generation baits. The rat begins to die only four days after consuming the poison. It dies as a result of internal bleeding. Even Seneca claimed that such a death is painless. The rest of the rats get the impression that their comrade has died a natural death. But even so – if several of them die in a short time, they decide the locality is unfavourable on account of the high mortality rate and they move elsewhere. Some people and even whole nations completely lack this ability to assess a situation."

A perfect, repulsive world. I smile over a glass of Red Tramin. The rat-catcher speaks very fast. His face is in constant motion. As if he had too many muscles in it. As if a pack of rodents were running around under his skin. From one ear to the other. From his chin to his forehead and back. I can feel his restless legs jiggling under the table and his whole trunk sways in a dance.

The sight of this makes me feel dizzy. My head spins like when watching a film that flashes too quickly from one scene to the next. The rat-catcher bends forward and gets tangled in my hair.

"You're such a pretty little mouse," he smiles. I smile back. I sense I stink of loneliness.

He sees me out and on the way he gives me a plastic bag full of rat poison.

Ondrej Štefánik

# Bezprsté mesto

aby sa sám nestratil, musí hľadať vraha



“What in God’s name are you reading?”

“Just something for school.”

“You bring textbooks on a date? Don’t you know that the biggest textbook is standing right in front of you?”

“I didn’t know that I had a date today, and alas, it’s hard for me to learn things from you. You’re only a kind of light reading for leisure time,” the young beauty said bluntly.

“I’ve told you once already not to be smart with me. You don’t stand a chance. Your looks are the only thing that will snare me. Looks are quite enough for you. Just be passively present, please,” Edo said, and sat down at her table.

“Where were you? I couldn’t find you anywhere the past few days. Have you been studying the whole time?” he asked.

“You were looking for me?”

“Let’s say, I scanned the bar a few times. I thought you’d developed a rash or something like that and you were waiting till it went away, so that I wouldn’t see you looking so hideous.”

“I don’t develop rashes, my hormones are in order.”

“Are you sleeping with someone?”

“Why? Would you want that? Do you want me to have someone? Afterwards you can be my hollow tree. And since you’ve said you’re a textbook, maybe you could advise me about men, what to do and what not?”

“Advice is no use.”

“You were really looking for me? Weren’t you afraid that killer had got me?”

“Did he get you?”

“As you can see, no,” she said.

“Maybe he got you and afterwards released you, because you don’t match his concept.”

“What concept? Do you know what concept he has?”

“I don’t know and I’m not interested. What’s that slop you’re drinking? Doesn’t it disgust you?”

“I’m only eighteen. Quantity matters more to me than quality, or just the actual feeling that I’m drinking,” Tiny elucidated. Edo bent close to her glass and sniffed the wine.

“Eighteen isn’t as little as all that, so don’t play Lolita. And likewise I am not so ancient that you should mistake me for your old man. When I was eighteen, I’d long since been sleeping with thirty-year-olds. Can I have this bottle of red, please,” Edo said to the waiter. The waiter came over to the wine list and tried to ascertain through Edo’s finger, which was covering the object referred to, the wine required.



MONIKA KOMPANIKOVÁ  
PIATA LOŮ

JK Bagala

Lucia was sixteen when I was born. It's quite understandable that her feelings were far from that of satisfaction, happiness and fulfilment. Becoming a mother at that age could only mean one thing for her – to grow old, be stuck at home in the flat, put on weight, stop looking after herself, lose friends, lose lovers, lose her enjoyment of life, free time, sleep and freedom. So she resisted tooth and nail. When she went anywhere she dressed like the girls in my class – short skirts, pink and lilac T-shirts with latex slogans. Sometimes she squeezed into narrow jeans and large boyish trainers, pulling the hood of a sweatshirt or a peaked cap over her head. Bangles tinkled on her arms – cheap, battered bands that hung down from her wrists. She walked with her fingers stiffly stretched out like a rake for leaves, just in order to keep them on her narrow wrist. We could have worn each other's things, the same pair of shoes, go shopping together – if we had the same taste and if Lucia had cared to.

Don't call me mummy, she said again and again, it makes me feel like an old cow. Call me Lucia. And I just couldn't get it out of my mouth. It always got stuck somewhere in my throat, unable to push its way through and sound sincere and natural. But I learned that too.

But you are my mummy, I would think to myself. Or aren't you? You can always be certain about your mother. Not everyone has to know. Are you ashamed of me? Stop that nonsense! I'm tired. I'm tired. That's how every conversation ended.

