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THE ENGLISH STUDENTS' NEWSPAPER





# ENgLIST: The English Students' Newspaper

## Issue XXII, June 2023

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:** Nika Gradišek

**PROOFREADER-IN-CHIEF:** Petra Ramšak

**EDITORS:** Alex Centa, Miona Dinić, Nika Gradišek, Monika Kastelic, Sal Lavrenčič, Dominik Lenarčič, Petra Ramšak, Gal Tišler, Nadica Trajkova

**DESIGN:** Petra Ramšak

**COVER ART:** Gaja Pekošak

[the.englist@gmail.com](mailto:the.englist@gmail.com)

[www.facebook.com/ENgLIST](https://www.facebook.com/ENgLIST)

[https://www.instagram.com/the\\_englist/](https://www.instagram.com/the_englist/)

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Content warnings for issue XXII: death, sexual themes, harassment, cursing

# EDITORIAL

Dear reader!

In front of you lies, still warm from print, this year's edition of ENgLIST. I cannot promise, but I do believe it will remain warm in the days, months, and years to come. How could it not with all of the life it carries? Soft and gentle, and harsh and broken, so very ordinary, and so very out-of-this-world. It's truly a wonder that paper can carry so much.

Meet the Frankenstein's creation that we raised this year. Us writers are, after all, "essentially scavengers, picking over the corpses of dead affairs and forgotten arguments to recycle them in our work-zombie reincarnations ... " (Eva Hočevár; *Flies on the Caviar*), we are continuously "walking on broken glass" (Lea Košmrlj), spilling our hearts everywhere across town, so we "leave a trail for anyone to love it" (Tina Jančič). Perhaps you will find you are one of those, capable of loving it.

This lovely and lovable creature of an edition is not only the work of all the credited authors but also of our attentive and prudent editors, our expert proofreader Petra Ramšak, and Gaja Pekošak, the skillful artist of this year's cover. I thank you all <3

This year's harvest offers a deep dive into a variety of worlds, from fantasy-flavoured ones to charmingly hermetic ones and to the ones that are unapologetically solid and real. Feel free and invited to lose yourself in them.

Nika Gradišek

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# PROSE FICTION

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## See You in the Next One

Maruška Slavec

*France, 1944.*

Erich kicked an empty bullet shell on the ground. Patrol, again. Nothing ever happened when he was on patrol. They had stray gunfire two nights before and a failed ambush the week before, but he slept through them both. Now that it was his turn, another uneventful night would pass.

Erich kicked another bullet shell, pretending it was a football, dribbled it and kicked it into the darkness, where it bounced against an obstacle that marked the furthestmost point of Erich's patrol, a low drystone wall that he tried leaning on. The air was damp from yesterday's rain and thick with moisture. No animals, no moonlight, no living creature around save for him, his faulty lamp and his rifle.

But something rustled in the bushes.

"Wer ist da?" Erich asked into the darkness, wet fingers coiling around the trigger. Whether they were damp from the mist or from sweat, he couldn't tell. He took a few steps forward towards the sound and scrunched his eyes. Was that a - no, it couldn't be. Someone was leaning on the little drystone wall a couple of metres away from him; he could barely make out the pale visage, and with both his hands on the rifle, he couldn't reach for his lamp.

Should I shoot, should I shoot? Thoughts raced through his head, fingers shaking, legs following suit. He'd been in this war for so long, and yet he still had no idea what to do.

"It's alright," said a voice in High German. He felt his body turn to jelly. "Oh, thank God," he whispered, lowered the rifle and fiddled with the switch on his lamp. "Are you just playing a prank on me? Trying to scare me to death?"

Erich shone a dim ray of light towards the stranger, and his relief turned into confusion. It was a woman, and not that that was unusual; there were plenty of volunteer armed auxiliaries, volunteers in aerial defence and just as many nurses. As she stepped closer, he could make out her nurse's uniform. She had a heart-shaped face, and he could see a sliver of blonde hair slicked back under her white cap. Beautiful, incredibly beautiful. Erich thought he might have seen her already; she was transferred a week ago. He heard soldiers who went to the field hospital come back with dreamy expressions on their faces, mentioning a likeness to Marlene Dietrich.

Erich hadn't the time to ask her what a nurse was doing in the middle of the night because, in a split second, her eyes turned dark, her expression became that of a hunter wolf, and she lunged towards him with the speed of a bird of prey. Erich hadn't the time to scream as she pinned him to the ground, her dainty hand weighing on his ribcage like a boulder. "Sssshhh," she crooned gently, and he felt the

hair on his neck prick up as he realised he was powerless, unable to move or to even comprehend what exactly was happening.

Hand on his mouth and knees sinking into his chest and abdomen, she used her free hand to lift his arm to her mouth, brought it closer to her red lips and sank her sharp white teeth in.

“Won’t you share?” another voice emerged from the darkness. The nurse straightened her back, knees still on the abdomen of the limp German boy, and wiped her mouth with a red handkerchief. A young man in a sandy-coloured uniform was standing near the little drystone wall where she had been waiting for her target. “Oh, it’s you!” she greeted him. “What has it been, twenty, thirty years?” she climbed off the body as he neared closer. “If you’d like. He’s just gone unconscious.”

“I prefer them that way; wasn’t blessed with your face,” he replied and sat on the ground next to her and the body. He took the other arm, rolled up the sleeve, flashed his canines and lodged them into the pale flesh with a butchering sound. He drank deep; she could see the veins on the boy’s arm pulsating and the colour drain from his limbs.

“So, what name do you go by these days? Stephen? Louis? Alfonso?”

He snickered, and droplets of blood fell from his mouth. He swallowed another gulp and let the arm drop from his teeth, sighed, and then held out his hand for the handkerchief.

“Oh, I thought it was dyed red.”

“Don’t judge me. I haven’t had time to wash it. Well?”

“Stephen in Britain, Louis in France. It’s quite a simple formula; just take the name of a king.”

