

***Nestling* by Sofia Kordić**

Translated by Mirza Purić

I'm going to receive two embryos which after an extended period of cultivation they refer to as compact morulae. On this day four years ago, my uncle died as a refugee in Serbia. Succumbed to dialysis and for his native country. He was buried in the undeveloped, muddy part of the Batajnica cemetery. Lowlands all around, fog.

The family cemetery is far away, in another country. In Croatia, 10 km from the sea, at the foot of a hillock and a church, where the sky is blue and the clouds bright white.

As the priest chanted and mumbled to his chin, we were standing in the mud shifting from one leg to the other, sinking deeper and deeper. The priests' chanting had always made me feel queasy, revulsed even. Those black frocks, greasy beards, what comfort can any of that offer to the grieving?

My father was drowning in tears, trying to be strong for me, and I tried to be strong for him. The more he tried to put on a stiff upper lip, the harder he squeezed my hand. This helped him hold back sobbing and concentrating on the pain in my hand helped me hold back the urge to scream. What does it feel like for a brother to bury a brother in the mud of a strange cemetery?

I remembered Kuzma, the tragic hero of Mirko Kovač's novel *Crystal Bars*, who visits his native Herzegovina, returns to Belgrade and cries out: "It's not the same, dying here and over there, especially when one believes death to be some kind of salvation."

Likewise muddy was the street on which our new hope, Prague's newest assisted reproduction clinic was located. Their success rates were surreally high, the price of IVF staggering. The street had been

completely dredged up, bulldozers everywhere, workers. Fortunately, the sun was shining. He drove up to the very entrance, so I didn't have to waddle in the mud. Somehow it seemed inappropriate to him. Mud on the day I was to conceive.

We entered a large, well-lit room painted yellow. He sat beside me, I lay on a sofa turned towards the wall with a screen on which they showed us the embryos. They don't give you sedatives at this clinic. They recommend acupuncture and a glass of red wine after supper during the weeks and months of preparations.

Reality in all its might took hold of me. All things were intense, palpable. The sounds, the colours, the words, the gentle music of the flute. My hand in his, the nurse who stroked

my leg, the embryologist who peered optimistically from behind the glazed opening waiting for the doctor to signal her to fetch something that was to nest inside me and turn into a human.

Everything was too good, perfect, designed so as to ameliorate the coldness of the artificial insemination process. Why, then? I don't know, but I knew it would fail yet again. For the fourth time. A sense of futility came over me, painful but bearable, familiar, felt so many times before. And I accepted the game. As if that were the whole point. Acceptance of failure. You do your level best, you put your very core into it, but you know it's pointless.

As the doctor below a sheet-covered me was trying to find the right way to my innards, the droplets of sweat running down his face, the flush coming down from his cheeks onto his neck and chest, the endless amount of time he was taking told everyone something was the matter, and I was wondrously serene. I already knew.

"Don't worry, it happens that we can't find a way in, we'll have to use a special catheter. Doctor, do take these back."

I calmly watched the embryologist leave. With the embryos. Compact embryos.

"Don't worry, they're not going to catch a cold on the way, they're not exposed," the doctor tried to be funny, comforting himself rather than me. I was playing my old role, on my way to a world of acceptance and pain.

Dr. Havelka was tasked with monitoring the catheter via the ultrasound and direct Dr. Ruml to the best place in the womb for two compact embryos. Then I heard both doctors, the nurse and the embryologist heave a sigh of relief. And I felt his smile, his teary eyes, his hand squeezing mine. They showed them to us on the screen, this time in my womb, they were really there! Both doctors stroked my belly, for good luck, they said, and left us alone with the sound of the flute in the yellow room.

I felt guilty because deep inside I didn't share the exhilaration, the joy of the moment, although on the outside I played the game, I looked into his eyes full of hope and tenderness. I knew it would fail. I knew it then, as well as twenty days after when I went to the toilet at the break of dawn, sprinkled a pregnancy test with urine and calmly stared for three minutes at the space for the second line which never appeared. As I stared blankly, I remembered a summer day fifteen years ago, before the war, when it occurred to me on a bus in Belgrade that I was twenty-five and I wanted a baby.