However, tiredness and feeble, slow-motion movements didn't become her. She was so young, after all. I remember what she was like just after Irena died and we no longer had to move from one lodgings to the next or put up with Irena's outbursts. I was ten years old and capable of looking after myself pretty well; I spent a lot of time in hobby groups and at the after-school centre. Lucia had a relatively steady job, which meant that she'd been working about three months in one place; she also had a relatively steady relationship, which meant that the gentleman in question was already willing to mend the flush toilet and his tooth brush lay on the wash basin. I remember Lucia at that time as crazy and cheerful, dashing buoyantly around the flat; I recall that she even cooked and tidied up and did the shopping and all the usual things mums do at home. And only when she was really irritated – after a row with her boyfriend, when she didn't get her pay on time – she would stand at the window, stamp her foot and tap the long, long nail on her thumb against the even longer one on her ring finger in time to some song. We had inherited the flat; Irena was dead and for us that was a real miracle.



DŮM

HLUCHÝ

Peter

KRIŠTŮFEK

MARENČIN PT

In Brežany the war actually started a number of times.

His arms full of papers, the news vendor shouted in the square: War's broken out! That was when the Italians invaded Ethiopia in nineteen thirty-five. It's said this came as such a shock to the notary, Mr Levendovský, that his pince-nez fell into the coffee he was drinking in Puškár's pastry shop and broke. Well, yes – maybe it only slipped into a half-eaten cream and custard pastry and got a bit spattered with cream – but like that it sounds duly dramatic. That was the first time.

Ever since then and for the rest of his life my father hated the Italians – he couldn't understand why they had used planes and machine guns to attack fleeing half-naked natives armed only with arrows. Fuming with rage, he declared they were nothing but degenerate Romans, the terminal stage of a great ancient civilization that once proudly dominated Europe and nowadays could do nothing better than hang around in the street and wolf-whistle at girls. It's true that also requires a certain skill, but...

He didn't change his opinion even when the Cat Man, Fellini in Italian, appeared on the scene with his films, which everyone, myself included, immediately adored. Along with the loiterers and whistling.

The second time the war began was in the summer of 1938.

Mum used to say that warm, peaceful, serene summer was the most beautiful in many years. The very air persuaded us that the world was a safe and fragrant place. Freshly bottled plums and apricots gleamed in the cellar when we happened to steal in there and open a jar before we should, the lid under pressure making a popping sound. I remember that Vojto got a beautiful dark-brown boomerang from his father then and we spent whole days playing with it. Occasionally it flew off into the raspberry bushes at the end of the garden and we had to go and look for it, but in the end we learned to throw it so that it came back for us to catch.

Into this idyll some odd fellow (Dad said it was the Czechoslovak prime minister, Hodža) kept lamenting over the radio and when he was not lamenting they at least played sad music. Dad couldn't tear himself away from the receiver in case he should miss the latest news in these troubled times. Our Sunday lunch began to look like a wake without a deceased. Everyone looked grave and when Uncle Armin was on the point of making jokes about it (he loved jokes about funerals and the dead) they silenced him with chilling looks. The radio dominated the whole house.



PAVOL  
RANKOV

*Stalo sa  
prvého  
septembra  
(alebo inokedy)*

KALLIGRAM

“Where are you going, sir?” The Czechoslovak customs officer asked the driver.

“To Győr,” Peter replied, “to do some shopping.”

“Don’t forget to write it all down in the customs and currency declaration,” the officer reminded him.

“Of course.”

Peter put the car in gear and drove off fast. The road was empty and his new Skoda 1000 MBX kept tempting him to go faster.

Once in Győr, he parked right in front of the post office. He went inside and told the unhealthily pale woman at the counter that he wanted to make a call to the USA.

“You must pay a deposit of two hundred forints,” said the telephonist.

While Peter counted out the Hungarian banknotes, the woman increased the sum.

“Two hundred and fifty.”

“How come?” Peter objected.

“That’s how it is,” the woman raised her voice. “You’ll get back what you don’t use. So what’s the worry?”

Peter went into the little wooden booth marked number 2 that the telephonist had pointed to.

“Hello,” Ján’s indistinct voice was heard in the distance.

“Hello? Is that you, Honzík?!” Peter shouted into the receiver.

“Peter?”

“Yes. Am I disturbing you at work?”

“Now? It’s five in the morning. I’ll call you if you like, to save you money. Give me your number.”

“No need. I just wanted to tell you I’m coming to America.”

“That’s fantastic! When?”

