

Centre  
for Information  
on Literature  
Bratislava



# Books from Slova- kia



# Ivana Dobrakovová

## *Toxo*

*In seven powerful stories the author captures the inner world of young women and reveals in a surprising way the dark, unsuspected sides of their characters.*

*Toxo* is not just a thematising of specifically female experience; it also oversteps the borders of something like psychological horrors. It penetrates the heart of darkness of human existence and makes visible the undercurrents of consciousness that lurk somewhere deep down inside each of us. Beneath the banal situations, the everyday routine actions the author allows a kind of indefinable dread to seep through that paralyses her heroines and forces them to struggle for their place in life, their integrity, themselves. The female protagonists in the stories are young Slovak women living abroad or foreign women who are coming to terms with dysfunctional relationships and busy partners, imminent motherhood or their own or other people's children. In spite of all the difficulties, they try to fall into their new roles of companions, wives and mothers.

In some of the stories from this collection, for example *Rosa* or *Return from Turin*, the author even personalises some feelings of anxiety or genuine aversion with which women struggle. The cleaner *Rosa* is not just a simple-minded, malicious Italian, but the very embodiment of the violence the world commits. The same principle is applied to the character of *Franca*, a woman neighbour from a town suburb, who the protagonist finds madly irritating. Dobrakovová has her own particular view of the female spirit and offers the reader an exceptional experience. Her work is a psychological probe into the human soul.

*“I wanted to show women in extreme situations, for whom such happy events as pregnancy can become a struggle to keep their sanity.”*



PHOTO (C) ZUZANA VAJDOVÁ

#### **Ivana Dobráková (1982)**

Ivana Dobráková studied translating and interpreting at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. Her literary debut was a collection of short stories entitled *Prvá smrť v rodine* / First Death in the Family, which was shortlisted for the Anasoft litera prize and won a Ján Johanides Award in the category Best Fiction by a Young Writer. The second novel by this young author, *Bellevue* (2010), nominated for the Anasoft Litera Prize, describes the experiences of a young Slovak woman in France, where together with other young people from all over the world she cares for old and sick people in a centre for the physically disabled not far from Marseille. Dobráková's third book *Toxo* (2013) was shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera 2014. She translates from French and Italian and lives in Turin.

#### **Translated titles:**

POLISH:

***Bellevue***

**(Bellevue)**

Wydawnictwo Good Books,  
Wrocław, 2013

HUNGARIAN:

***Halál a családban***

**(The First Death in the Family)**

AB-ART, Okoč

To be published in 2014

**Ivana Dobráková**

***Toxo***

Published by:

Marenčin PT

Bratislava 2013, 192 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8114-189-8



**Translation Rights:**

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# Michal Hvorecký

## *The Danube in America*

*An adventurous travel tale with a shocking criminal plot-line, a parody of mass tourism and above all a love story that takes place on the water.*

A first love, the eternal river and a last voyage. The plot speeds up in a turbulent manner when Mona, the main protagonist's mysterious friend, comes aboard. Martin and Mona first met in Bratislava as children and the river brought them together. As adults they meet again on a luxury ship full of Americans that is sailing from Regensburg to the Danube delta in Romania. Twenty days and almost three thousand kilometres from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, a young man and the woman he is destined to love versus one hundred and twenty tourists. Of particular interest are the descriptions of different towns and historical realia; they offer an unusual excursion to a selection of places beside the Danube.

Two murders take place on board the ship; the atmosphere among the members of the crew becomes increasingly tense, but all this goes on without affecting the happy passengers and the strict schedule of the programme. The Danube in America offers the reader a voyage where the river comes alive with stories both of the present and of the long-forgotten past.

*“A love story that takes place on the water, and the river, which is perhaps the main character. For my hero, unlike for myself, his work becomes his fate and his affliction.”*



### Michal Hvorecký (1976)

Prose writer and publicist, he studied aesthetics at the University of Constantine in Nitra and then spent several years on research stays in the United States (Iowa City University) and in Western and Central European countries (Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary). His debut collection of short stories *Silný pocit čistoty* / *A Strong Feeling of Chastity* appeared in 1998. In 2001 his next collection of short stories, *Lovci & zberači* / *Hunters & Gatherers* was published. Hvorecký has also written novels: *Plyš* / *Plush* (2005), *Eskorta* / *Escort* (2007) and *Dunaj v Amerike* / *The Danube in America* (2010). Hvorecký worked on ships for two seasons and sailed up and down the river many times between Germany and Romania. There he met hundreds of Americans and heard their stories, had long conversations with them and gathered fresh inspiration. It was a hard, but good 'school' for him.

The book *Naum* (2012) is again a collection of eleven different short stories focused on the central theme of contemporary life in Bratislava and Central Europe more generally. His latest work *Spamäti* / *Off By Heart* (2013) is an authentic portrait of the author from his childhood in Bratislava to the story of his extended family, up to the birth of his son. It tells of his travels around Slovakia and through the world from Michalovce to Palermo and as far as Kabul. Many of his works have been translated into German, Italian, Polish or Czech. A dramatic adaptation of his novel *Plush* was performed at the *Aréna* theatre in Bratislava, the *Na zábradlí* theatre in Prague and the *Schauspielhaus* theatre in Hannover. He also attracts a general audience with his social and civic engagement.

### Translated titles:

#### BULGARIAN:

***Dunav v Amerika***  
**(The Danube in America)**  
Nov Zlatorog, Sofia, 2013

#### CZECH:

***Silný pocit čistoty***  
**(A Strong Feeling of Chastity)**  
Kniha Zlín, Zlín 2005

***Smrt na Dunaji***  
**(The Danube in America)**  
Kniha Zlín, Zlín 2013

#### GERMAN:

***City: Der unwahrscheinlichste aller Orte***  
**(Plush)**  
Tropen Verlag, Berlin 2006

***Eskorta***  
**(Escort)**  
Tropen Verlag, Berlin 2009

***Tod auf der Donau***  
**(The Danube in America)**  
Klett – Cotta, Stuttgart 2012

#### POLISH:

***W misji idealnej czystości***  
**(A Strong Feeling of Chastity)**  
KWARTALNIK FA-art, Katowice, 2002

**Michal Hvorecký**  
***Dunaj v Amerike***

Published by:  
Marenčin PT  
Bratislava, 2010, 330 p.

ISBN 978-80-8114-004-4



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# Jana Juráňová

## *Unsettled Business*

*The main character gradually uncovers the strange story of a young woman in an old portrait and draws us into an unsolvable mystery. In a coolly refined manner she mirrors the present in scraps from the past and vice versa.*

*When her husband dies Zita is left all alone in the world. She is over fifty and everything suddenly changes completely. After living for many years in the town, she finds herself in a village, feeling that she is nearing old age. Adapting is what is most difficult for her. Although she is charmed by the interior of her new environment, an ordinary village house, it is not easy to part with her previous lifestyle. Fortunately, Zita is a modern woman, she writes emails instead of letters, she does not cling to traditions, she does not resist changes; after all, people move far more frequently nowadays for work or love; it is no problem for them and ties to a particular place are being transformed. After the death of her husband Zita wants to fill her free time. Someone else's life enters her own like a bolt out of the blue. In the loft she finds the picture of a beautiful young woman, some notes and an old diary. She delves into other people's lives and although at first she tries to resist, they eventually completely absorb her attention. All of a sudden there are two heroines in the book: Zita, with her friends, memories, seemingly fulfilled life, contrasts with the mysterious unfurling story of the woman in the picture. Lost letters, a picture found by chance, a house that belonged to who knows who, a cat that appears out of nowhere and disappears again, a friend who surfaces from the past. These fragments begin to make up a story. The investigation into the unknown woman in the picture forms a bridge between the present and the past, which nevertheless remains shrouded in mystery.*

*“How can you tell stories nowadays so that they remain stories and not banalities or shocking reports? The older I get, the more I am interested in history and its never-ending distortion. As I have been destined to live in a time when history is dancing before my eyes it is really tempting.”*



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN

#### **Jana Juráňová (1957)**

Jana Juráňová studied Russian and English at Comenius University in Bratislava. She has worked as a literary adviser for the Trnava theatre, for the journal *Slovenské pohľady* (1991-1993), as a commentator for Radio Free Europe and as an editor for several book projects. In 1993 she worked with others to launch a feminist cultural, educational and publishing project, *Aspekt*, which she still coordinates. She has published nine books, the most successful being: *Orodovnice* (*Mediatrices*, 2006), and *Žila som s Hviezdoslavom* (*My Life with Hviezdoslav*, 2008). Her prose work *Nevybavená záležitosť* (*Unsettled Business*, 2013) was nominated for the Anasoft Litera 2014. Jana Juráňová is also well-known as a dramatist and children's writer.