Tel Aviv, July 2006

Dear Mia,

Tel Aviv is like a bubble bound to burst with the first rocket that lands. In the meantime we work, go for walks, go to restaurants. Tonight my mother-in-law is taking us out for sushi. This has become normal to me. I've become part of the madness. I speak in the plural – we have no choice, everyone is against us, they want to destroy us, wipe Israel off the face of the planet, we buy peace with war, it cannot be otherwise.

I'm witnessing the so-called Second Lebanese War. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced both in Israel and in Lebanon. Soldiers and civilians die, cluster bombs are dropped.

Last night she was screaming in her sleep in Serbian for the first time: "Mum, we're going to Serbia, I'm scared!" When I reassured her claiming that no rockets would hit Tel Aviv, that they were only falling in the north of the country, she said she'd had a dream in which she was in a bomb shelter, a filthy, smelly windowless basement, alone, while rockets were falling.

I reserved the next flight to Belgrade. What irony! Exit strategy Belgrade! When we were running from the tear gas, the batons and the hooves of the police horses on 9 March 1991, Belgrade was becoming more and more cramped and oppressive. A few months afterwards, tanks in the streets on their way to Vukovar, showered with flowers by the befuddled masses, turned my favourite city into a cage, a ball and chain, a noose.

Milica

Belgrade, July 2006

Dearest Mia, the text you sent me from the Red Hot Chilli Peppers concert sent a new wave of self-pity over me. Woe is me, a woebegone wretch I am.

*Some of us get a little
And some a lot*

And then I sat down write to you. Typed on the keyboard to the rhythm of Frusciante's screaming guitar, shedding tears all over it.

We've got to make do

With whatever we've got

Then I deleted everything. My finger was stuck to the delete key, as the cursor mercilessly and thoroughly shredded the misery on the screen.

Our phone had been shut off for two months. We paid the electricity bill only when we received the overdue notice.

Sometimes when
I'm lying there all alone
I think of every little nothing
That we could own

My fucking paycheck came in today. I'm in for a few days of hedonism in the form of a normal diet and no fear of unpaid bills.

Andrija has finished year one. His marks are descriptive and the teacher praises him, but instead of enjoying the celebration I had to hide from other parents.

To overthrow all of you
Who have overgrown

I didn't have money to chip in for a present for the teacher. It's a stupid custom, I wouldn't have chipped in even if I'd had any. But it's different when you have the money and just think the whole thing is stupid and backward. When you actually can't afford a flower, it's humiliating.

Vuk works like a dog, his eyeballs are popping out from all the painting. He'll have three exhibitions this year, but people are skint, and those who aren't are also not interested in art.

Neither the government nor the city councils are paying for artists' health and social security. The kids and the two of us are uninsured.

All my friends
Like to spend
Days on end
On the mend

What is an artist anyway? And this formation we languish in, can it even be called a nation-state now that it has shut and shuttered the National Museum? It wasn't closed even during WWII!

Serves us right, we've given up on ourselves. We've withdrawn into our cocoons, we don't concern ourselves with politics, especially we artists, we don't want to dirty our hands, we don't vote. And we wonder how all of this came about. We've been punished. Plato's curse is upon us. You want out? Fine, then accept the rule of the unworthy.

I've come to learn
Whatever time I can find to spend

Taking flight into
Whatever light we bend

My student exhibition went great, but the department is falling apart. There's no interest in our study programme, a private uni has just opened a department like ours, but they're almost twice as cheap. Last year we had four new students, this year

only one candidate sits the entrance exam. Dear God, I thought 1991 was the worst shite that could possibly ever happen to me.