“The second of April. For a week.”

“Which town will you be in? I’ll fly over to see you.”

“You needn’t. I shall be right in San Francisco.”

“Really? Fantastic! I’ll be waiting for you at the airport. When are you coming?”

Before Peter could answer, he was cut off. The telephonist dialled Ján’s number again, but first asked Peter for another fifty forints.

Only when he was opening the car door in the car park outside the post office did Peter realise his lack of caution. He should have parked somewhere round the corner. As it was, all the unpleasant clerk had to do was to look out of the window and she would immediately see that someone

from Czechoslovakia had made a call to America. She could write down his registration number and she had Ján's telephone number. Peter quickly got in and started the engine. As he was leaving, he glanced once more at the post office window. He didn't see anyone there.

Peter's overseas business trip to the United States of America was planned to last eight days. The accounting department gave him the dollars in cash he had a right to according to the valid tables to cover his subsistence allowance and accommodation. His colleagues immediately told him that it would only be enough for accommodation in some cheap lodgings for students. And it would be very little for food, too. He should take a Hungarian salami. That wouldn't go bad. But he was told he must hide it carefully, so the American customs officers wouldn't find it, as it was forbidden to import food into the USA.

The day before his departure, Peter was visited by two men. They rang the doorbell the moment he came home from work in the afternoon; no doubt they had followed him all the way from the office. They showed him their secret police identity cards.

It was, however, only a routine visit. They made Peter promise to bring a report of his trip in person to the building in the Street of the February Victory within three days of his return. He should describe his whole programme there, but in particular all his meetings with emigrants, as well as US political or military representatives. The secret policemen only showed a more alert interest when Peter told them he was planning to attend a performance in San Francisco by the Soviet poet Andrey Voznesenski.

"Where should I pack the salami, so the American customs officers don't find it?" asked Peter, when he thought the interview was drawing to a close. The policemen looked at him in surprise.

"You should ask the intelligence officers that," one of them stammered.

**Translated titles:**

ARABIC:

***Karib gidan***

**(In Close Vicinity)**

Dr. Mousli Ghias, Homs, 2007

**It Happened on September 1**

**(or Another Time)**

Dal Al Hiwar, Lattakia, 2011

BULGARIAN:

***Ot dalečinata na vremeto***

**(After Some Time)**

PAN-VT, Velike Tarnovo, 2003

***Sluči se na pervu septembri***

**(ili drug pt)**

**It Happened on September 1**

**(or Another Time)**

Ergo Publishing House, Sofia,  
to be published in 2013.

***Majki***

**(Mothers)**

Bezsmrtni misli, Sofia,  
to be published in 2014.

CROATIAN:

***Dogodilo se prvoga rujna***

**It Happened on September 1**

**(or Another Time)**

Disput d.o.o., Zagreb, 2011

CZECH:

***Stalo se prvního září***

**(nebo někdy jindy)**

**It Happened on September 1**

**(or Another Time)**

Host – vydavatelství, Brno, 2010

***Matky***

**(Mothers)**

Host, vydavatelství, Brno, 2013

HUNGARIAN:

***Testközelben***

**(In Close Vicinity)**

AB-ART, Balázs Francisc-Attila,  
Bratislava 2005

***Az idő távlatából***

**(After Some Time)**

Kalligram, Bratislava, 2010

***September elsején (vagy máskor)***

**It Happened on September 1**

**(or Another Time)**

Kalligram, Bratislava, 2011

MACEDONIAN:

***Se sluči na prvi septembri***

**It Happened on September 1**

**(or Another Time)**

Ars Lamina, Skopje,  
to be published in 2014

POLISH:

***Bratysława jest mala***

**(Bratislava Is Small)**

Collected short stories.

Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT-

Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo

Oswiatowe, Wrocław, 2011

***Stało sie pierwszego września***

**(albo kiedy indziej)**

**It Happened on September 1**

**(or Another Time)**

Słowackie Klimaty, Wrocław, 2013

SLOVENIAN:

***Matere***

**(Mothers)**

KUD Sodobnost International,

Ljubljana, to be published in 2014.

SILVESTER  
LAVRÍK

KALLIGRAM

ZU

How am I supposed to love you, when I don't understand you? Dad asked me.

The firemen had just left.

I'm not given anything to eat, they had learned from me.

There was a huge oak in front of our villa. It's still there. An enormous oak full of years. *Quercus robur*. I managed to climb it. I didn't manage to climb down. My shoe betrayed me. It fell. They got me down from the tree.