In her prose and drama works Jana Juráňová consistently and very successfully disrupts the traditional gender stereotypes and Slovak myths with a dose of healthy irony. Even if we didn't immediately label Jana Juráňová as the hard core of Slovak feminism, with regard to her education and scope of knowledge she is definitely a conspicuous part of it.

#### **Translated titles:**

##### HUNGARIAN:

***A vén kandúr szenvedelmei***  
**(The Suffering of an Old Tomcat)**

AB-ART, Bratislava, 2005

***Csak csaj***  
**(Just a Chick)**

AB-ART, Okoč, 2012

***Égi szerelmek***  
**(Heavenly Loves)**

AB-ART, Okoč, 2013

##### GERMAN:

***Meine sieben Leben (with Agnes Kalina)***  
**(My Seven Lives)**

Gabriele Schäfer Verlag, Herne,  
to be published in 2014

##### ENGLISH:

***My Life with Hviezdoslav***  
Calypso Editions, 2014

##### MACEDONIAN:

***Živeev so Svezdoslav***  
**(My Life with Hviezdoslav)**

Ars Lamina, Skopje,  
to be published in 2015

**Jana Juráňová**  
***Nevybavená záležitosť***

Published by:  
Aspekt  
Bratislava, 2013, 148 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8151-008-3



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# Jozef Karika

## *Till Death*

*A chilling two-part thriller about a friendship and love which turns into a fatal hatred.*

Two inseparable friends grow up at the end of the 1920s in a small Slovak town. After a tragic mishap they are forced to escape the country and leave the girl they are competing for.

One emigrates to New York and becomes a foot soldier in a notorious Jewish gang. He then gets embroiled in a bloody war between the city's most powerful Mafia families and moves his way up the underworld hierarchy. The other finds himself in Munich where he is recruited by the Nazi secret service. After taking part in various murderous operations, he gradually turns into a bestial SS officer.

After the outbreak of the war, the two again meet unexpectedly amidst the horrors of a German concentration camp, this time on opposite sides. While the Jewish ex-gangster Viktor is desperately trying to save the lives of his close family, the fanatical SS officer, Karl, is responsible for their search and capture. Can the two men's friendship survive such a test – or will they become enemies for life – and death? TILL DEATH – an outstanding action thriller about humanity in inhuman conditions.



*"Reading one of my books is like setting off a hand grenade. If a book doesn't blow the reader into lots of little pieces, then it's poor stuff."*



### **Jozef Karika (1978)**

used to work as television reporter specializing in political and investigative journalism. He is a winner of the Literary Fund award for his reporting as well as of various other journalistic and literary awards. His books *Zóny tieňa* (Shadow Zones, 2005), *Mágia peňazí* (The Magic of Money, 2007), *Kurz praktickej mágie pre začiatočníkov* (A Practical Magic Course for Beginners, 2007), *KPMPZ* (2007) and *Brány meonu* (The Gates of Meon, 2009) have been published in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In the USA, a collection of his essays, *Liber 767*, has been published. He has had short stories published in both the *Rak* and *Fantázia* magazines while some of his texts have appeared in the American anthologies "The Best of Konton" and "Manifesting Prosperity". In his writing he likes to provoke the reader with some of his material bordering on the unacceptable. His blog was banned from the pages of a famous Slovak daily newspaper because of his controversial and politically incorrect views. At the start of this year, his most recently-published novel *V tieni mafie* (In the Shadow of the Mafia) was at the top of the Slovak bestseller list for several weeks.

### **Jozef Karika**

#### ***Na smrť***

Published by:

Ikar

Bratislava 2012, 375 p.

ISBN: 978-80-551-3170-2



#### ***Na smrť 2***

Published by:

Ikar

Bratislava 2013, 365 p.

ISBN: 978-80-551-3581-6



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# Maroš Krajňak

## *Carpathia*

*Step into the magical  
Carpathians – the world of  
a disappearing civilization.*

*Carpathia* is about the inhabitants of a particular area divided up by the borders of three states – Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine – and which until not long ago was inhabited by an ethnic group most frequently known as the Ruthenians. The most striking and interesting characteristic of the “Carpathia” area is the meeting of eastern and western “civilizations”, which has meant that the area is exceptionally varied and unstable.

In both world wars many dramatic battles took place in the Carpathian passes; there were frequent changes in the state borders here and forced religious conversions have also left their mark on the area.

In his debut the author brings to Slovak literature his own personal view of and feeling for the disappearing world of his birthplace; he sketches over “pictures of an old world” and compares them with the present state of things that he finds during his wanderings through this “no-man’s land”. In spite of the eerie and gloomy nature of the prose, the reader is convinced its truth. The author achieves his aim of persuading people that “what could realistically have happened, really did happen.”

*“Although I have not lived the greater part of my life in “Carpathia”, I am perhaps bound to it even more than I would have been if I had stayed there.”*



PHOTO (C) IVANA KRAJŇAKOVÁ

#### **Maroš Krajňak (1972)**

A prose writer, he completed his studies in 2006 at the International Business School in Brno. His professional career has for a long time focussed on marketing in the field of telecommunication services and the internet. His work on a particular genealogical project that enabled him to travel intensively through the geographical area he describes provided important inspiration for some of the real-life stories recorded in his first book *Carpathia* (2011). His second book *Entropia/Entropy* (2012) leads on from his successful debut. He completed this loose trilogy in 2013 with the book *Informácia/Information*. The author's remarkable position in Slovak literature is confirmed by the fact that all three of his prose works have been nominated for the Anasoft litera prize (in 2012, 2013 and 2014).

#### **Translated titles:**

CZECH:

***Carpathia***

Větrné mlýny, Brno

To be published in 2014

**Maroš Krajňak**  
***Carpathia***

Published by:  
Trio Publishing  
Bratislava 2011, 120 p.

ISBN: 978-80-89552-06-1



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# Uršula Kovalyk

## *The Equestrienne*

*Krasojazdkyňa / The Equestrienne is a novel about the desire to realise one's girlish dreams in spite of totalitarianism; it is a celebration of friendship between women and also a bitter acknowledgement that the desire for power can destroy any relationship whatsoever.*

It is 1984 and a small town somewhere in the east of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic is in the firm grip of totalitarianism. Karolina, a teenage girl who never knew her father and who grew up in an untraditional family full of strange women, is moving with her mother to an ugly prefabricated housing estate. Although she has a clumsy, weedy body and the children laugh at her for it at school, she still manages to see what is the real essence of people – their souls. At school she can't stand the socialist brainwashing and the offal in sour cream sauce often served in the canteen.; At home she hates being witness to her mother's sexual adventures with strange men so much so that one day, when she catches her mother with a lover in the bathroom, she runs away. By chance she discovers a riding school on the edge of town where she gets to know Romana, who is a year older and who has a physical handicap – one leg shorter than the other. Romana shows her how in spite of her handicap she can exercise on Sesil, a fat old horse grazing in the enclosure. Suddenly her flight from home ceases to be important to Karolina. The two girls become inseparable friends. Every day they go to see Sesil at the riding school, where they are discovered by Matilda, a rider and trainer. She begins to coach them.

At that time trick riding is an almost unknown sporting discipline, which Karolina compares to circus riding. They found a trick riding team, train and achieve fantastic success in competitions. However, their career as trick riders and their personal lives are marked by the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Relationships between people at the riding school are quickly damaged by the arrival of capitalism. The dictatorship of the proletariat is replaced by the dictatorship of money. The team has to turn professional and the girls are expected to be absolutely perfect in their performances. All of a sudden there is no room there for the physically handicapped Romana and the unruly Karolina ...