Jelena

Zadar, August 2006

Dear Mia,

A few days ago a ward chased me round the home with a knife, threatening to kill me first, then himself. That's the first time a child has attacked me since I've been doing this job. It's as if this institution were from the 19th century, and its problems from our times. The gap is vast. Everyone is unhappy, we and the kids alike. Interpersonal relations in the workplace have deteriorated, pathology abounds.

My love life – a disaster! It's incredible what a magnet for trouble I am. Nothing but married men or fucked up ones that I'd end up pushing through life. I feel as if someone pointed a finger at me and said, "Let's take the piss out of her again for a bit." It's been fifteen years since the madness started, and it feels as though I haven't moved a step forward.

Ana

[...]

What does dance mean to people? What does it give them? Pleasure? Relaxation? Escape from everyday problems, bad relationships, decaying marriages, unpaid debts? What does dance mean to me in December 1991? In a disco in Brussels, after a dinner and a visit to the European Commission headquarters?

Let's dance, put on your red shoes and dance the blues

As I set my mind and muscles free in ecstasy, intoxicated with alcohol and the music, every movement brings joy and pain at the same time. Every bang of the drum contracts and relaxes the heart. Every scrape across the guitar strings shrinks and expands my diaphragm. Each strike of a key on the keyboard freezes and thaws my jaw and my smile, each tap on the percussions wets and dries my palms.

Really, how?

How to twist one's hips, flail one's arms and legs, twerk one's bottom?

How to enjoy the lascivious gazes, accidental touches, flirting, smiles?

Let's sway

While color lights up your face

Let's sway

Sway through the crowd to an empty space

How, when they're sitting in a dank, windowless basement, counting the shells and gauging the distance of the impact sites from the house?

How, when they're sitting with their eyes lowered and their arms crossed? How, when every rustle scares them to death? A rustle near the basement is more terrifying than the shell that exploded nearest to the house, because it means soldiers may barge in, or people who look like soldiers, like those who entered our neighbour's house, tied him and his wife to chairs, tortured them and cut his ear off, or those who took away another neighbour of ours in his pyjamas in the middle of the night only for him to turn up dead in a ditch, those who demanded that my father admit that he was a chetnik, or those who waved a pistol round his head for several hours, pressed the cold barrel to his burning temple a million times, threatening to make him pay for the crimes committed by Serbs in the village of Škabrnja.

How, when my sister is begging father to finally say that he is indeed a chetnik, just to make them leave, take that gun barrel off his forehead? How, when she pleads with him in vain, as he repeats like an automaton, "I am a Serb, I am not a chetnik", and she slaps his face whilst the so-called soldiers are chuckling with gusto?

How, when Grandma is telling them, "Kids, my heart is breaking for Škabrnja, we're all humans, but those who did that are evil-doers, less than human. My folks have nothing to do with that, my daughter and my granddaughters are married to Croats".

How, when one of the two kids in uniforms is shoving her out of the way in disgust, shouting that those are not Croats but common traitors?

How, when my mother is sitting motionless on a sack of potatoes, staring blankly as if none of that were there including herself, no basement, no screaming, cursing daughter, no husband who keeps repeating monotonously that he isn't a chetnik, no mother who isn't afraid of her own death but is dying of fear for everyone else?

How?

Let's dance for fear

Your grace should fall

Let's dance for fear tonight is all

Zadar, November 1993

The Old Bridge in Mostar has been destroyed. We've become desensitised to the destruction of churches, mosques and graves. But the disappearance of that wonderful stone arc above the Neretva, the sixteenth-century masterpiece of Ottoman culture in the Balkans, momentarily startled me from the daze and numbness. I managed to feel anger again, but it was soon replaced by a feeling of hopelessness, just like when Dubrovnik was shelled.

I'm scared, Mia! I'm scared that nothing can be put together anymore. That no one can solve Rubik's cube anymore. As if all things were rearranged and no longer served their purpose. Imagine those three greenhorns crammed in a tank, aiming, shooting, cursing. As those ancient stones rent the sky, did they think about their childhood, their friends, girlfriends, walks across some other bridges?