If something is bothering you, talk to me about it, Zu urged me that night in bed.

We were lying crossways. Then it was still possible. We'd fit in the space. We looked like two little Jesuses. In nightdresses. With splayed arms. Safely and cosily crucified.

Don't you like being with us? Dad returned to the episode with the firemen at breakfast next day.

I do.

How could you think of saying that we don't give you anything to eat?

No one would pity me for the truth.

And what's the truth?

I was interested to see if you'd look for me.

For a while nothing happened, we just ate. Then Dad spoke again.

Pejo, does Zu matter to you? Do I?

Yes.

Do you know what the question means?

Yes.

I'm asking if it interests you how we are. How we're feeling.

Yes.

Today we are sad.

Don't you like it here?

We do. We're at home here. We want it to be home for you too.

Yes.

If something matters to you, you don't want it to be troubled.

Are you troubled?

We are troubled for you.

Yes.

After breakfast Dad rose and came over to me. He caught me by the chin.

Pejo, this is important. I don't have to like the way you see the world. But I want to know what is happening in your head. In future, try asking me first.





# JAROSLAV RUMPLI

## KRUHY VOBILÍ

*Krátke dejiny death metalu*

**Chapter 177**

At the beginning of the story, which I eventually played a part in as well, Oto's death had not actually happened, but his shooting into the dark nine months ago had taken place. The words that my father uttered on the verge of this event were among the worst that I have ever heard, even though I did not hear them from his lips directly. Mama told me about them. In a moment of weakness, shortly after the funeral meal held in my father's honor, she revealed to me what he had once whispered in her ear. He would probably have been glad to know whether that parachuter experienced double the pleasure as he was doing his Siamese twins. I did not have the strength to respond and Mama never talked about it again. That moment was absolutely horrible. It did not matter whether or not it was the truth, it was more the incomprehensibility of why she even told me at all. Maybe she just did not want me to be too sad after father's death. Or maybe she was just paying him back for what he had revealed to me about her and about her relationship with the parachuter's widow before his death. She did not know if it was fact or not, but who knows what her sub-consciousness was linked to then, not to mention her un-consciousness. As if they were actually part of some kind of collective memory which psychologists the whole world over had been dreaming about for decades on end, maybe it was really all that. Including everything that was completely ruled out.

I know that you have already heard this many times. But I'll tell you again – maybe it was really all that. It would be enough if it were just a bit probable. And what is probable is not just what could happen, but also what could occur to us that might happen. Think about what you want. But careful! For some things, it's enough to be silent about them. The wise sages of all possible religious denominations could tell you about that. Each of them would interpret the situation differently, but in the end, they would all agree: Thoughts have wings. They do not need words to fly. They find their destination and get there, moving along invisible paths. They peep out at the most unexpected moment, so that everything that you have thought of can come dumping down on your head in your moment of weakness. They will shit your own truth at you in the face, full of poison and pride, they will whittle your eyes down and screw up your smile until it looks like some sort of wild animal had been gnawing away at you.

Pavel Taussig

# hana na



## A Guest in the House

One day Hana returned from work and while still in the hall her mother hugged her tightly, “Don’t be alarmed, Hana dear, we have a visitor.”

For as long as she could remember, they had drummed into her head that one should be happy to welcome guests, regardless of whether it suited one just then. Her mother’s assurance that she needn’t be afraid of this visitor only underlined the absurdity of the situation. Some guests were avoiding the remaining members of the Kováč family, and if someone did happen to stray their way, it must be for an exceptional reason.

It was not a couple of hulky men in leather coats whiling away a long wait by carrying out a house search that she found in the living room, but one elderly intellectual in the category of “uncle” or “comrade”. He politely introduced himself as Dr Huber from Legal Aid Office No. One. Clearly agitated, her mother added that the doctor was the lawyer who would be defending Daddy in court. The visitor politely corrected her that he was a comrade, but otherwise had no objections. Then he briefly repeated the facts he had already managed to tell her mother. Mr Kováč was being held on remand and was as well as could be expected under the circumstances. He, Dr Huber, had been assigned to him as his official defence lawyer and he was doing all in his power to help his client. While he was preparing the defence, the relevant authorities were being very obliging and had allowed him to see his client and he had even spoken to him briefly. On that occasion Mr Kováč had asked him to send his wife and daughter a hug and kiss (at which point both women burst into tears) and at the same time begged them to believe, as he did, that everything would turn out for the best very soon.

