

Gabriela Babnik

INTIMATELY

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After Father died, Mother came on the bus. Her hands were full of translucent polythene bags packed with wedges of bread rolls, pot handles and gold and silver butter wrappings showing through the plastic when you looked at them from afar. What she brought would last a day or two at the most.

Janina could not remember when she had last looked her in the face. She thought about her mother more in terms of colour combinations; beige shoes, white winter jacket, blonde hair, so sometimes it seemed that she was invisible. Were it not for her eyes confusing her – Fadul pointed this out to her, ‘your mother is like a wild animal,’ he had said, his comment bewildering and perhaps even upsetting Janina – she might have imagined her mother was an intangible spirit moving through unfamiliar spaces.

Every so often Janina would ask Mother how she was feeling, how she was coping with the time she had left, and Mother replied, her back turned towards her, that she was fine. A dark pinkish light fell through the window of the rented apartment and all of a sudden Janina’s hand was in Ervin’s hair. The boy had become something of a buffer between them. At first mother kept saying, ‘ugh, Fadul stinks, I never liked him and I never will,’ but they soon began to collect Ervin from kindergarten together. They would sit on the plush seats and it was a while before Fadul stuck the key in the ignition and started the engine, the raindrops thumping, trickling down the front windscreen. When she asked Fadul how the drive to the kindergarten had worked out, he replied, ‘Nothing, we each sat in our seat, looking in different directions.’

In fact Janina had the impression that for Mother Father’s death was a form of atonement. That now that Father was no longer standing behind her, laughing inwardly, she had grown invisible, perhaps even angelic wings. Now it was she who controlled the house and her own life. No longer did she keep shaking her head, saying, ‘I can spend my money as I wish,’ now she just piled everything she bought in

the shops onto the table. And there was the time she took Ervin to the park and some man had refused to stop the roundabout. ‘You should have seen him,’ she said. ‘Ervin stood by the carousel, waiting anxiously for the man to stop it, but the rascal just kept turning it. When I approached him and said that there were also other children in the playground, he raised his hands in the air, hissing at me that he had nothing to say to me, that I was not at his level. I asked him what level this might be. Most probably the level of idiots.’ Janina placed her hands back on the glass table. Never before had her mother looked people in the face, at least Janina had never noticed her doing so. Never before had she so openly defended Ervin. In her argument in the park the essence remained unspoken; the man whom she had called a rascal had left Ervin waiting because of his wiry hair and dark skin. There were occasions when children spat at him, shouted ‘shoe-polish-face’ at him or at best ‘African.’ Taken aback, Mother came rushing home, even forgetting in her fluster to zip up Ervin’s jacket and put on his hat. Almost sobbing, outraged, she would start describing the scene – as if she expected Janina to go out there and beat up the kids. But all Janina did was stroke Ervin’s hair and ask him whether he was hungry.

‘Mum, I will be away for a few days. I need to go to Mexico to a book fair. The publishing house is sending me,’ she said.

Mother nodded. Janina glanced at the bags on the floor, spilling into the room. ‘Fadul will look after Ervin but, if you can, come and see them. You can do that, can’t you?’

Mother nodded again. Scents of the food cooking on the stove were spreading through the room. Onion fried meat with grated carrot and a spoon of tomato paste reminded Janina of her childhood. Fadul did not like Mother’s cooking. Recently he had started mixing tuna and pumpkin seed oil into the cooked pasta she would bring in one of the plastic bags, tied at the top with a rubber band, inflating with the heat.

‘Darling, Grandma made something special for you today. Janina, get the plates ready. You can have some too.’

Janina rolled her eyes. The smell of the cooking meat mixed with what she had at the tip of her tongue. She had thought for days about whether to tell Mother about Veronika’s phone call, but decided not to say anything. When she had mentioned the call to Fadul he shrugged his shoulders. ‘So, your sister needs money, who doesn’t?’