*“I am writing above all for those readers of either sex who are not afraid of the word feminism, who don’t believe the fairy tales about constantly smiling, self-sacrificing women and tough men who do not cry and like black humour and irony.”*



**Uršula Kovalyk (1969)**

A prose writer, playwright and social worker, she worked for a women’s non-profit organisation focusing on women’s rights and is currently the director of the *Theatre with No Home*, which features homeless and disabled actors. She lives in the capital, Bratislava.

Uršula Kovalyk has written and staged 10 theatre plays. She has published two collections of short stories, *Neverné ženy neznášajú vajíčka* (Unfaithful Women Hate Eggs, 2002) and *Travesty šou* (Travesty Show 2004), and two novels, *Žena zo sekáča* (The Second-hand Woman, 2008) and *Krasojazdkyňa* (The Equestrienne, 2013). The latter has been shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera 2014

**Translated titles:**

CZECH:

***Obyčejný mrtvý otec*  
(An Ordinary Dead Father)**

Maťa, Prague, 2006

HUNGARIAN:

***Traveszti show*  
(Travesty Show)**

AB-ART, Balazs Francisc, Bratislava, 2007

***Nő a turiból*  
(Second-hand Woman)**

AB-ART, Francisc Balázs, Okoč, 2013

ARABIC:

***Imra'alilbee*  
(Second-hand Woman)**

Al Arabi Publishing and Distributing,  
Cairo, Egypt, 2013

***Hosan El Mooled*  
(The Equestrienne)**

Al Arabi Publishing, Cairo, Egypt  
to be published in 2015

**Uršula Kovalyk**  
***Krasojazdkyňa***

Published by:  
Divadlo bez domova  
Bratislava 2013, 118 p.

ISBN: 978-80-971354-0-9



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# Lukáš Luk

## *The Tales of Považský Sokolec*

*The Tales of Považský Sokolec introduce us to the imagined and realistic, crazy and rational world of an invented village lying in the River Váh valley. This is a brilliantly mixed cocktail of bizarre situations and lives, daft and dramatic characters, full of kindly humour.*

The book is the kind of caricature that town people usually draw of people in rural areas, although in fact it is about themselves.

Seventeen amusing short tales capture the Slovak village of Považský Sokolec during the beginnings of democracy.

A bird of prey that heralds unfavourable events provides a frame for the collection. Here and there the stories are linked to each other; they have some characters in common: quirky villagers, blunderheads to a greater or lesser extent, who can find a way out of any situation.

By going into business they gradually become familiar with new possibilities and hitherto unknown "achievements of civilization", which often gives rise to absurd or even bizarre situations. Their comicality is for the most part based on the ludicrous behaviour of the characters (smuggling frozen vegetables under a sheepskin hat, breeding mouflons, removing and selling stones from the Castle Hill).

With gentle irony and his own particular brand of humour, Lukáš Luk caricatures a whole range of unflattering human characteristics and weaknesses so typical for a village or small town.

*“The Tales of Považský Sokolec are by no means intended as revenge! I trust that the attentive reader will perceive my fascination with the Váh valley area. I love the rolling hills, here and there topped by a castle, the river meandering from the mountains in the north to somewhere in the southern plains. Also the historical connections and natural disposition of the people. Sometimes the energy flowing through the Váh valley even seems like music to my ears.”*



PHOTO (C) ???

#### **Lukáš Luk (1972)**

Lukáš Luk is the pseudonym of a prose writer well known from literary magazines for young authors and the internet portal Amnézia (Amnesia), where he regularly publishes texts in a column entitled “The world through the eyes of Lukáš Luk”.

His first book, *Príbehy Považského Sokolca* / Tales of Považský Sokolec (2010), reached the final shortlist of the ten best prose books for the literary prize Anasoft litera 2011. Its sequel, *Záhada Považského bula* / The Mystery of the Považie Yokel was also shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera 2014 and at the same time this book was nominated for the prize of the European Festival of Humour and Satire, Kremnické gagy 2014.

#### **Translated titles:**

HUNGARIAN:

***Irina és az ordog***

**(Irina and the Devil)**

Kalligram, Bratislava, 2010

**Lukáš Luk**

***Príbehy Považského Sokolca***

Published by:

Petrus

Bratislava, 2010, 208 p.

ISBN: 978-80-89233-41-0



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# Peter Pišťanek

## *The Hostage*

*This poignant novel about a boy from a border village close to Bratislava maps the political situation of the 1950s and 1960s through the fate and perceptions of a child and his experiences with his friends, classmates and their parents, neighbours, local drunks, Communist functionaries, brickwork labourers and border guards.*

Little Peter Achberger is from an ethnically mixed family and lives in Devínska Stará Ves near Bratislava. In him flows the blood of his Croatian ancestors and of old Pressburgers, the nickname for inhabitants of Bratislava fluent in three languages: Slovak, German and Hungarian. The boy's life is far from easy. When he is only four, his parents go to visit relatives in Austria and don't come back. They hope that the Red Cross will help them get their son across the border but fail in their attempts. In the meantime Peter is looked after by his grandparents.

Most special of them is Grandad Erich, a man unbroken by life's cruel hand, war, captivity, confiscation of his own restaurant, car and luxury flat in the capital, forced resettling into a block of flats and the muddy industrial setting of a brickworks, and finally work as a village pub keeper. A man of admirable strength, he makes the best of every situation, never complains on principle and understands his grandson like nobody else. Peter is surrounded by a whole gamut of other memorable characters: his gracious and caring grandmother; his other grandparents; regulars from his grandad's pub, teachers but above all children, his peers, classmates, friends and their families. Peter feels disowned and longs to be with his parents who live just a few kilometres across the border but are quite beyond reach. However when they unexpectedly appear with an unknown little brother to take Peter back with them to Austria, he can't bring himself to leave the familiar place, his school, first love (Helena) and friend's enemies without first having chance to prepare and say goodbye.

Peter later gets another opportunity to join his parents in the turbulent days following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. This time Grandad Erich helps him seize this chance, his inner voice telling him it may be the last.



*"I've always been interested in outsiders, people who feel a strong desire to conform and blend in but who, because of that desire, are somehow excluded from ordinary life. If such a person reflects on the fact that he wants to blend in, he becomes someone exceptional. And that is the case of my characters, saxophonists, prompts and suchlike."*



PHOTO (C) PETER PIŠŤANEK

**Peter Pišťanek (1960)**

Acclaimed prose writer who paved the path of an innovative approach to the art of fiction. After a career in advertising, currently he is an editor and marketing manager of the inZine Internet magazine. Pišťanek is best known for his pulp-fiction-style trilogy *Rivers of Babylon I—III* (1991, 1994, 1999); he has published also several collections of short stories, and a special cook book of family recipes. His latest novel, *The Hostage*, has been just released.

**Translated titles:**

CZECH:

***Muzika***  
**(Music)**

Kniha Zlín, Zlín 2008

***Rivers of Babylon 1***

Kniha Zlín, Zlín 2009

***Rivers of Babylon 2***

Kniha Zlín, Zlín 2011

ENGLISH:

***Rivers of Babylon 1***

Garnett Press, London 2007

***Rivers of Babylon 2***

**– *The Wooden Village***

Garnett Press, London 2008

***Rivers of Babylon 3***

**– *The End of Freddy***

Garnett Press, London 2008

TURKISH:

***Babil' in Nehirleri***

**(Rivers of Babylon 1)**

Pupa, Istanbul 2009

SERBIAN:

***Rivers of Babylon***

IP Dobar naslov, Beograd, 2011

SPANISH:

***Nuevos estropicuentos de Claudio***

***para principitos y elefantes***

**(New Stories About Vlado)**

Ediciones Xorki, Madrid 2012

**Peter Pišťanek**

***Rukojemník***

Published by:

Slovart

Bratislava 2014

ISBN 978-80-556-0689-7



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# Stanislav Rakús

## *Eccentric University*

*An inventive university student, an intellectual and eccentric, who previous to his university studies has done a variety of jobs and has gained wide experience of life, describes the conditions at a provincial university. In his novel he compares superficiality, self-indulgence and narrow-mindedness with spiritual depth and penetrating intellectuality, which are, alas, pushed out to the fringes.*

An older, twenty-nine-year-old university student, who previous to his university studies has done various jobs and gained wide experience of life, talks in a detached manner and with the ambition of writing a novel to two of his young freshman colleagues who are studying Russian literature and are enthralled by Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov and are full of 19th century noble Russian nostalgia. He puts them in the picture in a humorous, bizarre as well as serious way regarding the situation at the Faculty of Arts. The starting point for his narrative is his unsuccessful attempt to propose marriage to his teacher, a twenty-seven-year-old lecturer in Russian literature. A great range of characters appear in his account, as well as various amusing stories and episodes.