Zlatá Praha! How many bridges connect the banks of the Vltava in Prague, have you walked across all of them yet? Ever since I received the postcard I've been imagining myself on Charles Bridge. I dream and I imagine, because when you have 200 deutschmarks to stretch, life soon turns to a reverie.

I've recently moved out of my family home and finally severed an invisible umbilical cord. Mum hoped I'd move out when I marry, but that doesn't seem about to happen.

An acquaintance got a scholarship and moved to New York, and I stepped in as a flat sitter. It's large, sunny, three bedrooms. The only downside is that it's on the eighth floor. I'm doomed to heights, I'll be staring the shells down.

Ana

Zrenjanin, November 1993.

I still haven't had, since I arrived from Prague, one of those days of total depression when I'm unable to utter more than a handful of words. But the familiar monotonous rhythm of life in my native city is re-establishing itself. I look on and let it, I know there's too little I can do to stop it. Although I've been saying this whole time I needed that step back so badly, I feel awful for spending all my money in Prague. My fridge is empty, I won't be able to buy cigarettes tomorrow, and I blew 120 dollars and 20 deutschmarks without batting an eye.

At the moment, Dad and I can only afford bread. But he will get his pension tomorrow, they'll print new money and the sheep will have just enough to graze to keep them from complaining.

Nobody is excited to hear about what wonderful time I had in Prague. They're almost glad I was late for Cave's concert. I ruined everyone's mood with my talk. Nobody asked me a single question about Prague. Some are waiting for their visas, some are going mental and just idle about, some sit in their gaffs till their eyes turn white, take drugs from time to time, shag young girls.

"Come back to Prague, I'll toss everyone and anyone out of my bed!" But he also said, "I can't tell you to come back for me", because, you see, he isn't "a marrying type".

I still haven't seen Dejan (I don't know why the bloody hell he didn't bring my stuff when he came to pick up his) and I must admit I'm queasy about the possible encounter. However certain some things may be, I don't feel confident at all. Being scared of the reactions of others is bad enough, fearing your own unpredictability is the worst.

Milica

As soon as I stepped into Marko's room I was engulfed in complete darkness. I felt Marko's presence, heard the rustle of the bed linen. But why is he lying in his bed in a pitch dark room at five in the afternoon? He does work night shift, but he's never slept till five.

"I've got some very sad news", from the darkness a voice came floating across the room to a petrified me at the door.

"Oh, god! Mum? Dad? Sister? Your mum? Your Dad?"

"No, no, not that! It's not the war! Frank Zappa died!"

"You're off your nut, you really are off your fucking nut!"

I leapt onto the bed, tried to find him in the dark by swinging my fists which he blocked in mid air, repeating in a hoarse voice, "It is sad news, you know how much I love his music!"

He put one earphone into my ear, pressed play on his Walkman (The Torture Never Stops), tangled up my hair, whilst Zappa's deep, raspy voice sent the convolutions of my brain back to Denmark in early '92, to my drunken phone call to him in the middle of the night when Slovenia and Croatia were recognised as independent states. After the incident in the parliament, when I returned to Aarhus I found a party at my house where I lived as a student. It didn't take long to convince me to join in. Around three in the morning, inebriated on Danish beer, I dialled Marko's number and for half a minute I sobbed into the receiver without uttering a single meaningful word. Terrified, he listed all the members of our families (in Belgrade he didn't have a telephone connection with Croatia), I squeaked:

"Nah, it's not that, Yugoslavia has fallen apart!"

"Mia, really, what the fucking hell is wrong with you? I live here, I should know. You scared the shit out of me, I thought one of ours got killed, fucking hell, you're off your nut..."

"But, will Croatia want us? Me, a Serb, you, a traitor?"

"That's our country", he reassured me, and I repeated till the credit on my calling card ran out:

"She is ours, but are we hers?"