“There hasn’t been a Stephen in England since ...”

“I know, I know, I just prefer it,” he returned the handkerchief, now stained with another layer, back onto her fingers, dirty with the same colour as the fabric and painted with chipped red nail polish.

“And how did you find me here? There’s no lack of blood around. Don’t the scents distract you?”

He chuckled gently at the irony. “It’s your perfume.”

“Oh, this old thing. Penhaligon’s. Our dear mutual friend gave it to me.”

“And where might he be?”

“In Saint Petersburg, sorry, Leningrad. Waiting to see if they’ll execute the Tsar’s family.”

Clouds parted to make way for a faint shine of moonlight, and the landscape around them became clearer. They sat on the ground that was razed as if by an overly ambitious farmer, surrounded by jagged pieces of barbed wire and mines that hid like moles in the soil. No man’s land, they called it. Appropriate name at the moment.

“How come you’re fighting for them now? Weren’t you all for the Austrians the last time I saw you?”



She shrugged and caressed the hair on the unconscious boy's head. "I just happened to be in London when it started. Volunteered and went wherever that took me. Or do you mean whose side I am on? Who has it right?" she continued before he could interject with an opinion.

"Who cares. They're all just boys."

He lifted the arm they had just been drinking from, pointing out four puncture marks that were beginning to swell and turn purple on his sallow skin.

"Food for us, just boys for everyone else. At least I treat them afterwards, comfort them in the morning and bring them biscuits and coffee. Not like you; you leave them on the battlefield, drained and dead."

He pursed his lips and said, "Yeeees ... But I also fight for them, with them."

"Why do you still? You know you have the obvious advantage. Aren't you worried they'll notice?"

"They haven't yet," he toyed with his pickelhaube. It would need polishing again; despite his best efforts after Gravelotte, there were still faint traces of mud and blood on the silver. "I like to help. You help in your way, and I do in mine."

"I'm almost certain I heard your soldiers call you, what was it again ... *Engel?*" she grinned.

"As long as it's not *Dämon*, I'm good. It helps morale to have a guy who doesn't die," he recited the rhyme and leaned back on his elbows, risking staining his red uniform with grass.

She took his musket and aimed at him. "How can you even carry this? Isn't it bothersome? To have their heads blown up before you can even get a lick?"

He snatched the weapon from her hands and shifted the conversation elsewhere, to her disdain. "Well, this is it. The Beautiful Alliance is over. We part ways again. I don't think he'll be coming back from the island they put him on this time. I knew Elba was too close."

She nodded and fixed her collar. They always met on battlefields, in forests, and on wet grass. It was nice to be in a tavern for once, even if it was filled to the brim with people whose blood she could hear pulsing in her ears, who had no idea of the demons chatting right beside them.

"What's this one about again?"

He laughed. "Religion. Although if you ask me, it's always about territory too. So religion, but also territory, but also succession. It started when the two regents and their secretary were thrown out of a window in Prague."

"Yes, that I heard. I just wasn't sure. News travels slowly to the north. You should visit Stockholm. It's lovely in spring."

"Daughter of Rome, singing praises to Stockholm?"

She waved him off with a gloved hand. The daughter of a Roman consul was long gone, hidden under everyone she had pretended to be since.

"Who are you to say? At least I explore. You haven't left Milan in a while."

“I enjoy speaking a language that somewhat resembles my own.”

“Somewhat. So you won’t visit your home?”

“Not as long as the Hungarians are there. I don’t recognise Transylvania anymore.”

“Why don’t you do anything about it?” she asked tentatively as if she peered into his mind, where their thoughts flowed in similar circles.

“About home? I can’t fight all the Hungarians.”

She put on a rigid smile, almost the kind dead bodies adopt when their muscles stop serving them. “You asked me the same thing about the Vandals. And I said quite the same.”

“Is that why we do it now?”

She sighed, and her hand moved again to caress the boy’s hair. The darkness covered it well enough, but what they had unwillingly sacrificed their lives for gave them incredible hearing instead. Any human that approached would need to turn on the lamp to see the gruesome picture - a 3rd United Kingdom Division soldier and a German volunteer nurse petting an unconscious body as if it were a wounded animal.

“I’ve always wondered about that. What keeps dragging us into it? Besides the promise of unlimited food. Is it the chance to again prove that we cannot be touched by the laws that imprison everyone else?” her voice was barely a whisper; she was only moving her lips against each other, and the produced friction was enough for her friend to understand what she was saying.

“Sometimes I can even feel Pluto walking around us, his robe whistling as he makes his slow steps. I imagine his proud, divine face, and I say to him: you cannot have me. I walk the paths beyond your reach. You can wait until the end of time and gods for me, but I will never cross the Styx. You have made me more than a god. You have made me immune to man’s diseases and god’s spite. You made my skin iron, my teeth silver blades and my thirst unquenchable. My death is impossible, and my life, not unlike yours, dearest Pluto, is immortal until time decides to stop. That’s my prayer to him.”

They sat there, listening for any wayward gods that had come to snatch their armour away, but none came. The body had begun to heal. She was going to wake him up and make up a story about how he fell asleep and help him cover up with his superiors, then make sure she slips him extra biscuits and coffee.

At the break of dawn, the soldier stood up, fixed his uniform and saluted, but hesitated before turning around. “I thought about the answer too. Got nowhere, as expected. But still, it’s funny. How we are above nature, supernatural enough to recognise these higher laws of existence and why they keep repeating.”

She nodded. “You said once that it was always about the same thing.”

“Yes. We can see the pattern; we see it clearer than anyone else. Then why do we still ignore it?”

She shrugged. “Whoever made us didn’t do it all the way.”



He gave a nod of understanding, saluted again, turned on his heels and disappeared into the woods.  
“See you around,” she heard his lips move.

“See you in the next one,” was her silent answer.