The author has invented a “silent” and a “talking” narrator. The first is a know-all, the latter, paradoxically, an antiserum for garrulousness. The first listens and is wisely sceptical; the other lets himself go and fills the space available with stories that have astonishing content. However, we shouldn’t philosophise, but listen. And trust that there is something to say and something to listen to – that is the main principle of Rakús’s novel.

*"Apart from the theme of conflicts and relationships, there is also the theme of talking and listening, which requires the combination within the novel of euphoric, really insatiable talking with acute, restrained, quiet listening. In the novel *Eccentric University* I applied this asymmetrical method, which makes it possible to cram into the text a wide range of material."*



#### **Stanislav Rakús (1940)**

Stanislav Rakús's prose work is bound up with his profession of literary theorist. In it the author not only demonstrates his own view of the world, but also modern narrative and compositional methods. His prose debut was the novella *Žobráci* / *Beggars* (1976), where as in the later work *Pieseň o studničnej vode* / *Song of Spring Water* (1979) he showed himself to be a master of atmosphere and imaginative abandon. In each story he includes a dramatic moment that underlines the tragedy of the human lot. His first novel *Temporálne poznámky* / *Temporal Notes* (1993) has an autobiographical background, but in it, as in *Excentrická univerzita* / *Eccentric University* (2008), he also made use of his teaching experience, full of awkward moments and paradoxes. For his collection of stories *Telegram* (2009) he won the most prestigious Slovak literary prize, the Anasoft Litera 2010, after which followed a collection of short prose works entitled *Fáza uvoľnenia* / *Phase of Relaxation* (2013) and books from the field of literary science. He has won many literary awards. Some of the author's prose works have been made into films and plays.

At present he is working at the Department of Slovak Literature and Literary Science of the Faculty of Arts, Prešov University, where he is Emeritus Professor. He lives in Košice.

#### **Translated titles:**

##### CZECH:

***Píseň o studniční vodě***  
**(Song of Spring Water)**

Mladá tvorba, Prague, 1982

##### POLISH:

***Zebraci***  
**(Beggars)**

Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy,  
Warsaw, 1983

##### ROMANIAN:

***Cersetorii***  
**(Beggars)**

Editura Ivan Krasko, Nadlac, 2001

##### SERBIAN:

***Nenapisani roman***  
**(An Unwritten Novel)**

Archipelar, Belgrade, 2011

##### HUNGARIAN:

***Alkoholista történetek***  
**(Telegram)**

Magyar Napló, Budapest, 2012

**Stanislav Rakús**  
***Excentrická univerzita***

Published by:  
Koloman Kertész Bagala  
Levice, 2008, 225 p.

ISBN: 978-80-89129-95-9



**Translation Rights:**

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# Víto Staviarsky

## *A Lovely Pair of Shoes*

*An elemental narrative about Roma from eastern Slovakia. A Kusturica-style road movie full of passion, tension and reverses, spiced with humour.*

Vrana, the Crow, a Roma vendor at the fairs, tells the colourful story of why her partner, the vendor Ferdy Sojka, has stopped going to the markets. Ferdy Sojka needed money to pay a debt. He went to a debtor of his own to demand the return of his loan. But the debtor, instead of money, gave him his beautiful young daughter Sabina, which started off a whole sequence of explosive events. With a heavy heart, because he liked the girl and wanted her for himself, Ferdy sent Sabina to “work”, so as to pay off his debt with her body. When the innocent young Sabina understood that she had received her new clothes and beautiful shoes in order to please the old man to whose hotel room she was sent, she became furious, bashed the old fellow over the head, and ran away. She could not return home, where they were certainly looking for her, and so she joined up with Olda, an ageing man whom she reminded of the love of his youth. Through him she made the acquaintance of young Karolko, a wonderful blind saxophonist, and despite his grandfather’s warning they fell ardently in love. Karolko and Sabina went off to a big city, Ostrava, in the hope that they could hide there and settle down, but that was not possible. They were obliged to return. Ferdy was killed by his creditors because of his unpaid debt and Karolko’s grandfather died unexpectedly. The underage Karolko tramped off to an orphanage, there to remain until he reached eighteen. The pregnant Sabina was taken in hand by Vrana and together they vended at the fairs and awaited Karolko’s return.

*“A Lovely Pair of Shoes could be set anywhere, for instance in America, and instead of the Roma there would be African – Americans or Puerto Ricans, because the story is universal. But in that case I would have to study the local milieu, the way people speak... and that would be much more arduous.”*



**Víto Staviarsky (1960)**

Script writer and prose writer, graduate of the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU). Since 2000 he has focused on prose writing. His book debut, *Kivader* (2007), a novella set among the Roma, as well as his collection of short fiction *Záchytka* (Sobering-Up Station, 2009), were nominated for the Anasoft Litera Prize. His most recent book, the novella *Kale topanky* (A Lovely Pair of Shoes, 2012), set again among the Roma, won the Anasoft Litera 2013. Staviarsky has also written two feature-film screenplays with his son recently. He lives in Prešov.

**Translated titles:**

POLISH:

***Kivader i inne opowiesci*  
(Kivader)**

Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT – Wrocławskie  
Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, Wrocław, 2011

***Wytrzeźwiająca*  
(Sobering-up Station)**

Fundacja pogranicze, Sejny, Poland,  
to be published in 2013.

UKRAINIAN:

***Burudni čerevyky*  
(A Lovely Pair of Shoes)**

Poligrafcentr Lira, Užhorod, 2014

**Víto Staviarsky**  
***Kale topanky***

Published by:  
Marenčin PT  
Bratislava 2012, 173 p.

ISBN: 978-80-8114-129-4



**Translation Rights:**  
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# Svetlana Žuchová

## *Thieves and Witnesses*

*In Vienna four characters, four immigrants, struggle at all costs to find a place in what is for them a new society. However, these “foreigners” are not just bearers of some exotic label but are real and convincing with their own life stories, even though we are never allowed to discover them in their entirety.*

The novel is divided into two parts: *Zloději* (Thieves) and *Výpovědi* (Testimonies). Both these terms play an important role in the book. The story is the testimony of the main characters. Marisia, Janut, Gregor, Borko, Petra and Nina are people who had dreams, desires and visions which were shattered when confronted with reality. When trying to achieve their ideals lonely individuals longing to improve their financial situation, but above all longing to belong somewhere, resort to theft and even also infidelity and cannot avoid breakdowns in their relationships. Some seek an escape from reality in memories of a carefree childhood, others want to flee from them by shutting their memories out in a Freudian manner; others get a chance to atone for their past mistakes, only to discover in the end that it is not possible and the clock cannot be put back. Flashbacks alternate with the present and leaps into a longed-for future. The attempt to adapt to a strange environment, the question of where one settles and which decisions in life lead to happiness are the leitmotifs of the novel.

*“I write far more freely than I speak and,  
I suppose, not much less freely than I think.  
There are things I don’t want to write about,  
but they are also things I don’t want to think  
about, and there are not many of those.”*



PHOTO (C) LUCIA GARDIN

**Svetlana Žuchová (1976)**

Writer and translator. She studied psychology in Vienna and medicine in Bratislava. She works as a psychiatrist in Prague. Apart from writing blogs and publishing in various magazine (Romboid, Rak, Vlna and others), she translates from German and English. She has published a collection of stories *Dulce de Leche*, a novella *Yesim*, the novel *Zlodeji a svedkovia* (Thieves and Witnesses) and a book *Obrazy zo života M.* (Scenes from the Life of M.)

