

Marek Technik

The Warning

summary

The tragicomic dialogue between the two female protagonists – a mother and daughter – is, at times, characterized by unfortunate misunderstandings and, at others, is akin to a violent reaction of two substances in a lab experiment. The story touches upon a number of topics, from anxiety caused by the inevitable end and the desire to finally meet it through generational conflict to the clash between faith and rationality.

Karolína Mapalová is an engineer. She graduated from university with honors and is now head of a heat pump development department. Both her personal and professional life are guided by individualistic and purely rational thinking. Her husband recently succumbed to a fatal illness and the rational thinker finds herself in a state of agitation – shaken by the death of a loved one, she examines and reassesses her entire existence. She has no close relatives left apart from her thirteen-year-old son, who she finds it difficult to connect with, and her seventy-two-year-old mother, Jarka Kohoutová, whose husband died years ago and who, unlike her daughter, seeks solace mainly in her faith. However, it seems to Karolína that her mother's faith centers around listening to self-proclaimed prophets and uncritically accepting all conspiracies warning of an impending apocalypse, which the internet is overflowing with, as Karolína quickly finds out.

The two women have more in common than meets the eye – loneliness, for one. Despite the numerous conversations they have (not only) with one another, they both stay closed off from the outside world, living their melancholic lives oceans away from others. As is symptomatic of their entire conflict – characterized by repeated failed attempts at communication – they constantly sail in opposite directions, propelled by their nature. And yet they genuinely care about each other.

While her mother relies on empathy and experience-based intuition to shape her passionate Christian spirituality, Karolína likes to rely on reason. Although the two women were once close, lately haven't been seeing eye to eye. Karolína sees her mother as a strong and inspiring woman who, thought intellectually inferior, has been a formative role model in her life since childhood, especially with her sensitivity and distinctive way of thinking. Jarka's daughter

is all the more affected when she witnesses how foolishly her mother falls for the simplest manipulations. As Jarka navigates her way through a dense network of underground websites, Karolína gets the impression that any manipulative freak is more of an authority to her mother than her smart, beloved daughter.

Karolína could simply shrug it off and leave the aging woman to her essentially harmless pursuits, but that would render their lifelong relationship a feeble illusion. Her seemingly meaningful existence starts crumbling to pieces, proving to be nothing but a mirage, and, in her period of mourning, this revelation is unexpectedly dark and destructive. But perhaps Karolína can take control of the situation – by becoming one of the creators of the very “false stories” constraining her and her mother’s lives, for instance...

The narrator takes advantage of a wide spectrum of registers, dressing up tragedy as comedy and vice versa. Focalizing the thoughts of the rational Karolína, the narrator works their way through a rubble of thought concepts, piles of detailed observations and rational analyses that, despite the best efforts of those involved, usually result in outbursts of destructive emotions. On top of that, the heroine is suspected of succumbing to a ‘devilish temptation’ of sorts that manifests itself in proud rationality – rationality that, once without its footing, wanders alone through a desert full of phantoms and sensory illusions.

The book is structured around the two women’s everyday lives – each chapter represents a new month, with the entire narrative spanning two years. Most of the scenes take place indoors, and the story’s dynamic is shaped by an introspective look into the minds of the two heroines. What is important, however, is not only what words the characters use, but also how they subtly avoid the blind spots in their vision.

– **Marek Technik**