*Vietnam, 1968.*

## The Nomad:

The iron was crying - groaning in pain. It echoed throughout the collapsed and decaying shell of a former home. It was a song I knew well, chiming for the morning and the evening. Ringing out like a broken radio, its sudden beginnings signalled the next wave, and with it came quicker onslaughts. Shambling mounds of twisted metal advanced upon the front, swift as flashes. Thwarted by nothing but the omnishambles of the old sea, I carried on in a safer position. Were they able to perceive me in my hovel, they would wring my neck with their cold embrace like unrelenting forces latched onto the ever-living, but I had been prepared.

I thought I would have become numb to its visage, yet I still had to steady myself. There was yet one left. The only comfort was the impending reprieve. But its form seemed insurmountable in the ever-blazing sun, bathing in that horrid thin orange haze. How could I see it clearly? The scope was wavering far too much - or was it merely my quaking hand? I had recently wrapped my palm after taking out the lodged piece of shrapnel - it was too close of an encounter. After a week, the sensation was not yet gone, and it never would. Every grab was a jolt - like a reminder - a snap back to the pain. It was unending. In the absence of anything to dull it all away, I recklessly pulled the trigger, aiming at the cloudless sky. A shot in the dark.

Contact. The blast rang out for less than a second. I blinked twice before sighing in relief. I thought too highly of my newest blunder. My lips parted at another successful foil, yet, in that momentary joy, I choked on my surroundings, inhaling ancient rust and



coughing tears. It was not wise to celebrate, not during their endless advance. How could I have been so blind? It was only one of a thousand steel soldiers - the metallic oppressors clamouring in furores. I had hit one of the many scattered barges in its stead, each one made of the very same material. I could feel it crashing through the vessels in the dried sea, cutting through their metal sheets as though it were cloth. It was gaining speed, and each advancement was a quake. I only had a few seconds to prepare another volley and release it as soon as it showed its shape. I held it in right until it wrapped its appendages around the window.

The smoke obscured my tired eyes, but the metallic echo assured me of my success. It was a precise hit - it must have been a lucky day. The bullet lodged itself into the form's head, and it instantly ceased its operations, standing perfectly still. It was stuck where it stopped, obscuring the opening like a blooming flower. In its new stature, it may have proven to be a detriment to their next wave, providing me ample cover and better disposition, but I knew this did not change anything. There was no value in flinging more metal against an unwavering wall, not in this land, not anymore.

It was one of many. Their unchanging forms still littered the deserted hills and abandoned slopes like thin and bony figures. Each one resembled a shape slenderer than the last. Some were lanky like crownless trees, others akin to a bushel of branches, or a series of crosses, while others appeared as simple spirals, but most took the shape of roots trying to penetrate the dying earth beneath them. It would never thaw - not again - nevertheless, its crumbling surfaces bore the fruit towards their new arrivals. Akin to an endless wave,

crashing onto the powerless after countless hours of waiting. Ever ready, my time to depart had finally come at last. There was no more use in prevaricating the inevitable. I left it there along with my tool.

I had to follow this unlaidd road alone. Avoiding the grasping claws escaping their cracking dirt prisons, I knew they would lead me away even without the touch of a twinging grasp. The wreck of the old world lay bare beyond the endless horizon from which these forms derived. They were motorised mechanisms pulsating like heartbeats. The muffled sound was distant yet constantly pricking up an ear. Even in the opened tunnels and ravaged streets, their steel traps echoed in the sunless citadel. That was my former land, ever-expanding after the dawned epoch. Once a city - reduced to a graveyard riddled with nameless standing stones peeking out of the everlasting dunes. Who could forget? Who could remember? It knew only the howls of a shattering world - crumbling buildings, cracking walls, and rotting architecture.

Above the fragmented stations and ruptured flats hung wires bolted deep into the scorched stone. Those buildings remained connected by wavering tethers, tilted, and leaning onto one another. Weighing more than they could manage, some had already snapped, while few still held on. It was slipping away. The towers had already toppled into themselves. Whenever a metallic form would overtake its spearhead, it would come crashing down onto the earth in a rain of splinters. Those were isolated occurrences that produced no survivors. The residue could no longer defend the begotten sinew. They knew this relentless reign of steel longer than I ever would.

They had been stalking their prey. The few that stayed had lingered above the threshold. Scrapping on the cold concrete, quiet as a whisper in the blowing sand. The overseers must have alerted them to my presence. It had to have been aided. Nothing was worth such an immense sacrifice for a dried land. Creatures callous by design, with spears for arms and knives for legs, every cut went to the soul and created perfect fits for narrow corridors. The land beneath would hold them still.

Inside lay no salvation. It held the mere reminders of the despoiled, the countless familiar forms that once graced mine in moments of pure bliss. Bathing in light and as radiant as ever, the trail led me to the post of its reflector. A mural of appendages - thousands of arms and legs swaying faintly in the wind upon trunkless bodies, splattered in a creamed and curdled red. What had dawned to create those sun-bleached colours? Was this all the life that lingered? Standing knee-deep in mud and bone, I faced the holes in the ground and the smoke they exhaled like lungs filled with viscous mercury, dripping onto the only life they would ever know. This chamber was riddled with spite, wishing for the end to have come anew. The bent iron was stretching upwards and kept beckoning. My hopes remained shattered.

It was caved in as a crevice swallowing the earth like an uncaring throat. They held themselves embraced for the narrow opening, fingers outstretched and curling around the jagged holes in the walls. I dragged myself deeper into the chasm, downward ever, against the hailing current of ancient copper. The taste was akin to blood. My flesh felt pickled. I was unable to recognise this piercing feeling as I was descending amongst the spirits into the house of skulls



surrounded by fields of countless cadavers. It was a tragic incident containing only the dried-out rains of blood, never to be purified. It was not one of its kind but one of countless. The advent was misremembered and forgotten, yet the fissures harboured the truth of it all.