Fadul appeared from the room. The room in which they slept, stared at the flickering TV screen, took off their socks and left them lying about on the floor for days, and most of all, where they read in the timid light. For a moment Janina thought that he, more than Mother, was as someone in mourning. Water dripped from his hair, eyebrows. He had just completed his daily prayer, his thoughts now returning to them. 'How was work today?' he asked gently, as if he didn't know that her job was a compromise for Janina. Something she had never hoped for, which she put off but eventually agreed to *because we always chose the lesser evil*. In the mornings, as she woke up and her short-sighted eyes registered that pinkish light, inevitably a futile pursuit as Fadul used the windows to hang up his leather jackets and even her grey-brown pleated dress bought in the second-hand shop, she would tell herself that all this was for Ervin and for Fadul, of course. She could only keep both of them together if she earned some money. The illusion of their family was more attenuated by the day, but, at least for Janina, still existed.

'Bring a plate for Fadul too,' Mother said suddenly.

Before Father's death the sentence would have lingered in the air, transformed into a full stop and only then go on to compose a wider picture. Janina looked at her man who had come from beyond the sea. She had not called him, he had come on his own. But now, as he sat on the chair, looking at Janina with his piercing, large, dark eyes, she thought that it must all be some kind of fate. Fadul had once called her at work and told her to hurry home as there was a flood. He had offered himself to the neighbours to remove the old plaster from the walls of the flat below them that was being renovated. 'Water running like hell, the neighbour below will go ballistic...' he gasped down the line. 'There must be a valve somewhere in the cellar, find it and close it down!' Janina shouted in panic into the phone. 'It doesn't work. I think it is best if you come home.' Janina wanted to scream at him that he destroyed anything he touched but later, when she did get home, and there was no sign of water anywhere, just Fadul, covered in dust, who had pulled her into the darkest corner of the flat and adeptly got rid of her underwear, she thought that it was the other way round. It was Fadul who had brought balance into her life.

'Hmmm, swells nice,' said Fadul, stressing and exaggerating so that even Ervin laughed at Daddy's funny pronunciation.

When Janina's mother ranted and raved about their wedding, all he had said was, 'Wait and see – she will be the first to run about after our kids.' At the time

Janina was preoccupied with Father and Veronika, two chess figures she at the time believed were crucial, though she was later proved wrong. ‘Whenever I think of the show your family made because of us, well, because of me, I want to laugh,’ Fadul said when, exhausted from making love, they embraced in the room that was meant to be a bedroom, overlooking the abandoned garden. ‘I called you because I remembered how funny your father was when he said he did not want to see you again. How he yelled that he would not allow this nigger to double cross him, how he had offered me work and I was all haughty about it. How I did not have the right, I really didn’t...’ The avalanche of words was interrupted by laughter, the high-pitched, squeaky laughter of a young boy that made Janina laugh along with Fadul. ‘After you refused to wear the work overalls he told me that he was done with me, that he did not want to see me again, not even on his death bed,’ Janina remembered and put her hand on Fadul’s thigh. She knew that their laughter resounded out into the corridor and that the wind spread it across the courtyard but she didn’t care. It was now too late for many things. Too late also to return to the publishing house after their lovemaking, too late to patch things up with her sister Veronika. It was not too late, though, to look Mother in the face.

‘Mum, sit down, I’ll do it...’

For a while the woman in beige did not want to show herself. Janina knew that her mother could be attentive and gentle despite hiding all that was sensitive and vulnerable inside her behind the dimples on her face; an eternal fear that she would, were anyone to touch her, collapse and crumble into dust.

Then Ervin suddenly jumped from his chair. ‘I’ll sit in your lap and you can feed me,’ he said to Janina, thus freeing up his seat for his grandmother. Before Mother dropped what she was doing and joined the family meal, she looked through the window. It occurred to Janina that in profile her mother was still beautiful.