Whose is the homeland, actually? Who may claim it thus? A character from Sándor Márai's novel, a musician fleeing Hungary in 1948 with his head stuck in the mud on the Austrian border, waiting for the right moment to be taken across to freedom, contemplated about homeland. It seemed to him there were several types of homeland. First they explained to him that there was a homeland of the gentlefolk, and then suddenly, overnight,

it belonged to the people. And as he smelt homeland's mud, he wondered what his homeland was, and, if it existed, why it had deserted him, and where it was now.

Belgrade, January 1994

We started the new year as billionaires. We walk with bags full of money, some with briefcases. The more zeros they add to the notes the faster they lose value. The highest value note, five hundred billion dinars, will buy you a hair band!!!

He's been abusing me again, we've broken up again, I'm afraid we'll get back together again.

The inflation this month is 60% daily, 2.3% per hour!!!

P.S. The Czechs are introducing visas for Serbs starting 15 January, 35 DEM. Cheers!

Jelena

[...]

I was sitting alone at the bar, waiting for Marko to clean up the place and close the till. I was empty and numb from the news I'd received from Zadar. Another house on my street blasted, another Serb family expelled.

*I'm crawling, I don't know where to or from
The centre of things from where everything stems
Is not where I belong
I have the city sickness growing inside me
So this is where I ran for freedom
Where I may not be free*

In my head, the news from Zadar collided with lyrics by Tindersticks who played at *Repre* that evening. Stuart A. Staples's delicate baritone didn't send a good signal to my neurons.

Black mini skirt, glossy black tights, tight black shirt, bright red lipstick, long red hair. Alone at the bar at dawn. To the drunken Englishman accompanied by a young Czech two barstools down, I must've looked like easy pickings. He had no idea I was waiting for my husband.

"Hey, you, come and sit next to me", he said brusquely, almost peremptorily.

"Leave me alone" was all I could and wanted to say to him, hoping it would suffice.

When he repeated the invitation four more times, louder each time, only to get up in the end and pull me closer forcefully, my insides churned up. I couldn't stand unwanted touching and pulling, something shifted in me, male hormones and émigré frustration got the better of me, I grabbed him by the throat and hissed through clenched teeth:

"When I say no, it means FUCKING NO, do you understand?"

I pushed him away. He was dumbfounded, he couldn't believe, I guess, that girls were capable of such roughness. But he hadn't got enough, he couldn't stop. How to swallow such a humiliation? He had to strike back, regain a sense of balance and superiority, in his own eyes, in front of others, and especially in front of me.

"Are you stupid, are you primitive, are you Yugoslav?"

Now, if only he hadn't gone for the *Yugoslav* thing! When I heard *stupid* and *primitive*, I just shrugged it off convinced I shouldn't pay that fool any mind. I was going to wait for Marko to finish, his embrace was going to deliver me from all the bad things, push out the news from Zadar, clear the fog in front of my eyes, ease my mind...

"I am not stupid, I am not primitive, but I am Yugoslav!"

I saw myself with a lit cigarette, walking up to him, screaming "I AM FUCKING YUGOSLAV" and pressing the burning cigarette on his lip.

"Yes, I am Yugoslav! My father is Serb from Croatia, my relatives are Croats, my husband is half Croatian half Slovenian, born in Bosnia, studied in Serbia. We are bloody Yugoslavs! Yes, yes, yes, I am Yugoslav. Satisfied now?"

As I was screaming and he was dousing his mouth first with coke then with water, our lads came running to see what was going on. At that moment the Czech youth approached me and asked me not to tell the short-fused Yugos that he was with the Englishman.

"It's ok, it's ok", I was calming him down, feeling sorry for both of us, knowing I would remember this episode of stepping out of my skin as one of the worst in my life. Fortunately, I didn't drag Marko into it, he heard nothing and peacefully tidied up in the back room girdled with his Walkman, his headphones on his ears.