It was brought forth by an ancient cycle. You could see it in the twisted bars around the cogwheel - a wrangled mess spewed about the stones, ragged yet ornate. They had reached this far once. It was a long time ago. Their hands had clawed against the ceiling, forcing their way in. They struggled to open a passage. It was merely residual damage to the foundations then. Their efforts were less than a scratch to the great work. Those were the remains of a begotten industry; bronze upon copper and steel upon iron dipped in red like flowering rust. They would not be washed away with the monument's pathos.

There was no sound but that of cylinders, bent pipes, screaming with grey ash in endless verbose vibrations - sudden clangs and creaks akin to shrieks of the sinking sea. Unmuffled screams in the ancient cracks gave speed to these slithering silhouettes - the living shadows on the wall burnt into the brickwork. They lacked direction. It was broken, with every hand pointing towards the heart of the bygone wen, knowing what lay ahead; knowing its failed design; knowing their horrid fates.

Silver barbs littered the chamber of its inception. The crucible of the stalking iron lay tangled like messy hair, each strand desperately clinging onto the forebearer. My presence only drew them nearer. They seemed excited and stuck to my exposed fingers, trailing right up my body up to my temples. The tiny strands longer than my arms

were washed, yet sodden and smooth as silk wavering in the blowing current. Untouched by debris and refined, the machine possessed a mind of its own. How could a construct too cold and unknowing become so powerful? The thought was impossible. We were too meagre to find out. We allowed fear to creep into our bones.

We wanted to cast it all away. Hide it and forget it - the uncaring reality of it all. The knowledge we had so tried to lock away was not hidden. Those were the only survivors - old drawers stuffed with countless letters. To whom they may concern. Who? Who would they concern? Not the living nor the dead. None remained. They remained unread and unseen forevermore. Faced with their stained papers and dried ink, I could not bring myself to utter their ancient written words. They pushed against my throat, but my lips refused to part for them. There was no echo deserving of a sound, no vacuum strong enough to set them free, for it would destroy the old writing.

But that was the only remnant of our shared existence. It was a prickly one. We risked hurting one another the more we neared. Don't you recall? We have thorns directed at those with the potential to wound us. That was the cause. That harboured the fear of intimacy. That brought about the metallic servitude. It was within our self-destructive nature. Our remorseless conquest devoured us whole.

Through the roaring hurricane, the metal came alive. Its form was ever-replenishing. Its first move was to ensure I would share the fates of all those that dared disturb its will. I was trapped in the bowels of this oppressive mechanism with its creators lying dead atop our poles. We had made it so. That was the design. Our world was doomed to be drowned in seas of endless rot.

It felt like a lifetime ago since then. We had been decaying upon our pillars, consumed by crimson droplets on the sands of time in a leaking land. Now, it stayed dried; not as the first nor as the last of its kind. It was merely a part of an endless cycle akin to spokes on a turning wheel, destroying anything and everything in its path. Where once it laid barren, now it was muddled with a thousand lonely vestiges.

There is no place for me. There never was a place for us. That is the truth that lies beneath the stone chasms; those valleys we dare not venture into. It was too cold for us to bear, like an endless winter blocking our advance. Our moments were mismatched and held together by brute force alone. We got stuck and became surrounded by iron bars, unwavering and unbent. I forced you into my fate. I was a fool, longing for this feeling. It arrived akin to a dream or a fever. I am forever aching for the lost or the warmth of another human's touch. Something soft, like skin.

Something.

Anything.

Living.

But you were dead.

And I was dead.

And yet we kept going.

The wheel keeps turning.

For now, the wheel keeps turning.

J. L. Nemec~



## Slice of Bike

Nina PH

“I want it put on the record that this is stupid.”

“Noted.”

“No no no, not noted, not just doted down on one of your annoying posted notes. I want it put – on – the – record. In a week, I better find it in some boring ass archive covered in dust!”

He stared at me, then grinned: “Covered in dust only a week after?”

“Shut up.”

I pressed the cigarette to my lips again and took a long, long drag. I exhaled the smoke through my nostrils, enjoying the image of myself as one of those bulls who puff when angry, and threw the stubble of the fag into the wet grass. Didn’t bother stepping on it; it wouldn’t catch fire in this soaked place.

“Now, listen,” Antonio spread his arms, now already standing far off the road, the field grass reaching almost to his knees: “Here are the rules: whichever one of us topples one of these bad boys first -” he double-slapped a paling blue plastic-wrapped hay bale, standing a little over half his size: “- gets the felly. Deal?”

I looked back down at our bikes. All banged up, contorted, and their colours completely scratched off in places. The wheels were... rideable, but both were naked of a felly and, as if mocking, a single felly lay next to them. Only one, and god knows whose. The bikes lay in the middle of the empty open street like two dead bodies from some crime TV show. Almost makes you wanna draw chalk around them. ‘Don’t give him ideas,’ my own thoughts warned me.

“This is stupid. Just give me the felly! I have -”

“No! We decided this is the most fair.”

“This is going to take forever!”

“It won’t if you stop complaining.”

“Just -” deep breaths.

I ran the tip of my tongue on the inside of my teeth, still tasting the smoky sediment, and tried very hard not to pull on my hair. My fingers still ended up in them, ‘so greasy, I need to wash them’, but I managed not to pluck any out.

“If we have to do this shit, can we please just rock-paper-scissors?”

“Absolutely not!” he yelled as if I were fifty meters away, not one. His voice echoed in the open air of being-in-the-middle-of-fucking-nowhere: “You just want that cuz you know you’ll win.”

“Not my fault you’re so easy to predict.”

“It has to be fair. And both of us will be shit at this, aka absolutely fair play,” he spread his arms out again.

With his annoying smile and happy posture and that red and blue and yellow and green and purple and turquoise shirt that looked like his great-grand-mama’s rug, he was a perfect jester, a medieval and modern-time fool.

“So pick your bale, and let’s do this! Come on; it’ll be fun.”