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Janina had been working at the publishing house for a while. Nothing special. She edited around twenty books a year, although recently the number had gone up a little and she would return home later and later, at five, six, sometimes even seven o’clock. It meant she could tolerate Fadul’s outbursts more easily. She once returned home late, darkness already appearing beyond the windows, although with those faded

patches of snow that were promising a thaw into spring, and called out her usual ‘darlings?’ She put her key on the shelf and slowly unbuttoned her coat, then, as there was no answer, shouted louder, almost waking up the sleeping Ervin. He was lying face down in the middle of the double bed, his mouth pressed against the pillow and droplets of sweat on his forehead. She stroked him but he didn’t stir. Fadul’s phone lay on the table, his jacket carelessly thrown across the sofa, his shoes, as usual, on the doormat. To start with, as she stepped into the empty flat, Janina thought that he was praying in the bedroom, he often kneeled on the rug droning to himself, withdrawn, detached from the world; but when he did not return until well past midnight, she cuddled up to Ervin. Occasionally the boy mechanically reached across to her with his hand, she covered them both with the blanket and closed her eyes in order to forget that Fadul was living a parallel life, one that excluded her and Ervin.

‘Janina, there’s someone on the phone for you,’ the editor said, his abdomen leaning into her office, feet still out in the corridor. He looked more like someone who belonged to the countryside than the publishing house, perhaps even the forest, where she imagined him chopping wood and driving it with his horses or tractor to a nearby village; perhaps that was what he had done in a previous life, Janina thought, pressed the button on her answering machine and said in a stiff singsong voice, ‘Hello, how can I help you?’ This formal manner of hers made her appear arrogant to her colleagues at the publishers, though the word does not remotely describe anything that she was. Most people at the office knew that she lived with a black man, even how they met, and of course that they had a son, but she never shared any details with them. Even the morning when Fadul returned from somewhere, exhausted and crumpled as if he had slept in some strange bed, she behaved as if things were as they should be.

‘It’s me, Veronika.’

‘Excuse me?’ Janina asked despite instantly recognizing the voice. A deep, manly voice with a velvety residue that wanted to make an impression on those it was addressing.

‘I would not call you if it was not urgent.’ Janina took a deep breath. She and her sister had not spoken in three years. They had argued over some incomprehensible matter which they had both long forgotten. All they did remember was swearing that they would forget each other existed. Janina, who was more easy-going, did so in no time, as she waited for the green light at the zebra crossing, as she drained the pasta or

as she looked across to the neighbour's half-finished terrace. Veronika, older and more determined, approached it more systematically.

'Last time you didn't even want to know me,' Janina said and rummaged through her handbag with her free hand. She suddenly felt she needed to moisturize her lips and thus gain some advantage over the one who was calling and had already thought out their conversation beforehand.

'You mean at the funeral? I was in a rush.'

Janina knew that her sister was making excuses and that she had also prepared these in advance. She knew from Mother that her sister had lost her job at the restaurant a while back, the restaurant was closed after the woman owner developed widespread cancer, so there was absolutely no reason why her sister would have been hurrying anywhere. After the funeral Janina had sat on the bench breastfeeding Ervin and various relatives stood around her as if wanting to protect her from the spring breeze, so she had barely noticed Veronika's silhouette as she, face firmly fixed on the ground, marched towards the exit. She was still a strong figure and still blamed others for her own lack of self-confidence.

'How did you even get my phone number?' Janina asked her sternly. She finally managed to locate the lip-gloss in her handbag.

'Mother told me.'

Janina decided that it would be best to wait to see where this phone call was going. Not say anything, just wait. Fadul had taught her that. As she lay in bed, she thought that *she meant something different to him than he did to her*, for a long time upset her so much she trembled, then she curled up against Ervin and fell asleep. In the morning she tried to behave as usual towards Fadul, as if she had not even noticed his absence, but as she shut the fridge door it was as if a electricity surged through her and she could not resist asking, 'Were you at an orgy or what last night?' Fadul looked at her with almost pity in his eyes and then said, 'Before you start accusing you could have first enquired.' Janina leant against the kitchen sideboard, lifted the mug she was holding to her face, as if she was thinking about something although her head was quite empty. She then laughed in panic, 'Now you'll tell me that you were stopped by the police when you took out the garbage. And because you did not have proof of abode with you, they arrested you?' Fadul also grinned, exposing the yellow stains on his teeth. 'How did you know?' Janina moved away and went to the bathroom to have a shower. Drying herself off with a towel still damp from the day

before, she put cream on her legs. She knew that Fadul was lying although the problem was not so much the lie but that she had no access into his world. What also continued to hurt was that she could not confide in anyone.

