

Summer of Lost Souls

by **Kristián Dlouhý**



Three lives poised between reality and illusion, where the past may never truly end

A former teacher is drowning in despair and alcohol, haunted by the bleakness of his past. Then a chance encounter with a mysterious woman draws him completely under her spell. Can he discover where she came from and who, or what, she really is?

Kiri, a young woman from India, begins seeing things she could not possibly be seeing. As the boundary between reality and illusion begins to blur, she finds herself questioning whether it was ever real in the first place. Can she still trust her own mind?

Meanwhile, Tadeáš's parents are suddenly confronted with the unthinkable, a situation they could never have anticipated, let alone prepared for. Three lives, three ways of seeing a world that may not be what it seems. And what if someone walking among us has been here before...?

Kristián Dlouhý was born at the tail end of the millennial generation. His lifelong companions are literature, animals – dogs in particular – and fragments of philosophical thought. He always dreamed of making a living through writing and eventually succeeded, though unfortunately not by writing books. Depending on his mood, he gets through difficult times with either self-pity or self-deprecating humor. He is terrified of rats, bottomless chasms, and his own vulnerability. Besides reading, writing, dogs, and philosophers, he loves the mountains. He is particularly fond of Mount Koppel and hopes to visit Transylvania one day.



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The Summer of Lost Souls

Kristián Dlouhý

Summarised by Laura Potomová

In the beginning was a word, a word familiar to all, and the word was "mama."

The Summer of Lost Souls is a slow-building atmospheric debut by Czech author Kristián Dlouhý. Set in the fictional village of Mnichova Ves, just beyond reach of metropolitan Prague, it follows three separate but overlapping narratives as they unfold over the course of a single summer. The stories are fablelike, and marvelously strange, embedded in a vibrant, eclectic landscape combining Christian symbolism, Indian mythology, and pagan motifs. Through dynamic narration, with lightness and humour, The Summer of Lost Souls deals deftly in subjects as current as human isolation, and the difficulty of finding belonging and acceptance - even as it initiates readers into the enchanting world of Czech magical realism.

The novel teems with the mystical spirit of Czech country life, its sleepy serenity, smalltown prejudices and psychological crises. From a steep hill, in the still summer heat, a quaint village square with a handsome church surveys the town. Old houses stand amid winding streets, horse pastures, ponds, and fields with sheep. Statues of saints dot the scene, and a forest envelops it - both religion and nature emerge in the novel as powerful forces, shaping the characters' lives in unexpected ways. There is in this world - as in the lightly sentimental, at times nostalgic, tones of Dlouhý's prose - the distinct sense of one stepping into the country's distant, hidden past. Only the sudden intrusions of modern technology serve as reminders of its contemporary setting.

Along with the milieu, the fantastical elements of the stories also imbue the novel with its mystical quality. Characters stand on the cracking ground between fiction and reality; they occupy the land of imagination, visions and dreams. Throughout the novel, magical forces repeatedly obstruct the flow of human reason. Transfigurations of the ordinary shed doubt on underlying sources of truth. Like the characters, the reader, too, becomes implicated in the omnipresent question: What is fantasy and what is real? Through its endless contesting of the rational, The Summer of Lost Souls firmly insists that - in the words of one character - "life without mystery would be boring."

For Julie and Štefan Melichar, the mystery comes from a bizarre religious predicament: the suspicion that their son is a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. When at the beginning of the novel concern about their son's true identity tears through their domestic life, a rift opens up between husband and wife. Against the backdrop of Štefan's cynical and pragmatic attitude, the once-rational Julie emerges as defensive, reverent, blinded by a religious obsession that begins to endanger the entire family. This is the story of motherhood and madness, and the extremes a mother will go to to "protect" her son.

Kiri Tkalova is a young child uprooted from familiar surroundings. Having moved from India to Prague, then again to Mnichova Ves, she finds herself caught between cultures and religions, homesick and displaced, snared in a crisis of belonging. Upon her arrival to the town, she is assailed by extraordinary visions that keep slipping from grasp, hazy and ancient "like memories of a dream." Doubts begin to creep in: are the visions real? Or are they merely figments of a child's imagination? Afraid that she is going mad, Kiri sets out to save her soul - until an accident brings her unexpected peace.

Eliáš is a disillusioned young teacher, who spends his days in a drunken pit of nostalgic melancholy. Aimless and anguished, he is mourning his past relationship and his lost ambition as a writer when he happens to meet the alluring and ethereal Anabel. Falling instantly under her spell, he follows her into a world of magic and mystery, where pagan myths seem to be coming to life. From amidst his confused infatuation, will he discover the girl's true identity?

The Summer of Lost Souls braids together this trilogy of stories - and in fact, it is through this braided form, as much as the mystery of the individual threads, that the novel succeeds in captivating its readers. Dlouhý skillfully cuts between the three disparate plots, sometimes in short intervals, sometimes in longer ones, switching between them at points of tension to drive narrative suspense. The result is a compulsively readable

novel full of mystery and surprise, with parallels and overlaps unexpectedly emerging as the stories begin to converge.