As I stood there surrounded by revved up Yugos who couldn't wait to report to Marko his wife's feat, an Alice in Chains song, played by the DJ ritualistically at dawn, roared in my head.

*Down in a hole, feelin' so small
Down in a hole, losin' my soul
Down in a hole, feelin' so small
Down in a hole, outta control
I'd like to fly, but my
Wings have been so denied*

He finally emerged from the back room, I darted off to hug him as Sarajevans, Belgradians and Zagrebians filled his ears with their respective versions of the event. He gave me a look of sympathy and took me out into a cold Prague morning.

Word about the new method of putting out cigarettes went round quickly, and brought me fame and the honour of free entry at *Repre*, a wide smile and nod from the young bouncers at the entrance. The Englishmen had been thrown out headfirst from the club on a regular basis for pestering girls. Allegedly, after the encounter with me he became as meek as a lamb.

Tel Aviv, April 1994

I've just come back from night swimming. Night swimming deserves a quiet night. The sea, the offing, the aeroplanes on a night flight, the lights of the great beachfront hotels, the music in the distance – I'm in a bit of a saccharine mood. On top of that Kurt Cobain dies, and you had the tickets for the Prague show. Oh, well.

I don't have the passion anymore
it's better to burn out than fade away.

It's getting warmer every day here in Israel. Khamsin was blowing today, it's a wind from the Sahara desert, and summer is round the corner. I've started to work in the morning as a baby sitter at three places.

Here & now I have much the same problems with myself, but here & now it's much more difficult to escape from them and ignore them like I used to do in Zrenjanin, lethargic and tucked into the decay of all things. I want it all without sweat and graft.

To live in Israel? Fuck, I don't know yet. Although it's a decent option (of course, if I manage to do giyur), I still can't make up my mind.

Would Dad really come after me, as he said he would, because I'm not leaving him there alone. He asked for some books for learning Hebrew through the medium of Russian.

I feel miserably for everything that's been happening to me just because I happen to belong to a nation, although the media pressure here is lesser than in Europe. I, too, am fed up with casting that entire people as bad. I sobbed when a UK MP said in Parliament that Serbs were an "evil nation". Yet, I feel even more miserable about the things that some of my people do. I know, I know, it's not the people, it's the bad apples, but still, I can't escape the shame. I try to explain to myself that it's a generalisation, that there is no such thing as collective guilt, that I'm not to blame for anything, that lunatic makes all the decisions. But what to expect from an average European who has seen the footage from Trnopolje? A concentration camp!!! And now, two years later, when he's heard about all that business in Goražde. And the massacres of civilians in Sarajevo, at the market? This is insanity, but not in terms of how the media will present it, but in terms of the facts, of those cataclysmic images.

It's harder and harder to get a visa for a European country if you've got a Yugoslav passport. And it'll be a tremendous injustice if we don't see each other because of that. I still can't quite grasp why we have to live this way.

Milica

[...]

"Friday 13th at thirteen sharp, now, that's timing, well done", the nurse chirped as she helped me clamber up the gynaecologist's examination table.

"Down with superstition!" her red-haired colleague smiled as she spread my legs.

“Doctor set the date, not me. I mean, we agreed on it, hormones, eggs, it just turned out that way”, I was justifying myself without realising why.

A short-haired female embryologist entered accompanied by a senior specialist I hadn't seen before.

“Look at the screen, it's them, the two embryos, enlarged. And this is a tube we'll use to suck them in and place them into your womb. Just relax your muscles a little bit. They're not having it easy reaching you. Don't be afraid, it happens, if I don't manage like this, I'll take a special catheter, just a second. And they're in you!” they all shouted as one.

And I became one with the hated examination table, all bliss and happiness, a bit numb from the diazepam they administer every time before a procedure, overwhelmed with emotion. Tears were rolling down my face. I remembered the bus and the cobbled streets of Belgrade fifteen years prior, and the tears that rolled down my cheeks like raindrops down the windows of a dirty Line 53 articulated bus. Now they rolled like fresh raindrops down the petals of a rose, like a child down a water slide and into the sea, like the music that permeated my body as I swayed for hours on the dance floor of a Prague club where he worked as a bartender and a DJ, and I was so proud to have him as a husband, and he was so proud to have me as a wife.