‘What is it you want from me?’ Janina said suddenly.

‘I was hoping that enough time has passed,’ Veronika was almost begging down the line.

‘Time for what?’

‘You see, I wouldn’t like the whole thing to be dragged through the courts.’

Janina smiled inwardly, realized that she was in fact ashamed of this smile and to distract herself from this shame she held the receiver between her face and her shoulder, applying the shiny gloss to her lips. Fadul did not like to kiss her when she wore lipstick. He would say to her that lipstick signals to a man *desire me, but even more works as a kind of shield*. In the winter months he almost begged her to allow her hair in her armpits to grow, burying into it, saying that only there was her true scent.

‘Veronika, listen, I understand that you lost your job, I understand that you have a family, but my hands are tied.’ Janina had found herself a lawyer even before Father’s death. In fact it was Fadul who advised her to do so. ‘You are entitled to your compulsory portion,’ he said and when he said it she observed his lips. He was the kind of man who fills a room when he enters and at the same time one who stood for too long in front of the mirror. Janina even had the impression of something too feminine about him but he just burst out laughing whenever she mentioned it, so she now chose to stay silent whenever they touched upon the theme.

‘But Father left it all to me.’

‘Congratulation,’ Janina said mockingly although Veronika had never had any sense for such linguistic nuances. She had married the first man who came along, arranged with him a flat in their parents’ house, given birth to a son, cooked and later worked as a barwoman in a joint owned by her husband’s brother and a few other stakeholders, and in the evenings when she returned home, reeking of the bar, her swollen feet on the coffee table, she had sat in front of the TV. Janina wondered how, with all the space her sister now had around her, no longer having to fight with her for the attention of their parents, Veronika handled her anxiety, within which she relieved her accumulated surplus energy and that had threatened to turn against her ever since they were children.

‘Mother said I should discuss it with you,’ Veronika eased off and Janina thought that this was probably not in her sister’s pre-prepared scenario.

Janina remembered the photograph of her and Veronika taken in their parents’ bedroom. Veronika in flannel pyjamas and bob haircut, and she, Janina, in a tracksuit that she most probably went to bed in. She would read long into the night, at some point mostly comics, and would finally forget to get undressed before falling asleep. They both looked happy in that photo. They had the world before them and could, of course, not have imagined the dark shadow that would come between them, one that Janina believed was not so much their own fault as that of their parents for not sitting them down at the table and discussing matters.

‘I don’t know what to say to you. We had to know that it would come to this. And Father too, I don’t know what he was thinking? That I would vanish into thin air, that...?’ Her voice hysterical, precisely at that moment the graphic designer appeared at the door waving a sheet of paper as if it was a flag. Janina, not wanting her family conversation to become public, covered the receiver with her hand and stared at the designer, trying to figure out from her face whether she could continue the conversation with Veronika, as if the designer could have known when she began to exist in a different realm, one beyond her family. She even thought of saying something to Veronika beyond the limits of normal decency but all she would be doing was prove to her that the anger and perhaps even the offence this exclusion had caused had not yet subsided. ‘We’ll speak later, I have work now,’ she whispered into the phone. She emphasised the word ‘work’ demonstrating to her elder sister that now was not the time for her ‘third-class’ position in the family, that relationships, especially after Father’s death, had changed. It was not a case of her wanting revenge – for Janina revenge was something she believed belonged in books – but Veronika’s call caused something within her to shift. What exactly this was, she did not yet know.