**Svetlana Žuchová**  
***Zlodeji a svedkovia***

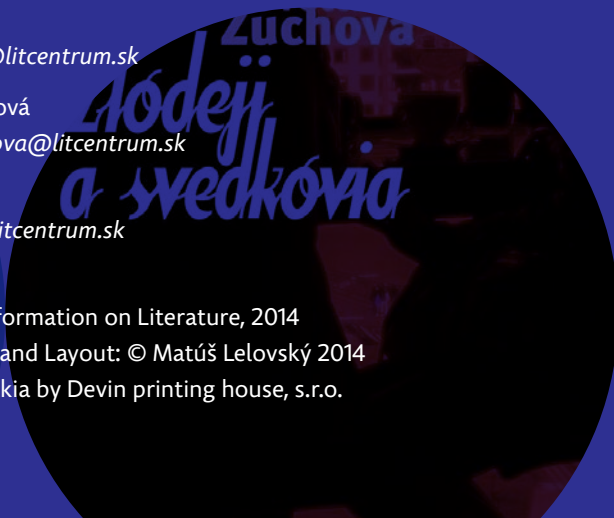
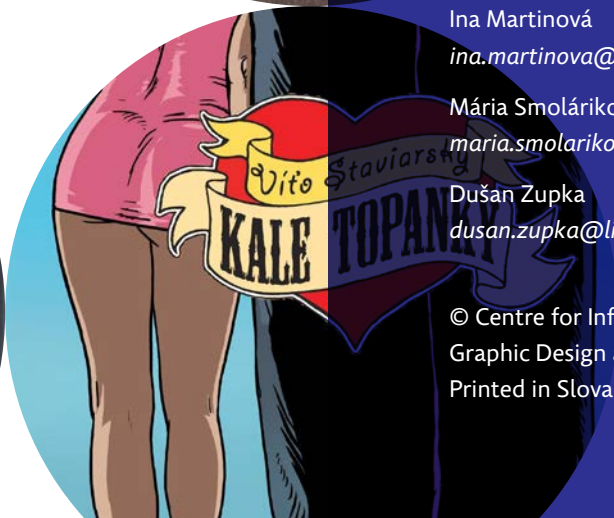
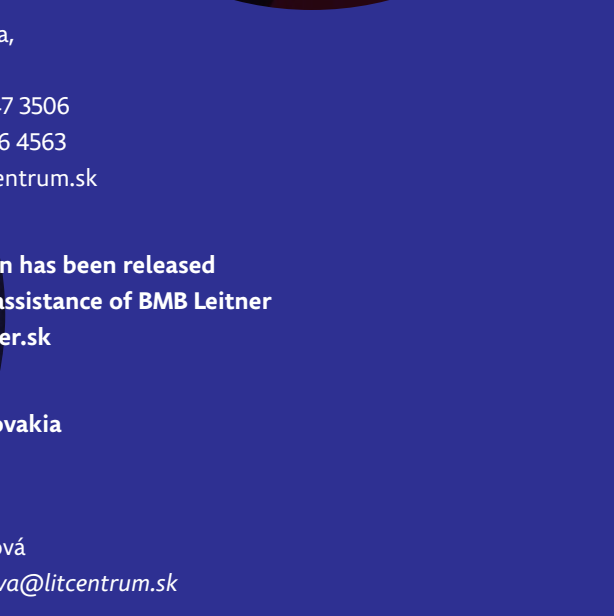
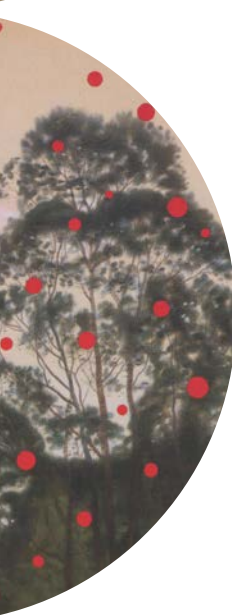
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About a month must have passed before I noticed it, after I had more or less settled in and no longer woke up in the morning amazed to see the dark-blue ceiling above my head – high above my head, because it was an old house, built a few centuries ago; it even had a vaulted ceiling, like those in wine cellars, and it was just while staring at this ceiling one day that I realised Gigi was always working, and by always, I mean always. He would leave for work at eight in the morning and come back a full twelve hours later, during which time I knew nothing about him, because he would react irritably to my timid phone calls: Natalka, please, I've got clients here now, tell me later, okay? If this wasn't enough, his mobile would ring at home too. And he would answer it every time, whether at supper, in front of the television, on the lavatory, or in bed – it was always *Carissimo!* no, you're not disturbing me at all, how could you imagine such a thing! I thought – how could you imagine you are disturbing me on a Sunday evening, you idiot! And in protest I began to pull on my panties again under the bedclothes. I tried to divert Gigi's attention in some way; I dragged him around all kinds of shops and shopping centres, I chose household accessories, I wanted to transform our flat into a place he would be glad to come back to, that would draw him away from work, a place where he would feel good. But no matter what I did Gigi never noticed that basil on the kitchen window sill, the red curtain over the glass panel in the door, the mortar for pesto, genuine Genoese, that I placed in the middle of the table before supper. But to tell the truth, I could hardly blame him, because the flat stubbornly resisted; it withstood my efforts to change it and make it cosier, it remained equally damp and aloof, with its bare walls, dim light and cold that got under your skin, even though it was the height of summer.

Finding myself a job wasn't easy either. Day after day I would buy newspapers and read advertisements, but every time I came across an Italian word I didn't understand, I was left paralysed, incapable of opening the dictionary and discovering what it meant, incapable of calling that number and enquiring about work they wouldn't give me anyway.

IVANA DOBRAKOVÁ

# TOXO

MARENČIN PT

He spent the afternoon behind the counter. On the table he had spread out maps of Regensburg with the way to the ship clearly marked, tourist guides that could be borrowed and a copy of Bavarian recipes. Passengers kept coming to him with questions. One wanted to know where to find the medieval house with a mural of David and Goliath, another where the Town Hall was, or the quickest way to the statue of Regensburg's Don Juan. He directed Foxy to the tomb of St. Wolfgang, who in 973 had supported the establishment of the first Prague bishopric.

"Martin, please tell me, what's baroque? The guide mentioned it several times," asked Jeffrey Rose, leaning on the counter.

"Don't let that worry you, Jeff. You haven't got that in America."

"Really?"

"Baroque was an Italian political dictatorship that ruled in Europe before the arrival of gothic. Very bad thing, grim and dangerous!"

"Then it's a good thing we don't have it in the US! We don't need anything like that. What we need now is prosperity and order."

"Couldn't agree more, Jeff," Martin replied.

Correcting a client lowered your chances of a good tip and above all of a positive rating. He went along with the most outlandish stupidities and said God knows what, just to make the time pass quicker. According to a quarter of Americans Winston Churchill, Gandhi and Charles Dickens were figures of the imagination while, on the contrary, Sherlock Holmes, Robin Hood and Eleanor Rigby were all real people.

Evaluations of the holiday, were filled in by the passengers at the end of the voyage. A bad rating meant you got the boot. Moronic ADC marketeers were forever studying the behaviour of both the tourists and the personnel. These boring, unemotional officials never left their offices in their lives, spent altogether one hour on a ship at a formal reception, but for all that, they knew best about everything connected with sailing and pulled ideal solutions out of their sleeves – at Skype conferences from Chicago.

The members of the crew also wrote obligatory assessments of each other. Colleagues were scared they'd lose their jobs, because there was a fight for positions on ships. You had to proceed tactically. Martin had already survived three seasons. Every year half the personnel were replaced. When fired, ordinary employees weren't treated in the same manner as directors.