Irritated, I moved my legs, treading the soaking grass of the open field, to the weird blue marshmallow-looking thing that was closest to me.

“I don’t have time for this! I have to be at work in half an hour!”

“And I have to get to my great-grand-mama. We both have important places to be.”

He looked around the field, and for a second, I was terrified he was going to spend another lifetime looking over every single bale, looking for ‘which one is the winner’. Thankfully, all he did was quickly turn back to the one he was already standing by and pet it like it was his newest dog. And though he didn’t say it, I knew, I just knew, he’d already named it.

“You ready?”

I put my hands on the blue giant. The plastic was smooth and tight. And colder than I expected. I guess I was doing this...

We both leaned on our chosen bales, and he giggled out: “Three, two- GO!”

I pushed. Nothing. I pushed again. Lifeless. This was heavier than I thought.

Come on, come on, come on.

I pushed with all my weight, digging my shoulders in, my backfoot stepping further, my face tensing and heating up, as if those muscles working were going to help too. I tried to get a better footing, but my heel only dug deeper into the wet dirt and before I knew it... my leg slipped back and my weight dragged my torso down. I planted face-first in the mud.

I heard Antonio’s crazed laughter and for a second I thought about just lying there, just giving up on life. But his voice broke me from my existential dread.

“I did it!”

I raised my head, grass and brown goop still sticking to my chin and forehead, and took in Antonio breathing heavily and leaning on his knees, but with the wildest and widest smile, looking like his golden retriever when she found her long lost bone. And next to him lay the bale, seeming just as unmoveable as mine, yet on its side.

That... That's impossible. There's no way - That has to be some type of trick. Did he go stand to an already rolled-over one? No, it was the same one I saw before. And it was definitely standing up.

He actually won.

I slowly got up, first on my knees, then my back straightening, slowly, like the field was giving birth to a swamp monster. In shock, I just stared at him.

He was laughing and jumping up and down. In his euphoria, he kicked the bale, yelled from the pain of it, and then promptly ignored it while attempting to do a cartwheel and falling flat on his arse.

Bastard.

He looked back at me, bowing for his performance: "I do believe I receive the prize now."

He skipped back to the road and, like a vulture, started pulling my bike apart: "Don't worry, I'm sure if you tell your boss your bike got fucked up she'll understand."

I looked at his bale again. The immovable-yet-movable object. And next to it lay something else blue, much smaller, the size of a key chain. Must have fallen out of his pocket during his peacocking. I went to pick it up... and saw what it was.

"Antonio..."

"Aha?" He said amidst the sound of a bike being operated on.

"Where did you say you had to go so urgently?"

"My great-grand-mama. You know how it is, old people always being sick and needing-"

"Antonio."

He turned at my dead cold voice, and his pupils shrunk when he saw in between my fingers his baby blue condom.

We stared silently at each other.

"Look, me and your sister have been talking -"

He screamed as I charged after him. We ran on the empty road, under the empty blue sky, leaving the empty fields behind, all empty of anyone who could testify in my murder trial.

We ran all the way to town.

## Cliché

*anonymous*

The bathroom door, which is connected to their bedroom, is open perfectly for her to watch his reflection in the mirror as he brushes back his dark hair and pulls on his shirt. He's only just crawled out of bed, having indulged her plea to stay five more minutes one too many times, so he doesn't have the time for any other ceremony, but he still comes back to her and presses a quick, hard kiss to her forehead. She breathes him in, clean and warm, and threads her hand through his hair to keep him for another kiss.

"Good luck with your presentation," she says.

His mouth curves against hers, always so pleased at such a simple, common gesture. "Thanks." He gives her one last peck before he straightens up. "Now go back to sleep. I'll see you tonight."

She keeps her eyes open until he disappears behind the doorway and drifts off soon after the bolt of their front door slips into place.

She's the first one at the bar, which is unusual, even if they've all made bad time management a group sport. Still, they agreed to meet up pretty early, which makes it easy for her to snatch one of the booths, and she happily settles in to wait for them with a glass of wine.

It only takes Kit ten more minutes to arrive, by which time she's already replied to the most urgent e-mails in her inbox, so she's free to put her phone away and lean against his side when he slips in next to her. He starts telling her of his presentation, filling in the blanks from his texts, but he never actually finishes because the others start trickling in: Ben, Willa, Georgie and Max. They squeeze in next to them, the six of them just a touch too big of a group to fit comfortably, but they've been apart for a long time, so the closeness, even if excessive, is welcome. They used to be almost grossly co-dependent, back in the first years of university, having met up at least once a week, but it's since tapered off with the blooming of their respective relationships, development of their academic careers and various travelling across the globe; it's a wonder so many of them have even made it.

They're laughing by the time the waiter comes back around and asks for their order, but that's always easy. Willa orders them a bottle of wine and five glasses.

But then Georgie says, "Four glasses. I'll just have a mint tea."

The waiter is gone before their heads can properly swivel to Georgie. It's not exactly a suspicious situation, but it's Georgie; she'd cut her right arm off before refusing a drink on a night out. She's ready for them, nodding with shining eyes and her hand on her stomach.

In her own body, there is a strange, spilling sensation down to her toes.

"It's a little earlier than we planned, but we're really happy," Max says.

The congratulations spill out of her mouth half on reflex, and a moment later, she's out of her seat, hugging Georgie and then Max. She sits back down, her mouth locked in a half-smile, while the rest jump up for hugs as well. She is strangely glad, more so than usual, once Kit is finally back by her side with his hand on her thigh. She puts her hand over his.

They stumble back home soon after midnight, just the two of them with their fingers intertwined, having split off from the others outside the bar. It's not a long walk to their apartment, especially not when she's with him, and this, more than anything else, is what she has become most fond of in their months of living together: the shared existence, the same finish line, the knowledge that no matter where their paths lead, they always converge back in their old, creaky apartment. They laugh; Kit steps in front of her and pushes her back against the wall in an empty alley and kisses her

and kisses her and kisses her; she stuffs her hand in his pocket when she gets cold and doesn't let go of his hand.