Hana was the first to collect herself. “And didn’t he say when he would be coming back? And why in fact is he in prison?”

At that instant the benign uncle changed into a strict headmaster who had just caught a first former smoking. He emphatically explained to the inquisitive daughter that Mr Kováč was not in prison, but he was being held on remand. Even after judgement had been passed he would not be in prison, but if the court found him guilty, he would serve his sentence in one of the corrective institutions. He urged Comrade Kováčová to watch her tongue, particularly in consideration of her father, whose fate she no doubt had at heart!

MAREK VADAS

# LIEČITEĽ



JK BAGALA

## I'm the Boy from the Book

I was not born like other children. On our street, the people say that I was born into the world from a book. Since I don't even have a mother. That explains the whole thing. Once I was sitting in the yard and watching my uncle as he smoked his pipe in the shade of the mango tree. He nodded to me, so I got up my courage and sat down near him. We got to talking and it was then that he told me everything. He told me that I did not have a mother or a father and that one time, the sea wind blew me here, together with some torn-out book pages. That was how it was.

The day that I had appeared in town, the main street had been covered with heaps of paper. Torn-out book pages were being pushed around by the air and were getting caught in the crowns of the trees and adorned them like strange-looking, headless birds. The air had been full of smoke.

No one knew me in that town and I was wandering among its narrow streets looking for a woman who would hold me in her arms. She would be running through the streets in despair until she noticed me, as I was, sitting helplessly and following the blare around me. Then she would call out my name and I would throw myself around her neck. I looked into the faces of women, looking for the one to whom I could belong. I roamed around the empty market-place and followed the burning papers flying high above my head. The wind was playing with them and was blowing on the rising flames, which in turn changed them into light, black nothingness. The burnt pieces disintegrated into miniature shrivels and burnt my eyes. In the Akwa quarter, enraged people had chased the whites out and were demolishing their library. They were throwing out the books and other documents from the files and were ripping them up one by one and burning them on top of old tires.

That evening, I found myself near the Mulet restaurant. I could not feel my legs anymore and I sat on the edge of the canal. It was then that Uncle Mongo had shouted to me. He shared his baked fish with me. At least that was how Uncle Mongo told it to me. He was the first person with whom I spoke in Doual. I told him that I knew no one in this town and that I was searching for my parents. I could not remember anything and where I had gotten here from. But he didn't know either, nor anyone in the street, not even anyone in the whole quarter. I was the boy who came into this world from one of those books that they had been flying through the wind.

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Gabriel had not met the old man at the University of Continued Education, he was a family acquaintance. That was how he knew things that never made it into oral history. For example, he knew that he came from old, probably Lithuanian lineage, which was later Russianized, and his ancestral nobility had then become poor. He also knew that he had visited the Soviet Union, many years later, taking a special train excursion to recall the Revolutionary Labor Movement. The track led through the town where the man had been born, but the train had not stopped there, and even if it had, foreigners were not allowed to get off. The old man had only been able to look through the window, but even though he still had had good vision at the time, he could not see his mother's grave. And where his father was resting – maybe, finally, in peace – he had no idea.

Whether it was thanks to his noble roots or because of the way he had been raised, the boy had maintained an unusual sense of dignity in his conduct and behavior all the way into his old age. He was always smoothly shaved and his hair carefully combed. He never spoke in a raised tone, he did not use crude words, he did not like double-faced jokes and when he sat down, he did not cross one leg over the other. His highly-polished manners were probably the only thing that he had left of his family. When he had already been in the new country a while, he was able to trace out his sister with the help of the Red Cross. She was living in Yugoslavia, where she had married and given birth to two children, but in the confusion of World War II, he lost track of her once again and it was not until the end of the 50s, when the cold war was not as frozen, that she finally contacted him one day unexpectedly from New York. Not even the Red Cross knew where fate had blown her brother. According to unconfirmed accounts, he was most likely living in South America.

“At school, we continued along at a fast pace. We could study well, as there were only three students in the class. I made it to the 6th form. A rumor started up in Istanbul that the lycée and high-school which we had there would be moved. One to Belgium and another to some place called Czechoslovakia. Our entire high-school requested a transfer somewhere, anywhere, and we waited for what would happen. One day, a man showed up who did some testing with us and then went away. Then it was quiet for a long time, until suddenly news came that we were being organized into the twenty-first group and that we were supposed to appear in Istanbul on a certain date. I sold all of the unnecessary things I had, even my blanket from home – it was an excellent one, a stitched quilt – and I set out with this money and the needed gear.