Martin had earlier thought that no one actually bothered to look at the company's questionnaires. But in ADC they read the forms with the kind of fanatical attention that probably only the secret police in totalitarian regimes are capable of. Every adjective, every conjunction, was analysed and evaluated.

mišal hvorecký

# DUVAJ AMERIKE



MARENČIN PT

There is something lying in the corner next to the little window behind the chimney. The only thing in the whole of the loft. How did it get there? An old suitcase. Did the previous owners leave something behind? In another corner there are two brushes and a dustpan. Once more I go round, treading on the edge of the inner roof. Apart from the tools and the suitcase, there is nothing here.

The suitcase is an old one, fairly big. In the shadowy space it can hardly be seen against the chimney. But even so, how come I didn't notice it immediately?

I drag it into the middle of the loft. The hinges are somewhat rusty, they creak, but when I wriggle them slowly I manage to open the case. I raise the lid and at first glance it seems to be empty. Inside there is a kind of sheet with something wrapped up in it. A wooden board? I lift this rectangular object, only a bit smaller than the inside of the case, and remove the cloth.

A woman's face with dark eyes and dark hair. An oil painting in a heavy frame. I carefully pull the picture out of the case and stare at it. I don't like to put it down on the floor of the loft, so I lean it up against the wall. The face with the dark eyes is looking somewhere to the side. The woman's dark clothes and brownish-black smoothly combed hair falling in a soft wave on her shoulders blend with the dark background of the picture. She is not smiling, she is not lost in thought, she just simply is. The expression on her face is not particularly animated, more a little bored, as if she has been posing for quite a while and has had enough of it. On the back are the painter's initials and the year: 1927. I turn the picture over again to take a closer look at her face. I decide it would be better to put it back in the case, but my hands are shaky. What if I should spoil the frame? So I lean it up against the wall. Then I get to my feet and look at it from above and then from the side. A picture. A woman's face. Mesmeric, unknown. That is all. What to do with it?

It is evening, I'm downstairs in the house and a bit afraid I'll find it hard to fall asleep again today. In my mind's eye I can still see the portrait in the loft. I have left it up there.



ASPEKT ♀

jana juráňová  
nevybavená záležitosť

## Munich, February 1932

### I.

Karol waited for Jonas in front of the entrance to the fencing club on Sonnenstrasse. Recently they had been going there a lot. The Fleret club was one of the most prestigious in Munich frequented only by students of the nearby university, professional fencers and representatives of the social elite. Most fencers were NSDAP members or sympathizers. No Communist, or, God forbid, Jew would dare come anywhere near.

Jonas was late and Karol was about to go in when he saw him appearing from around the corner. Jonas was walking fast.

"I'm late! The lecture went on for ages," he blurted.

"Never mind. Let's go in," replied Karol opening the door.

But unlike his usual self, Jonas seemed reluctant to follow him.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know if I should...I didn't have time for – you know."

Karol raised his eyebrows: "No I don't know."

"A protective rune – there was no time," he mumbled.

"Are you kidding?" smiled Karol. Jonas's belief in the occult seemed absurd to him. He grabbed his hesitant friend by the collar and dragged him in.

Three long fencing strips lay across the floor of the gym. Karol and Jonas changed into their protective outfits and approached the other fencers. They rarely fenced together – they knew each other's moves and strategy too well.

It was just after lunch and there weren't many members there, just a few students, two professional students and a tall stranger exercising in the corner of the gym.

Jonas challenged one of the professionals. Karol shook his head at his choice. His roommate would have no chance, he would just lose badly and then get angry for no reason. He still hadn't learnt that he should choose someone evenly-matched or someone he knew he would beat. It was opponents like that who gave you experience and who were the key to success in later, much more difficult duels.

Karol approached an older student who he had occasionally fenced with before. So far he hadn't beaten him but he had learnt a lot and knew his first victory against him wasn't far away.

They donned their protective masks, touched swords and began.

# Jozef Karika

Autor bestsellerov

V TIENI MAFIE, V TIENI MAFIE II., NEPRIATEĽ ŠTÁTU

# NA SMRŤ

**IKAR**



Suddenly I'm a herdsman of cows, sheep and goats. My brain can't grasp and decipher what is going on down there in the village. People assembled with their overflowing rucksacks, suitcases and bundles. Troops, hustle and bustle, weeping and spread-winged eagles. Blank faces, pleading, men and women on their knees, clasped hands, wailing children, startled animals, shots fired in the air. I run into the shepherd's hut and hide in the tangled pile of birch twigs and branches in which I wanted to wait until all these strange things had passed. Someone discovers I am not among the rest and sends a soldier to get me to join the others. I could have fled much, much further into the depths of the forest, crawled into an animal's den under a rock or climbed a tree and tied myself to it. Become part of its crown, catching open-mouthed the rain and snow, the light of the moon and sun, other stars and planets, meteors and comets, swallowing mist and clouds, gradually merging with the flowing resin, and lived there safely for the rest of my life. And then gone up unharmed to heaven. But perhaps I believe that this peer of mine will bring me deliverance with an incomprehensible beginning, but possibly a calm continuation. Which is why I don't resist and in answer to his scared, squeaky calling I come out of the forest and walk up to him. Perhaps I expect a shaking of hands, perhaps an explanation. I stand right in front of him and say nothing. Nothing. For a moment we are silent. His frightened, trembling hands suddenly lift his rifle. I'm taken unawares and that prevents me from assessing the situation, in which a couple of seconds later the butt lands on my right temple. I fall, I faint, but a moment later I come to with my hands tied behind my back. I have to get up and walk along the dusty path. In his high-pitched voice the soldier begins to curse me, calling me a bandit and murderer. I can't make sense of it, I don't understand. I walk on, still hoping that when we get to the village everything will be explained. Then a big black horse comes into sight with a middle-aged soldier in the saddle. He shouts something and only now do my knees begin to give way under me, but still I manage to stumble on. I hope this soldier has come to rescue me. That he has come to explain it all to this confused young man and I will be free again, just as I had been all my life until a few minutes ago. But a couple of metres before we reach him comes another blow. The rifle butt again. This time I don't regain consciousness. The older soldier throws a rope down on me. The younger one understands immediately. His previous external and internal trembling does not change. All that disappears is its original cause. A second later he realises what he is going to do. All of a sudden he must shit. My death is accompanied by the murderer's brief runny shitting in the ferns. Then he vomits.



# CARPATHIA

MAROŠ KRAJŇÁK

We both collapsed in the sand. We had been practising jumping together for almost a week. And after some time Romana and I were perfectly coordinated. When we were in the basic sitting position with our arms stretched sideways I felt her budding breasts gently touching my back. The music coming from the loudspeakers governed the rhythm of Sesil's canter. Romana's breath caressed the top of my head. Her sweating thighs rubbed against my neck while she was sitting and balancing on my shoulders. We elegantly swung from one side of the horse to the other. Romana even managed a brilliant handstand and I held her by the waist! Our movements flowed smoothly into other exercises. We became dancing Siamese twins, creating with the horse a living statue. Matilda was satisfied. She sewed us little short red skirts. In white T-shirts and white trainers we looked like delectable toadstools. Toadstool Siamese twins with peas for breasts. Well, who could resist?