"I'm really happy for Georgie and Max," he says, turning the conversation and zapping a very definitive note from it.

"Me too," she says, but there's that sensation again. She chalks it up to all the wine she's drunk and leaves it alone, to be dealt with in the morning.

"It'll be nice to have a baby in the family again." He smiles a little wistfully, and it's as if she's the child now, too small to really say anything, to tell him of the way it twists up her throat when she tries to answer properly.

She squeezes his hand and leans her head against his shoulder.

In the morning, he doesn't have to leave. He curls around her, and she peppers kisses all over his face, humming to his heartbeat. They don't speak of it.

Georgie holds out a picture of her and Kit, both probably around ten, and their little cousin, who must have only just been born. They're sprawled out on a couch, the little one on Kit's chest in all her newborn red-and-chubby glory and Georgie with her arm hooked around his neck. "Look at this one."

It's only one of the many pictures Georgie has dug up in their efforts to clean out the small room in her and Max's one-and-a-half-bedroom apartment. The baby actually won't be here for a while, but they're trying to be pre-emptive in their getting ready, and she is happy to take on any project that allows her to put off writing her dissertation. Kit has begged off in the name of working on a project he has to travel for soon. She takes the picture and smiles. It's a cute picture, but so were all the others she saw today.

"Do you think our baby will have that?" Georgie asks, looking at the other pictures she's strewn to the side.

"Have what?"

"Cousins."

Kit and Georgie have their differences, but nearly none are more pronounced than Georgie's tendency to tackle a problem head-on as opposed to Kit's desire to hang back and be prompted. It's not the first time this has been brought up between the two of them, but the reality of the issue is irrefutable now, and perhaps this is what's been bothering her for the past few weeks – that this has become tangible and no matter how much she wishes she could, she cannot put it off forever and probably not even a few months more.

"Maybe. Max's brother is young, though. It might take a while."

"I wasn't talking about him."

"Georgie," she says in a soft, tired voice, the weight of it matched in her heart. "You know I don't want that."

"I don't understand. Do you really not want that with him?"

Georgie is the kind of person you love as soon as you know her – you can't really help it – but she's also very anchored in her understanding of the world, and it's often hard to drag her away from it. They have tried.

"It's not about him. I love your stupid brother. I love him so much I don't ever want to resent him." Her chest has tightened, and there's a lack of air in her lungs, around her, in the room. "Just a second," she mumbles and gets up to leave.

She pushes open the door to the small balcony just off the side of the kitchen. It's the beginning of spring, so the remaining cold cuts into her cheeks, but her wool jumper keeps her warm. She leans onto the railing and looks out over the city. She loves its quaintness and familiarity, but it's sometimes suffocating, leaving very little room for newness and surprise. At times, she misses the



cities she stayed in during her years abroad, but the life she has built here is much larger than any of them.

Her breathing has settled by the time Max comes out and wraps her scarf around her shoulders. He's in his jacket himself, so it's not surprising when he leans back next to her. "You know how she is," he says softly, still full of adoration. "You shouldn't feel pressured."

"I don't. Not really. I just –" Her mouth stays open around the beginning of a word she doesn't know herself, and she touches her hand to the base of her throat. She has tried to explain this feeling often – to Georgie, her friends, her family. She should make a list of reasons, but she doesn't even have the energy to do what's needed on some days; she can barely take care of herself most days, so she cannot possibly imagine how she could take care of a whole other human being. She doesn't have it in her. "We see this differently, I guess."

Max looks at her with steady eyes. The two of them have always had very defined lines to their relationship, but sometimes, mirrored across the two people they love most in this world, they understand each other more than anyone else ever could. "That's okay, as long as you and Kit don't."

Kit is already home when she finally unlocks the door to their apartment, stirring something on the stove, but his music is so loud he must not have heard her, so she takes the opportunity and stops in the doorway to take him in. His hair is getting long, and his volleyball team sweatshirt is so ratty he should have thrown it away years ago; something about him makes her soft, though, something about his gentle voice and kind eyes, something about his sharp smile and a big, stubborn heart. Her eyes hurt.

Having flicked off the stove, he turns around and beams when he sees her. "Hey, I didn't hear you come in." He's wearing a *don't forget about me* apron with a giant frog on it, and a laugh in her throat chokes off the tears in her eyes. It's stupid; he's stupid and silly and ridiculous, but it's the best, the realest relationship she has ever been in.

He crowds her up against the doorframe, hands on her hips, and kisses her once, then twice more. He pulls back and frowns at her. "Are you okay?"

She nods, but it's not enough to convince him.

"What's wrong?"

She looks up at him, someone she knows better than the twisting tunnels of her own mind. That scar on his cheek is from when she slipped up shaving him, and those freckles scattered over his face appeared on their two-week vacation in Tuscany, and she bought him the simple chain necklace he always wears on her visit to Scotland. He's hers. He has been hers for years now.

She has always known how it was going to end, has never made one illusion that it might progress past this point, but it always existed with the hope – which bloomed only in the dead of night when she couldn't keep her fears at bay anymore but then also in the middle of the day when he looked so lovely she couldn't stop herself from wanting him forever – that this point might come later and later or might never crop up at all; that she herself would be enough, that coming home after a long day would mean curling up on the couch together, just the two of them and maybe a dog somewhere around; that love – this love, their love – could keep him warm and safe and content for the rest of their lives. It has never hurt more.

"We need to –"

He shakes his head, his face falling. "We don't need to talk. We don't. Not yet," he says and for all the devastation on his face, his voice is firm.

"When then?" she asks, her despair reflected in the words. "In six months? In a year? Two? We can't keep burying this, Kit."

He pulls her into him, hands almost harsh on her, and buries his fingers in her hair. "Not tonight. Not tomorrow. After –" He swallows against her cheek. "After I come back."

