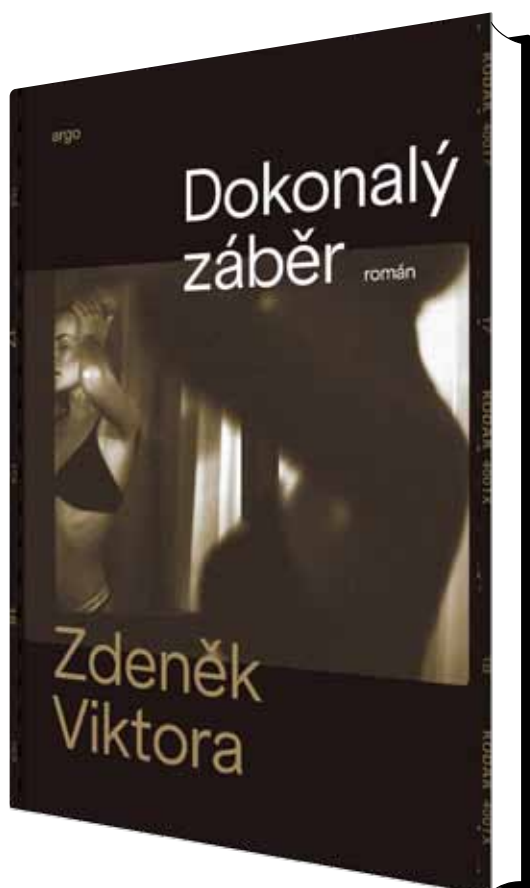


The Perfect Shot

by **Zdeněk Viktora**



Four people search for love, only to fall for the images they have created of one another

Tomáš is a screenwriter who has spent his life believing in the romantic myth of one true love. Alice dreams of building a family in which everyone can feel safe. Leoš searches for the perfect image of a woman, one he can capture like a photograph. Nina wants something simpler: to finally be seen for who she truly is.

Each has their own idea of what love should be. But they gradually discover that they may be in love not with one another, but with the images they have created.

The title links the novel's photography and film motifs to its characters' attempts to capture an idealized image of love and hold on to fleeting moments.



foto © Author's Archive

Zdeněk Viktora is a Czech screenwriter, director, and author. Born in Prague in 1976, he first studied journalism at Charles University before going on to study screenwriting and dramaturgy at FAMU. During his studies, he completed an internship in Paris and attended New York University's Tisch School of the Arts as a Fulbright scholar. He has written numerous screenplays for film and television, working on both original projects and commercial series such as *Ordinace v růžové zahradě*, *Modrý kód*, *Cesty domů*, *1. MISE*, and *Polda*. He has also directed the feature films *Raluca* and *Miss Hanoi*.

The Perfect Shot

Zdeněk Viktora

Summarised by Laura Potomová

The new novel by screenwriter Zdeněk Viktora takes as its subject the promises and pitfalls of love. Set in contemporary Prague, *The Perfect Shot* tells the story of two couples— Tomáš and Alice, and Leoš and Nina, each equipped with distinct values, desires and expectations— as they navigate the tribulations of modern relationships. What emerges with stark realism in this erotic romance novel is the striking impermanence of human arrangements. Love figures as something of a limited resource, an elusive composite consisting of the binding roles and blinding illusions we build for and impose on one another.

The story of Tomáš and Alice paints a portrait of the couple crumpling under the cumulative pressures of ordinary life. Career-driven and hard-working, in the spirit of optimism characteristic of the post-revolutionary years, the two are initially attracted to each other's ambition. But after the birth of two daughters, the blissful idyll of their youthful romance dissipates, replaced by the everyday (often contradictory) demands of family and work. In the sobriety of their newfound disillusionment, anger, alienation and resentment grows. When people change, and ideals rot, the novel seems to ask, what happens to love?

For Leoš and Nina, it is not so much love as sexual attraction, momentarily mistaken for love, that animates their relationship. Leoš, a stock market analyst and recent divorcee, meets the Ukrainian Nina, who moved to Prague with her son before the start of the war. They fall into an uneasy romance, flirting uncomfortably with dynamics of dominance and submission. Even under the lustre of their extravagant travels— a series of romantic getaways across Europe— a dissonance emerges in their respective expectations of one another. When Nina eventually recognises her imprisonment within the role of a compliant, self-negating woman, she stands up to the arrangement, steering the story towards one of female empowerment.

The arcs of both relationships are narrated, notably, in the present tense, conveying a sense of immediacy that is distinctly cinematic— it is, after all, the tense of screenwriting, Viktora's native form. And indeed, the influence of the author's profession (as a screenwriter, producer and director) is evident in the novel. In the absence of a linear narrative, short scene-like chapters capture crucial episodes in each relationship; close third-person narration shifts between multiple points of view. Flashbacks— aptly signaled by the use of past tense— constantly assail the present, revealing romantic histories and personal memories, and exposing each character's tendency to linger in the past, often to the detriment of the present.

It seems to be part of the novel's agenda to articulate our fear of impermanence and our dread of forgetting, which gives way, in our technological age, to a constant desire to freeze, preserve and return to life's beautiful moments. In wavering endlessly between the present and the past, *The Perfect Shot* is thus caught in a waft of nostalgia— for lost selves and their place in a fading utopia of love.