It promised to be the most beautiful Saturday in my life. The delicious smell of "*Bundáskenyér*" filled the flat. It dragged me out of bed. Mum was standing at the stove in a casually-fastened dressing gown. The coffeemaker was spurting strong percolated coffee from its bowels. It could have woken the dead. I sat down at the kitchen table. Mum asked whether the eggy fried bread was as I liked it, whether I didn't want more ketchup and whether it was salty enough. She fussed over me as if I was a painted Easter egg. Her sudden solicitude began to make me feel a bit nervous. "You must have plenty to eat! My clever little girl," she cooed and offered me a fag! At first I pretended I would refuse. Mum grinned: "Don't try to fool me; I've known for ages that you smoke!" We sat on our mini-balcony drinking coffee. Blue smoke rings wafted from our mouths, dissolving in the air. I noticed that the first signs of grey had appeared in Mum's black hair. We gazed into the sky scrawled with a white line from a plane and listened to the whistling of the zebra finches our neighbour kept in a cage next door. I realized how good I felt being with Mum. I even had an urge to cuddle up to her. "I would never have dreamt that my gawky little girl would manage to get so far," she said with a laugh and went to answer the telephone that was ringing in the hall. I put out my fag and went to clean my trainers. I wanted to be absolutely tip-top that day. I imagined the stunts I was going to perform during the exhibition as I gently wiped the dirty fabric with powdered chalk. "*Istenem!*" said Mum and in her voice I sensed surprise mixed with horror. I pricked up my ears. "*Istenem!*" Mum repeated several times. That unhappy "*istenem*" - Oh my God! - flying around the hall made me get to my feet. "What's happened?" I asked, when she put down the receiver. She didn't answer. She

# KRASOJAZDKYŇA

URŠULA KOVALYK



went to light up on the balcony. It could really have been the happiest Saturday in my life. If someone hadn't rung us. If those nice women from Miškolc hadn't had a faulty gas boiler and had not slept with the window closed. If, if, if only... everything would have been fine. A neighbour found them. They were already cold. And pink – like three little pigs. For a while I stood in the hall and stared at the telephone. In case someone should call and say it was just a silly joke. Then I went to finish cleaning those shoes. I could hardly see. My tears soaked into the cloth, leaving ugly brownish-grey patches. Mum was crying on the balcony. She called out that I must put it out of my head. But I couldn't stop thinking about those alabaster women with braided hair I had seen that summer. I imagined them lying in the mortuary, being dressed and then laid out in their coffins.

“I hope they shave Marta,” I blurted out on the way to the riding school. Mum spluttered with laughter into her handkerchief. She'd already had two apricot brandies, so everything seemed funny to her. There was a warm wind blowing, roguishly knocking the juicy mulberries off the tree to fall into the glasses of those drinking beer next to the snack bar. The neighing of excited horses reverberated throughout the riding school. Through a loudspeaker a woman's voice announced the results of the Captain Ján Nálepka memorial. Comrade Director had won on his horse Zádiel. Romana and I limbered up and changed into our costumes. Matilda spat on us three times for luck and then we stepped out ceremoniously into the sand-sprinkled ring. Sesiľ's coat reminded me of freshly whipped egg whites. He put on an air of importance, elegantly placing his oiled hoofs on the mown grass. Matilda was wearing a red riding outfit and leather boots. She had bought a new whip with a colourful little pompon. The spectators were already sitting in the small stands. Mum was in the first row. I caught a whiff of hot dogs and mustard. Someone shouted out Romana's name. The woman's voice in the loudspeaker matter-of-factly announced the closing programme. The brass band fell silent. The third composition on Arpi's tape set the air vibrating. Pink Floyd took the spectators' breath away. The stands fell silent. “Tchick”, Matilda urged Sesiľ on and cracked her whip, just for show. The coloured pompon at the end of the stick flew up like a tiny little hummingbird. I jumped onto Sesiľ's back. My crimson skirt waved to the rhythm of his canter. Sesiľ immediately followed the percussion instruments. My brain projected an image of the first exercise and sent it to my body. My muscles obediently copied this image. My spine vibrated freely. I didn't have to try at all. Conscientious training had made my movements automatic. I was only aware of the music. Without the least strain. My heart

pumped oxygenated blood into every little cell in my body. The percussion rocketed me into another world. The stands with their little flags disappeared. I found myself in a circus arena, wearing a shimmering black dress. As light as a cobweb, it gently stroked my thighs. The horse was cantering, its gold and red harness reflecting fiery little lights. The audience clapped and one man threw his top hat in the air. Kids licked nougat and beautiful women in lacy gowns fanned themselves. The music lifted me above the horse's back. There was a heady aroma of paraffin lamps. I performed one acrobatic figure after another. Each more beautiful and more dangerous than the last. I couldn't believe it was me. I was a different person. Grown up. Muscular arms, long legs and firm, full breasts. I couldn't take my eyes off myself. At that moment I realised who the person inside me really was. I stood up on the cantering horse, took a flying leap into the air and cut through the dome of the arena like a razor. The sun sealed my eyelids and for a moment I was blinded. I stretched out my arms and fell. Slowly. A long time. I was transformed. Into a woman from the circus. Before my heels touched the ground I had passed through several lives. The music came to an end. I landed on the hard ground. Like a real equestrienne. The equestrienne bowed. The spectators clapped. Mum too. She was in front of the stands, a glass of beer in her hand. I hadn't seen her eyes shine like that for a long time. The sexually bottled-up Indian concubine had vanished and become just an ordinary happy mum waving to me. Success was sweet. I had quite forgotten the poisoned women. Everyone around was smiling at us. Paying us compliments. They invited us for corn-on-the-cob and lemonade. Matilda proudly answered the questions: "*Who sewed those lovely red skirts?*" "*What is this discipline called?*" Sesil proudly strutted off to the stables and greedily sank his noble head into a bucket of sweet molasses. We rubbed his sweating belly with straw and chattered. Matilda cleaned the trick-riding strap. She smiled mysteriously to herself. When the voice of the last visitor was lost in the satisfied munching of the horses a huge shadow appeared behind us. The Director himself had condescendingly come to greet his worms. He looked at us strictly. Until I felt like a scrap of paper pricked with a pin. "*You can train and compete,*" he barked. "*Under one condition! Change that awful imperialist music at once for something ideologically acceptable!*" He spun round and marched away. "*What does 'ideologically acceptable' mean?*" Romana asked. Matilda gazed scornfully in the direction he had left and explained drily: "Something that won't give those commies a heart attack!"

Since times immemorial people from Sokolec had been ploughing up bits of old earthenware or metal statues when working in the fields. But no one paid any attention to these useless objects, after all, the most important thing was to plough, sow and harvest the crops on time. The farmer had no time to waste in the annual cycle of work. It was different if the ploughed-up vessel was still fairly intact. Then the thrifty inhabitant of Sokolec took this old piece of junk home and used it as he fancied. Here as a feeding bowl for the chickens' grain, there as a flowerpot, or a rubbish bin. Every Sokolec family had some old crock and no one thought twice about it. The change only came in nineteen seventy-one when the foundations were being dug for the village hall, built as part of "Action Z" and Uncle Machara pulled three heavy bronze swords and a helmet of the same metal out of the excavation pit. Then a delegation of comrades from the Party's District Committee visited Ján Vladár, chairman of the Local National Committee and laid down the procedures for building anything in the village, so that archaeological research could be carried out to map the history of our homeland for future generations of working people.

This was the beginning of bad times for the unfortunate inhabitants of Považský Sokolec. As a result of the archaeological research the village hall was completed two whole years behind schedule and the same threat hung over every excavation pit dug by small builders. By nineteen seventy-nine the construction of twelve houses had been suspended only because a few bones, a strip of metal or a little pile of pottery fragments had been found when digging the foundation trenches. The continual presence of an employee from the Archaeological Institute in Nitra reminded one of an armed Egyptian supervising the work of a thousand slaves when building the pyramids. In Sokolec hostile neighbours began to take advantage of the situation, throwing fragments of old pottery into foundation pits with the aim of officially holding up the construction of their adversaries' houses.

In the spring of eighty-two quarrelsome Agnes Riedlová also resorted to such a ploy. She found it very hard to bear the fact that Irena Lalová, née Podoláková, Agnes's former rival in love, should build a house in the gap next to hers. Several years earlier Irena Podoláková had lured away Agnes's current boyfriend, Ivan Lalo and led him right up to the altar. At that time Ivan Lalo was a very good catch – you couldn't find many people in Sokolec who had finished technical college and had a good post in the freezing plant.

Agnes could not come to terms with the idea that for the rest of her life she would be gazing into the windows of that siren and she swore that she would thwart the building of the family nest they planned. Or at least hold it up.

**Lukáš Luk | Příběhy Považského Sokolca**



It was around that time that Peter decided to try and grow up as quickly as he could so that he could start doing grown-up stuff with his grandad: playing cards at the regulars' table; doing men's talk about life and so on. Swearing from the heart about the state of society. Downing a shot of rum, chasing it down with a beer and then wiping the foam off your moustache with the back of your hand; slapping the well-formed rump of Auntie Zorka or that of the new one, Auntie Zdenka, who had taken over from Auntie Jarka in September. So far Peter had been excluded from all those delights. Instead he had to dress properly against the cold, wear his silly hat, go to school, speak politely, always say hello and thank you for everything. Like an idiot.