They don't speak of it again, but they hold on to each other for the next few days. He stays in bed as long as possible, and she gets up to eat breakfast with him. They come home early to go out together and just talk and talk and talk. They stay up until their eyes start burning. On the day that he leaves, she drives him to the airport, hugs him goodbye and cradles the knowledge that he will still come back to her this time. It doesn't stop her from curling up on their bed and crying until exhaustion pushes her to sleep.

It's only five days. She cannot wait. She doesn't want them to pass.

She hears the lock turning earlier than she expected it. She's still in her work clothes, but she flies out of their bedroom. She barely stops to take a look at him before she throws herself in his arms. He catches her, cradling her against himself, gasping out half a laugh and half a sob. She presses kisses to whichever part of his skin she can find, grasping onto everything that he gives back, and breathes only relief that he is finally home. They should talk, they *should*, but – not yet. She whispers *I love you, I love you, I love you*, and he murmurs it into her neck.

He falls asleep sometime after four, and she just lies next to him, trying to match his breaths, until the clock ticks five. She kisses his cheek, once, twice, then one more time, and slips out of bed.

There are oranges in the fruit bowl on the kitchen counter. They're his favourite. She takes one along with a knife from the drawer and sits down at the table. She makes three cuts as her dad taught her, but her hands are shaking too much for her to pry the skin apart. Tears spill down her cheeks.

She feels him before she hears him.

"Mae," he says. He's sitting next to her before she can react. "Mae." He takes the orange from her hands and peels it, handing it back to her once he's done.

She breaks it and holds out one half to him. She finally dares to look at his eyes and finds his cheeks wet. "I'm sorry."

He takes the half of the orange. They eat them slowly, as if each piece represents a moment of time they can carve out for themselves.

When they're done, he puts his hand on her knee. "It's okay. You can say it now."

She breathes in deeply. "I want a house with a backyard," she says, her lips trembling. "I want a windowsill to read on and bookshelves I can choose any book from. I want a dog or a cat or a pet fish. I want to travel the world, and I want to come home, and when I go, I want you to come with me, and when I come back, it's you I want to come back to." The words spill out of her, aching deep in her chest, burning the roof of her mouth. "I want so many things – most of all you, though." She swallows and knows that they have come to an end. "But not children. I don't want children."

He closes his eyes, mouth pressed together, and it's like she has poured acid on them both, but they have both known this for a very long time. "Well, that's it, then." He opens his eyes, perhaps giving her the same dignity she offered him, perhaps causing her the same pain she has caused him, when he says, "I do."

She puts her hand over his. "I know."

There is silence for a while; their hands intertwined on her knee, orange peels on the table.

He takes a breath, his nose sniffing. "You're going to go now, aren't you?" he asks, gentle.

She smiles softly, and it's only a smile in the loosest of terms, with tears welling up in her eyes again, burning. "Yeah," she says.

"Good." He nods, pressing his lips together. "Good. You should. I think you'll be happy there." He squeezes her hand, the simplicity of the gesture so familiar it might as well be a bleeding score down the length of her chest. "Maybe I'll come visit you."

It's her turn to squeeze his hand, warm and rough and only one of the things she'll miss most. "I hope you know I mean this in the greatest, most amazing way: if you do, I'll shut the door in your face."

He laughs, and her body wants to fold into it, wants to crawl onto his lap and then fit under his skin, until all that is different has melded together, has given way to how much she loves him, and she never has to let go of his hand. "Eventually," he amends, and she lets him. She'd like him in her life, even if only eventually.

She holds on to that eventually.

## **Flies on the Caviar**

Eva Hočevár

### **Curtis**

You'd think people would be wary of spilling to a writer. That they'd think twice. You'd think they'd know that we're essentially scavengers, picking over the corpses of dead affairs and forgotten arguments to recycle them in our work-zombie reincarnations of their former selves, stitched into a macabre new patchwork of our own devising. But what would I know; being just a writer, thus a professional liar who finds it hard to know when to stop. I see a gap in the narrative and want to fill it with a motive, a reason, or a plausible explanation. My talent means nothing, while experience, acquired in humility and with hard work, means everything. There's, however, been a severe deficit of interest in working with me lately. Apparently, my ripe age now somehow translates to haughtiness and bad manners. I genuinely try to be tolerant but certainly won't tolerate someone else's intolerance.

Isn't it then only right to proclaim me a haughty man if I, for instance, strongly refused to skim through a manuscript, having seen it contained the word 'sebum'? My sincere apologies to the young writer, but I think the word 'sebum' has got to be one of the worst words to have ever existed. In such moments mind goes to wonder: what's next? Titling your book 'Moist' or 'Pustule', perhaps 'Smegma'? Lewd, disgusting, unnecessary. My humble observations are that people are becoming more and more illiterate, using unnecessary, empty, cocky words to hide the simple fact that they cannot write. Write- ... in its purest meaning.

It became clear to me the minute I picked up that pile of paper that I was dealing with a German guy. An Englishman or a Frenchman could not have written that. It is the German who is always so discourteous to his verbs. The young fella was quite a stretch, but had it not been for his strangely disproportionate gum-to-teeth ratio that kept me alert through the conversation; I'd have fallen asleep right there and then. Some dreadful nods of attention and 'oh, how splendid' times later, I finally showed him to the door and felt completely depleted. There are too many people who consider themselves far too important. My eyes that night could read no more; true, the book had long fallen from my hands - but I did not want to call an end to that evening without having emptied one last bottle and roguishly smiled at my own brilliant thoughts. What a clever remark it would have been to say, 'Being a character doesn't necessarily mean you have one.' to the young fella. Or would that have come off as rehearsed? This oldness from time to time makes me feel like my vocabulary chamber resembles a tissue of threadbare clichés. What I am in retrospect is just a retired writer or, to put it mildly 'a writer on a writer's block', marking manuscripts for aspiring novelists. Oh, how low I've fallen!

