

Samira Kentrić
LETTER TO ADNA

My dear Adna, if you have found this letter, it's bad, it's very bad. I wrote this in hopes of taking it with us on the promised journey and destroying it at the end. If you are reading this, it means that I did not make it. I was cautious, I tried hard, I hope that you believe me. I never told you why everything is the way that it is, so I'm writing it here so that it won't be obscure forever. I know that you remember the arguments we had with your brother. There was so much screaming and crying among us. You just sat silently and never said anything. And when he did not return home afterwards, you still said nothing. You did not cry. And you laughed so rarely, too, soothing your emotions with Brundi at your chest. It didn't seem right to do so with everything that daily life demands of us. How sad childhood can be...

I wish I could do more, for you, for you and your brother, but you came without any instructions. Both of you so reserved. It was particularly hard with your brother. I handled his behavior irresponsibly and without any sensitivity to our needs.

I told him he neglected us in favor of his ideals and that he was living a completely different life. When they came to tell us that he was no more, I was seized with unending rage. He achieved nothing, nothing at all with his actions. Nothing! He just made us miserable. But time passes, and neither sadness nor doubt fall away. Why such anger, when he was hardly ever home? He came home when you were already asleep, and you were still sleeping when he left. Maybe that is why you did not respond to his death. You squeezed Brundi, infuriated and persistent as always. You watched me go crazy—what is more important than taking care of yourself for the future, for the ones you hold dear? Everything can be fixed, everything can be agreed upon, as long as people are there and they respond, but what about when they are not there anymore, when we are no longer given chances to meet? You walk on the streets, you recognize his movements in strangers, but he is never there. I do not believe those who say that some people have to leave to make room for others. They are evil. But what am I saying? You know, maybe even better than I do, the kind of foggy emptiness that settles in, just big enough to distract us from everything in our lives.

I am so crazy! Forgive me this madness, forgive the resignation that followed. Forgive all of the dinners we spent in silence. During those months, I was happy with your silence, as it did not disturb my own... Forgive me, if you can.

Like you, I slowly sank into myself, too. It was easier when I was still angry at him. But I was angry without any right, really, out of pure vanity, Adna. Your brother was a hero... I know that now. His struggle gave meaning to my existence, to our daily life. His hope fed mine. His activity justified my passivity. He has embodied for us my desire for freedom, for a better life. If I blamed him for neglect, I did it to make myself feel useful. Perhaps he really was concerned about this, thought that we would be better as communities, but I was the one who made it possible for us to survive on a daily basis. I was practical, he was a dreamer. I was looking for approval for myself, for my actions. He did not demand that of me. He was grateful for his bed and warm cake. And then, when he did not exist anymore, I felt ashamed. To whom will I now defend my efforts? What is my vision for us, for all of us? And this hopelessness, you see, this is the worst. It took some time for me to come to my senses. You were here, the furnace had to be kindled and beyond that, stoked. I also had to justify your brother's fight with my own will to live, with my will to find a better, freer tomorrow, to abandon my passivity forever. I did not know the weapons, and did I want to belong to the groups, either. I went on my own path. And it was a blackened path. Decided at last.

You know that the borders of our place, this world, are changing. I know that I am taking a risk, that they can crush me at any time, that we are not safe here and that we cannot go anywhere. Of course they can catch me if they want to. The way they caught your brother, too. But the fact that we love each other, that you mean the world to me, this... this is not enough, my dear Adna. They say that people on their deathbed only regret bad relationships with their loved ones, spending too little time together. I believe it, only how could it not be that way! Women all too often raise us to live through others and for others: partners, children; to be caregivers, to be comforted by their everyday battles. If we are more active, if we stand out, it is good to give credit again to others, to loved ones, to our community. We experience anonymity as a safe shelter for good behavior. Such a fight is also legitimate. Heroes need caregivers, and it is an art to be a good caregiver on a bad day. But our hero was defeated, only the two of us remain... If, however, it happens that I do not come home, please remember that in the end, I left like your brother. With eyes that knew fear and overcame it.

Finally, I live. Finally, with a smile, Adna!

I just want you to be happy with your choices, my girl. Will you fight? Will you adapt? I do not know. Do not feel guilty if you cannot fight, or do not want to. Others will fight—for you,

too. What are we fighting for, if not precisely so that we do not have to fight all the time, so that people can live their dreams beyond the struggle for survival? And if some of them succeed in living in this situation right now, will they be condemned? Your brother also fought for me when I was not in the fight, and for you, who did not yet understand this fight. There will be no resentment, there must not be.

The two of us ripped off their piece of freedom just before the end of their journeys, so do not think of us as anything other than happy, accomplished people.

We loved you very much, Adna. Just as you are.

Hasima

excerpt translated by Kristina Reardon