When they were playing in the yard, he always had to come in right after the news. None of the others from the brickworks had to, only him. He'd press his forehead against the cold window of the lit-up kitchen to make out the silhouettes of his friends in the deepening darkness. They'd go on playing not even seeming to miss him and he'd remain standing there stubbornly until he was too tired and sleepy to carry on. In the darkness below him the last shadows had long stopped moving; they were all at home having tea and bread and butter with salami – only he could see how they were actually having the best adventures of their life and know how he again was missing out on something unrepeatable.

Grandad was a man-mountain and it was good to be his friend. Being his grandson wasn't too bad either – having a few man-to-man secrets and so on. But being his friend must have been much better. Peter could see and hear how he would talk to those on the same level as he was. There weren't many: Batay the butcher, whose Jednota shop was right opposite Grandad's pub; the manager of the Technokov store, one Mr Mašíček; Dr Beluch, the local GP... and that was it: just enough for a round of mariáš. With them Grandad was just *perťú* but with everyone else he was *perzí*. That was how they differentiated between the informal and formal means of address. In the pub Grandad sometimes used the informal *ty* form with his customers, the permanently sozzled Kolár, for instance and similar tosspots when he was throwing them out of the pub, but no-one dared address him in that informal manner. Grandad was not the type to be spoken to like that; he kept his dignity. When his tall, thin and rather stooping figure moved through the locale, it exuded a weighty and unspoken authority. He would remove a disorderly drunk from the pub in seconds, grabbing them first by the collar, twisting their arms behind them and then marching them summarily to the door.



Everything, gentlemen, her beauty, her natural feeling for 19th century Russian literature, as well as the precision and ease with which she grasped in her pronunciation even the most subtle phonetic nuances of the Russian language and, of course, many other things, eventually led me to decide one day not to eat my heart out any longer just passively admiring this young female beauty, but to take decisive action. I will ask Mária Petrovna for her hand in marriage, I said to myself, and immediately began to analyse my intention.

First I must find an answer to the question of why this beautiful twenty-seven-year-old woman is still single, you could say free; after all, she is not to be seen around with any men. Could it be that she wanted to devote her life to 19th century Russian literature, Pushkin and his duel with d'Antès in particular, or to the question of why Dostoyevsky's heroes experience their greatest crises in the early hours of the morning, that is, at a time when Turgenev's characters are sleeping peacefully in their stately homes? Could she possibly wish to study a little sadly how much truth there was in Chekhov's slight marginal vexation that in spite of having married, he had to go around in socks full of holes? Does she want to investigate whether Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy really did sleep as a child in a raised bed separated from the ground, because in the mansion on the Yasnaya Polyana estate rats and mice used to run around the floor at night? There might be a lot of things she wanted to get to the bottom of, and that could be hard to do if confronted with the trivial duties of married life. Or it also occurred to me that maybe she was alone on account of her beauty, which no man dared risk trying to possess for fear of rejection, for fear of being unworthy of it? And what if her girlish independence, her not being encumbered with men and the bondage of marriage should derive in the case of Mária Petrovna from her Russian, Siberian height of one hundred and ninety centimetres? I don't know any man at the Philological Faculty, or in the town itself, who could meet her criteria when it comes to height. With the one hundred and eighty-seven centimetres my parents had somehow managed to endow me with (after all, my father was only one metre sixty-two), I was perhaps the only suitable partner for Mária Petrovna in the area. I should say, however, that Father takes a large size in shoes. Perhaps it is just this contrasting genetic detail that can explain my surprising height. When preparing to meet Mária Petrovna I felt grateful to my parents, especially however to the length of my father's feet, for this feature of my physical construction. Of course, height is only one feature that could make an impression when Mária Petrovna considered my offer of marriage.

Stanislaw  
**Rakús**

**Excentrická univerzita**

**HK Bagala**

She woke up in the middle of the night. Winnetou was snoring away in his bed. She made a smacking noise, which made him turn around but it didn't stop him snoring. She got up from the couch; she wasn't feeling dizzy any more, only very thirsty. She had a drink from the tap and wanted to go back to bed but then moonlight fell on the wardrobe that served as a passage to Karolko's room. She tiptoed over to it quietly so that the floor wouldn't squeak and opened the door. She looked back to make sure Winnetou was really asleep and slipped into Karolko's room.

He had kicked off half of his duvet as he lay in his bed. He must have been hot because he was all covered in sweat. He was so slim, so handsome and so beautifully built! She watched him for a long time, then reached out with her hand and touched his cheek with her fingers. He started and sat up.

"What's up?"

"Karči, move over," she whispered, covering his mouth with the palm of her hand to keep him quiet.

"What for?" Karolko asked in puzzlement and lay down again.

"I want to be with you," she whispered.

"Now?"

"Karči?"

"What?"

"I'm so sad, you know... C'mon, move over."

Karolko moved towards the wall. Sabina quickly slipped under the duvet but then she got a fright.

"What's that?" she screamed in surprise and pulled the saxophone from under the duvet.

"If Winnetou finds us we'll be in trouble," Karolko said.

"He won't... He's fast asleep. Karči? D'you know what I've been thinking?" she interrupted him and put the saxophone on the floor next to the bed. "That I'd like to be your girl. Ferdy is good-looking but I don't want him. Maybe I did want him once but he betrayed me. You're kind and you would never cheat on me. And I like it when you play. It gives me this feeling inside," she took Karolko's hand and placed it on her breast.

"Winnetou won't let me have a woman," Karolko said pensively. Sabina lay next to him, saying nothing and started stroking his hair.

"Where are your mum and dad, Karči?" it occurred to her. "Why aren't you with them?"

"Dad is at Ilava," Karolko said.

"Where's that?"

"There's a prison there. He's in for stealing something."

Vito Štaviarsky  
**KALE TOPANKY**

Until then I had only looked through glass at people like Borko. Through the shop window when I was standing behind the counter and they were coming out of the station building. People who came here for the holidays with colourful rucksacks and a variety of anoraks. Who used to go skiing on the slopes outside the town and took photos of each other at the station with a view of the platform. Then they would buy wafer biscuits from me for the journey and ask where the buses stood. People from the capital who were always smiling. I had never touched any of them. Until Borko, who had everything. More than Gregor, who was, after all, one of us. Gregor was Borko from many years ago. He still had to make an effort. Borko didn't need to any longer.

That's what I was thinking about when he undressed me. And his grey hair, like in a black and white photo. Dark hair that is the first to go grey. Not Janut, but that Borko's world was now within my reach. Which Janut could only ever wait for. We met one day when I came to see Janut at the building site. Borko spoke to me when I was leaving. Said he was curious about me. About the woman who had had such an impact on Janut and had forbidden him to smoke. He laughed and said I could be sure of Janut. Apparently he didn't even light up in secret. While all the others were standing in front of the caravan with cigarettes between their fingers, Janut hung around inside listening to the radio. To a broadcast he didn't understand a word of. He looked at me and said that now he understood why. You don't see women like that around here, he claimed. Beautiful women come from across the border. He asked me if he could give me a lift. He was going for some material and he pointed to the van parked near the gate in the fence. He opened the door in the wire netting and let me go out first. The van was standing in the sun and the leatherette upholstery was as hot as sheet metal. He opened the window and turned on some music. He asked me where I wanted to go. From the vehicle a different world opened before me. Through the rolled-down window on the passenger's side I saw the city as I had never seen it before.

As it is seen by people Janut and I will never get closer to. By hiding banknotes in tea tins we shall never catch up with them. Eating marked-down yogurts the day before the use-by date. Bread fried on pork fat instead of oil. Not even bills for the telephone that delusively connects us to the world. A world we don't live in, not even on the outskirts. A world that is moving away from us and we have no hope of catching up with it at the pace we're going. And suddenly I was riding along with it. In Borko's van, right to the heart of it. Along the highway that flows into the town like a river.

Svetlana  
Žuchová

# Zlodeji a svedkovia

MARENČIN PT