Had it been springtime, Janina would have stepped to the window and opened it, but as it was winter she just wanted to look out and see the snow. Shaking her head as if wanting to discard some weight or other, she once more looked at the phone and stood up. Her skirt had gathered but she did not straighten it out. It occurred to her that Fadul of course has other shoes too that he probably wore on the night of his disappearance, but where did he actually go and what was it out there that exhausted him so much? There were no traces of lipstick on his shirt or any kind of scent.

Nothing to betray him and nothing with which he would betray himself and so then even Janina gave up. She said to herself that *she needed to wait for him to tell her himself, despite the possibility that she was waiting in vain as there was nothing to tell* .

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The trip to Mexico proved disastrous. The plane landed at Frankfurt in the middle of a snow storm and for a moment Janina feared that her darkest premonitions might come true; being suspended in mid-air totally negated her. But as the scenario she had predicted had not happened she then observed the airplanes beyond the huge glass. After the emergency landing she knew that she would be spending the night on a plastic chair instead of between clean hotel sheets. She sighed and thought about her mother who was afraid of flying, though she never admitted it. She had booked a plane ticket to Egypt but changed her mind at the last minute. So that high time when they called passengers on the cruise ship to tea at five o'clock in the afternoon belonged to just Janina and her father. She remembered how he, dressed in jeans and wearing a hat (probably to avoid sunburn on his bald patch), sneered at the stench and filth of streets in Cairo. Towards the evening the large cruise ship moored to the pier and they were driven around town in a horse-drawn carriage. At the time Janina did not know how to express the thought that a mother lying on the ground with her child wrapped in rags should not be a tourist attraction, but the sight of her triggered anxiety. And most probably the insensitivity of their tourist guide, a rounded lady with short hair who held the card with *Slovenia* written on it high above her head, had also projected onto Father. Hate intensified to the point that she changed seats on the bus. She felt she would vomit were she to continue sitting next to him.

‘Janina?’ she heard a voice behind her.

A man’s voice. Even before turning around to look at his face, she sensed an undue confidence. Turning slowly, almost lazily, as if she could not in fact be bothered to deal with this chance stranger. But when the turn was complete it felt as if the snowflakes that had threatened her flight were now falling behind her back, surprising her at first but then thickening into an incomprehensible fear. ‘Do we know

each other?’ she asked curtly, biting her tongue before she finished the sentence. She knew the man with *thick, slightly greying hair*, dressed in a dark suit who was standing behind her, by name. Even more, some years ago, in some other life, she had once shared a bed with him. Just for one night, but still. She had stepped into his law office in almost new ballet flats and a slightly oversized coat and asked him to take on a case which most believed was lost in advance. She had cooperated with a non-government organization which decided to sue a well-known traveller. In a rather popular documentary film on Africa, concerning the war in Sudan, he had shown the faces of the dead. The organization maintained that this was misuse and disrespect towards those persons whose corpses had been shown; almost as if they had not died completely. The lawyer, quite a little older than her, but still with a kind of humour in his face, invited her out for a drink and then to his house where she, after a couple of glasses of wine, took off her coat, then her skirt and allowed him to penetrate her with his pink, slightly curved penis. When she left in the morning, the odour of sperm that they had splattered onto the living room floor and the kitchen counter still lingered in the flat.

The man before her raised his eyebrows with a downward curve of his mouth. Although he must have known from the expression on Janina’s face that she remembered him, this rejection was hurtful. Janina caught his internal monologue mixed with a fair measure of sarcasm, *I always wanted to be something else from what I have become but I now can’t change what I am.*

To apologize for her abruptness she stood up, took a step towards him, her nostrils catching a scent of musk mixed with lemon verbena, and forced a smile. ‘Sorry, Tibor, I didn’t recognize you there. Your hair is different, you are different.’

