

**Jana Bodnárová**

Translated by Jonathan Gresty

### **Winter of 1951**

mummy no longer reads books. everything has lost its solidity. even memories.

I am one and a half. diphtheria. fever. the doctor is drinking wine in our bedroom. there is an acrid smell. in a high mirror I can see it: a white man undoing the pearl buttons on a woman's blouse. untying laces. the heavenly veil. through her petticoat he is stroking a woman's breasts. kisses on silk. isn't it my mummy?!

I'm behind the mirror. in the heat of the night.

now an ambulance. the doctor is holding me in his hands, not mummy. they are taking me along bumpy roads to a town under the mountains.

in the hospital the nuns will see if the child survives. which she does. and a first memory takes root in the darkness of my brain. food for Lacan.

### **“We are with you all day“**

/slogan on a hoarding next to a crossroads/

and who stays with us at night? whose is that scent above faces woken up in the blackness!?  
just before daybreak.

at this moment Morpheus is roaming the clinics and white operation theatres, scattering hypnotics into mouths turning blue. “Life is a killer. Memento mori!“ murmurs the bald-headed one with bitter breath.

Mor-phe-usssss! stood at the end of a long tunnel.

and yet: one girl dancing barefoot. on a threadbare carpet in the living-room.

after midnight the creamcake Christmas Eve scent dispersed.

and in the moonlight a girl was dancing barefoot. all by herself. before the transit of her existence.

### **Aeon**

Jung drew a diagram of It in us. it looks like a chemical formula. of a diamond, for instance. a bottomless soul yet you are caught in a net of reason?

### **Inexplicable**

the murmur reaches me. is it the frozen lakes cracking? the wind? a faraway town? the first signs of deafness? waters beneath the peaks of childhood? ghosts dipping their feet in the frozen waves? dreams which I have dreamt? words of reproof from the people I've upset? or simply the voice of Silence. confiding in me.

### **Childhood town**

chestnuts. avenues. green light. captive town. sultry. dusty. snowed under.

with churches of rival Catholics and Protestants. snow-covered synagogue. cakeshop with mincemeat tarts and Russian tea. glass discs and the spirit of Dean Martin in the plush cafe of the highland town. at nights wolves howling at the moon. there's a gale blowing in the mountains. sobs and screams in the driving wind. who is it calling to me? that highland town. a white pearl, smeared and lost in the litters of my life.

### **Kharkivian**

orange in parks. "*jesień już Panie, a ja nie mam domu* (it's already autumn, Sir, and I have no house)". brick houses with verandahs. bones of factories. pipes of wind from the river. swings. wild boyssmashing bottles. cut wrists. Khlebnikov wrote poems on any old scraps. from the Pushkin statue Yesenin yelled out poems to a crowd. to an irate crowd. that drunken giant Mayakovsky was dragged from beneath a billiard table in the writers' community.

blood, hunger, chaos tugged the flags. “*veter podul v sosednem sadu. v duchach prašol, kak charašo!* (the wind blew in the neighbour’s orchard. it changed into a scent, how good!)“

a yellow leaf has fallen on my shoulders. ...the fire of the age is spreading into one veins...tell the sisters...again everything is different. only the orange of the parks remains. and the mixed echoes of the itinerant poets.

### **China rose**

today I will fall asleep on the leaves of a China rose. there will be no shooting outside. no cars will explode. I’ll see no shadows of lost children. there’ll be no pigeons and stink coming out of skips. the phone won’t ring. no dry voice will tell me mum ran away again only to wander up and down a sandbank. they chased her off, revived her for a moment to the smells of disinfectants and litanies of crazy old women. today I will fall asleep on the leaves of a China rose. hypnotic rain will dance hypnotically to the rhythm of cosmic drums.

### **A spring day at the Košice faculty**

a young Polish woman is lecturing about Bond girls. vampish women from cinema noir.

thin hair, an emaciated body. the very opposite of those femmes fatales she is breaking down into component parts.

earlier her colleague was lecturing about the paranoia of American governments. he wanted to confuse the emaciated fairy from the city suburb:

“how is it that the heroines of cinema noir could have sex with men they didn’t love?“

“because to love and to have sex is not the same; it’s just not the same,“said the girl without hesitating.

”aah!“ and the American clicked his fingers. and for a moment wondered whether that Slavic wraith might not be worth the effort after all.

**Jana Bodnárová** (1950, Jakubovany) is a Slovak writer, poet, playwright and author of books for children. Originally an art historian, since the mid-1990s she has devoted herself to the creation of performance video poetry. Bodnárová has been translated into several European languages, Hindi, Persian, Japanese and Arabic. She lives in Košice.

**Jonathan Gresty** (1965) is originally from the UK but has been living in Slovakia since 1992. He is a lecturer at the University of Prešov where he teaches courses in translation and creative writing. Amongst the books he has translated are the novels *The Camp of Fallen Women* (*Tábor padlých žien*) by Anton Baláž and published in 2016 by the International Foundation Forum of Slavic Cultures and *Necklace/Choker* (*Náhrdelník/Obojok*) by Jana Bodnárová (to be published in 2021 by Seagull Books). He is also a novelist in his own right and his first novel *Cudzincov kabát* (*The Foreigner's Coat*) is due to be published in Slovak by Ikar publishers in summer 2021.