“Easy, now, sit up a bit, we'll switch you over to the other table. Lie on your stomach carefully, rest for two hours, give them a chance to nestle,” said the senior specialist stroking my hand.

I thought, “This is the exact opposite of the stuck up fellow at the welcoming meeting who can't look you in the eye and shake your hand right and proper”.

“I don't think we've met. I'm Dr Černý, just so you know who to blame if we fail.”

Černý is the Czech for black. So, we had Dr Black performing embryo transfer on Friday 13th 13:13 AM. My goodness, is this a bad horror film? Or one of my nightmares? As for grey-headed Senior Specialist Dr Černý, he was forgiven there and then on account of the warmth in his eyes, compassion in his voice and his firm handshake. I was feeling the bliss of the delicate condition, at least for the time being, as the two were still in me trying to nest in my womb.

“*Lost my time, lost my place in sky blue*”, sang Peter Gabriel. Before I walked into the transfer room, where Marko wasn't allowed, he gave me a Discman, to listen to the music he'd selected for me as I lay on my stomach, as my womb absorbed the embryos.

Sky blue, I am tired of all this travelling, so many miles away from home, I keep moving to be stable, free to wander, free to roam.

Every word stuck into my body, I thought my embryos could feel them, too, that Gabriel was singing to us and us only. My lips moved to mouth ma-ma, maaa-maaaa.

I was 41 years old, lying on my stomach at a fertility clinic in a suburb of Prague, naked from the waist down, with earbuds in my ears, crying and calling for my mother, trying to become pregnant. There was a woman lying next to me in the same position whom the diazepam had already taken to the realm of dreams. Gabriel sailed across sky blue, whilst my pillow absorbed tears with dissolved mascara, and I baby-talked to the embryos, begging them to nestle in me.

What's the matter with you, c'mon, let's go, slip away...

Peter Gabriel turned into David Bowie. As I was sinking, I thought, he was always good at choosing music, that's why everyone loved are house parties in Belgrade. British tins with a beef head on them, Danish Feta cheese, red wine from Kosovo...

...don't forget to keep your head warm. Watching all the world and war torn, how I wonder where you are...

[...]

Tel Aviv, April 2007

Travelling tomorrow. Paris. First time. He and I. I don't know if it's the trip, or if I dreamt something (and forgot it, as usual) and the feeling decanted into waking life... Ever since I woke up this morning I've been thinking about departures, our (and not only our) never-ending farewells. Do you remember the last one? At the Prague Airport, we cried so much. First you, then me, then Amy, little darling, then the poor woman at the passport control. Marko found himself caught up in yet another female drama.

I'm thinking about what to take and how to prepare for a brief romance in the Marais. What to wear if it rains? And what if Paris is just an exit strategy? A romance wants a suitable end.

I'm thinking about endings and partings, about departures. At times my life still looks like a film starring me as me. Not very credible. You remember our conversations during our walks in the Jewish Quarter and Paris Street in Prague? When we shopped for varicoloured pan pots? What if we'd never left? What if we'd never dispersed every which way like we did? What if we'd never had one country one day and woken up in another the next day, and moved on? What if, what if, what if.

What would our lives have been like? If I'd never married a foreigner, would I have ever left? If it hadn't been for the war, would I be living in Serbia now?

Would you be living in Croatia, or would you have stayed in Belgrade? Has all of this really been just a coincidence?

My Israeli ID card still reads: Place of Birth: Yugoslavia. A country that is no more.

My feet are itching again. Maybe it's time to be on the move once more.

You'll be getting a postcard from Père Lachaise, Proust, and, unavoidably, Jim.

"This is the end, beautiful friend..."

Milica