Tibor did not respond. He stood there, looking her up and down as she stared in embarrassment at his hands. Soft, with not too long fingers, familiar from the night when she had allowed them to unzip her narrow skirt and which on average handled at least one pack of cigarettes a day. Instead of replying and talking about the violation of the conventions on treating the dead – he had carefully avoided the theme and eventually did not take on the case – Tibor told her that he had calculated as a student that if he had quit smoking he could afford a return ticket to Syria. Janina saw him lying in the bed, supported by a pillow, the sheet revealing a relatively large bush of yellowish cigarette hair.

Suddenly, as if he was afraid that her thought might reach too deep inside him, he said, 'What about a coffee?' As they walked side by side, careful not to accidentally touch each other, Janina thought that at that moment, more than Fadul, she missed Ervin. She had filled the fridge, gently said goodbye to them in the dark corridor, kissed Ervin on the lips and wrapped her arms round Fadul, whispering, 'I'll be back soon, don't worry.' Half jokingly and half seriously, Fadul said he was not worried. Although all this had only happened a few hours ago, it seemed incredibly far away. Now, it occurred to her, she was once more a woman who could make up a new story. She did have some attributes of the past, namely her body, admittedly slightly changed since the time she had stood with nothing but her bra in the doorway in Tibor's flat, but still.

'Do you still have a law firm?' Janina took over the initiative as they leaned against the high table and ordered a coffee with a glass of mineral water. Janina noticed that Tibor had not gotten any fatter and that the dark suit rendered him self-confident, dignified. She felt a sharp pain in her stomach, not because it would really hurt but because, all of a sudden, she *felt regret over the opportunities that had passed*.

'Yes, I still do,' he stayed silent as if he was thinking about whether to continue. 'After our meeting I took on a few delicate cases.' He stared at the table and Janina fixed her gaze on the watch on his wrist. Large and flashy it demonstrated organization, a comfortable life. 'I realized that you were right. Law should defend fairness, be an area of creativity, but what can you do when it so often seems that this stance is merely fantasy. The idea of what law should be morally is one thing, the apathy I see all around me is another.' Janina had the feeling that this talk was geared solely to try and impress. When he asked her, 'And how are you?' he stared at her as if he was not merely trying to refresh the features of her face but was reaching within her with his hand, bringing out into the open something very precious. Janina realized that what attracted her to him was the mixture of a brutality that had probably come with the years, experience and a temper that could at times probably still be taken to be a deliberate preservation of yearning.

'I am no longer an activist. I work at a publishing house. Editing. Translated literature.' She shrugged her shoulders to hide further her confusion. 'It's not as bad as it sounds.'

‘It sounds wonderful,’ Tibor said. ‘You probably need to be in a particular kind of shape?’

To begin with Janina didn’t understand, but then she thought of Father’s workshop. A large yet still dark space, quite the opposite of what was out there beyond the glass. He would shut himself inside and pretty soon Janina realized that it was not because he wanted to get away from the family or, for example, Janina’s mother, but because he was in his own way, addicted to work. Those two weeks in Egypt thus signified a miraculous step out of routine and perhaps this was why he had been so serious all the time. Janina even thought that this was why he had worn a jeans outfit, as if he was travelling to the moon, not just to the ancient continent. ‘Yes, there’s a lot of reading,’ Janina said. He was looking at her and Janina knew that this was the gaze of someone who does not understand that in today’s world of hyperproduction it is possible to make a living with something like reading.

‘Do you have children?’ he asked suddenly as if he was surprised himself he did so.

‘A boy, Ervin.’

‘That’s nice.’

They fell silent again and Janina dared not interrupt. She took a sip of mineral water, peering towards the glass surface, beyond which the airplane fuselages were lined up. She thought that their meeting was not coincidental and how amazing that Tibor recognized her in this crowd of people, almost like in a novel. At that precise moment Janina had yet to understand the link between figures and situations. ‘Do you have any idea of how to counter this apathy?’ she said suddenly.

Tibor stared at her with interest, his gaze no longer merely anticipating her curves. ‘If we had met then at a different time it would have been dangerous for you, you do know that, don’t you?’ he said as if he hadn’t heard her question.

In order to calm her pounding heart, Janina searched for sharp lines on him. She found them in the T-shirt he was wearing under his impeccable buttoned white shirt. Of course she wished that instead of all that he had said in continuation of their conversation he would have said ‘come with me,’ or ‘would you make love to me in the toilets,’ some quick, greedy lovemaking that they would not have to answer for, but she suppressed the desire. ‘I think we can only retake control of the legal state through revolution. We need to fundamentally change how we think. In a way I agree with what Sartre said – *how will we get new political representatives that will look*

after social needs, justice and democracy when people do not recognize them and in fact reject them. We keep voting for facades, empty words...'

'That is what I am talking about, if only part of what is written in *books on the philosophy of law and the foundational rules of law, democracy, constitutionalism, enlightenment and solidarity*, would come true, *we would be living in a very different world...*'

Janina stroked her neck, a gesture indicating a desire to shed her flirtatiousness and at the same time not entirely give up on it. Half jokingly she said to herself that although this man probably didn't stand in front of the fridge in the shop opening the cartons of eggs like Fadul did, Father would still not approve of him. Branislav had had someone in mind who would wear blue overalls easily and, as they returned from working on site, talk to him in the car about politics and the mistakes made by the left (if he was in the mood he joked about how baby rocket leaves are the new left's lettuce, if he was really irritated he grumbled how four-hundred square metre flats owned by political leaders were the perversity of all perversities even if their party defines itself as centre-left). Fadul not only refused to wear overalls when he worked in Father's workshop but even said it was a good thing he didn't understand the language. 'The stupidities your folk talk about are unbearable,' he would say in the evening as they lay in bed and he gently stroked her back. 'Ideas need to be internalized, I think, otherwise...' she said.

'I see you haven't changed,' Tibor said.

'Working at the publishing house is a particular kind of sanctuary for me. I am probably one of the last of my generation who managed to find work.'

'I must say I'm worried too. *Young people really are robbed of a future*. But it is up to you to change things, to resist...'

Janina sighed. 'I see all these young women moving abroad as a kind of revolt in itself...'

'That's not a revolt, it's a withdrawal,' said Tibor at the very moment the loudspeaker announced the last call to a passenger who had clearly got lost somewhere, was delayed, or had allowed himself to be seduced by a girl from a previous life. Only after the third mention of his name did Tibor flinch and somewhat theatrically pointed his index finger at himself. Janina first pulled a face and then nodded. He stepped closer to her, holding his breath as if not wanting the scene to

end, and then kissed her on the cheek. 'It was great to see you,' he said and marched to gate number A56.

Janina watched him and thought that he was *walking as if aware that she was watching him*. She had hoped that in the instant he kissed her on the cheek she would be able to untangle why he, all those years ago, when she had walked into his office, thought she was just a well brought up girl who could afford an unusual approach, she had no intention of participating in a custom which the media force upon us – looking at the faces of the dead on TV. He later, romping around in his bed, tried to tear something out of her, pounding her as if he wanted to deflower her but there was nothing there. As if they had never met. Something similar to the time Father and she returned from Egypt. Janina forgot all about how he had turned up his nose at the poverty and stench of Cairo, his insistence on early evening blackout, she even forgot the hatred she had felt towards him at the time. And when shopkeepers had asked him how much he would sell her for he replied, quite seriously, 'a million camels.' When they realized he was not joking they despondently answered that there weren't that many camels in the whole of Egypt.

As she searched for the seat on which she would spend the night until the next flight to Mexico, Janina decided that her father had had a sense of certainty, that he lived in self-belief. The world he had stepped out of and to which he returned after the cruise on the Nile would continue indefinitely. And perhaps Janina, by marrying one of them, Fadul, and not one of ours, had betrayed him. Betrayed him in a way only a daughter can betray a father.

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excerpt from the novel translated by Gregor Timothy Čeh