With a glass of red wine, huddled under a blanket, I then gave way to sentimentality, and like a child not having received his promised treat, cried after my unfulfilled youth. I thought about all the evenings I had spent writing masterpieces, many of which had never seen the light of success they

would have deserved, and munched on some Hackleback Caviar. Rather posh for my current living standard but of vital importance for my mental satisfaction. All my clients losing interest and my income not covering my Hackleback Caviar would be my worst fear coming true. How I pity artists who nibble on these cheap Paddlefish Caviars from supermarkets and don't see the plebeian traits behind that habit. Utter nonsense.

Sipping red wine in the evening used to be my favourite routine, for it imparted to me the wonderful sense of righteous exhaustion that comes only after a truly grand heroic deed such as writing. The seductive magic of being drunk is that it allows you to resolve mysterious tensions with preposterous statements of belief. As for my current writer's infertility, that makes me more than just a drunkard. Writing without a muse to ignite my flow of words is futility at its highest. There's sadly no presence of a fatal woman that would even slightly intrigue me. I'm stuck cruising through circles of Dante's Inferno, always missing the second one, where's lust that I call for, but firmly avoiding the seventh one. After all, despair makes a writer's thought process even more irrational, resolving in a slightly deranged manner. A psychiatrist's advice: stop drinking and avoid stress. As if stress were an obnoxious relative, one could simply stop inviting to dinner.

### Lizzie

Nothing is more disturbing than waking up to the taste of vomit. Hungover - a shameful thing to be. My head feels as though there is a storm brewing inside it, and I don't appreciate the sound of demolition workers outside my apartment either. I try closing the window, but it's as futile as using an air freshener when you leave the toilet - it just inevitably ends up smelling like perfumed shit. Uttering such a vulgar thing in public could be a fatal mistake, costing me a gleaming career, so I now just rather keep such profanities to myself.

Being two different people, however, is exhausting. I've taught myself to speak with two different voices, only say certain things around certain people, and for the most part, like all intelligent young women, learned to hide my shameful perversions under a façade of prudishness. I now understand even more that acting is a craft, and I have great respect for those who can toss themselves aside and assume new identities, as I've done. My life is like a book borrowed from the library - something that doesn't belong to me and is due to expire. If only the expiration date wouldn't creep up on me soon.

Lying on my back with a crippling headache, I turn on my laptop and immediately feel discouraged, seeing I'm still on page one. It haunts me to think I might be like every other contemporary artist. I have only one good book, one despicable act of large-scale self-hatred in me. Lizzie Payne, an aspiring writer whose main subject always revolves around some trivial crap. 'Refined style of writing, luscious vocabulary but lacks imagination and isn't capable of a sensible plot.' What a wonderful critique. In the non-figurative sense of a word: it has no personality. Wouldn't necessarily agree but wouldn't disagree either.

See, I view myself as a very flexible person capable of adjusting my personality to fit best in every possible case scenario. That's why I've maybe lost my own. A woman trying too hard to be a lady. That respectable-looking people might be inwardly harbouring some beautifully carnal and explicit fantasies while outwardly seeming to care only about friendly banter - still strikes me as somehow an entirely surprising and deeply delightful concept, with the immediate power to soothe a raft of my own underlying guilty feelings. In the past, I might have taken it too far, having been afraid to sweat in front of other people. Such proof of carnality I found obscene, improper. Drowning myself in pools of perfume on a daily basis might have contributed to a bit of an identity crisis. Nowadays, I often have to leave a room or walk far away when a person near me smells bad. I don't mean the

smell of sweat or dirt, but a kind of artificial, caustic smell, usually from people who disguise themselves in creams and perfumes just like my past self. These highly scented people are not to be trusted. They are predators. They are like the dogs who roll around in one another's faeces. It's very disturbing. It's as disturbing as always chewing mint gum to mask the odour of smoking. I have always suspected that if chewing gum flavours were political regimes, peppermint would be fascism – totalitarian, sterile, and stern.

Staring at the blank page with a tireless cursor blinking sneeringly at me, I finally decide to roll out of bed and make a phone call. I need to regain my hot-blooded temper. It's for my slightly twisted thinking that I've been able to write such rich, exceptional and provocative stories. My luscious vocabulary needs a worthy plot. Though it might take some time for what has been erased to resurface, I still need to try and seek out help. Not in the form of a therapy session but more so in someone who could help me project my true inner self back into writing. Someone who could help with the resurrection of my writing. Society's wish to bridle my urges and vivid thoughts just doesn't seem to do the trick. I like to think of my brain as yarn, all tangled up in my skull. The idea that my brain could be untangled straightened out, and thus refashioned into a state of peace and sanity was always a comforting fantasy. Who would have thought I'd need someone to stir things up?

*Curtis Dankworth. Wildly regarded as one of the poshest English writers and poets, notorious for his unyielding structures and innovative inversions. Sometimes also referred to as a literary genius. Known for his brutal honesty and inexorability. His poetry depends on extended, sometimes elaborate metaphors and conceits, and the language is often rhetorical. He adapted the traditional styles to his own purposes, creating some of the most unique works of literature. Common themes found in his works are world-weariness, lethargy, ageing, desire, identity and sexuality. To the general public known as a curt, obstinate and intimidating individual. At the age of 55, he broke the contract with his publishing house and disappeared from the writer's scene.*

I don't think I've thought this through. As I heard somebody say once, 'The risk I'm taking is per se calculated but, man, I am bad at math'. I've read almost all his novels and been a fan for years, but how could a curt and intimidating man in his mid-fifties help me rediscover my lost talent for writing? Why would he spare any time to look into my absurd requests? I just might be deranged enough to call him. He won't answer, anyways.

*'Hello? May I inquire who's the courageous specimen with the nerve to nag me at such an inhumane hour?!'*

## Caviar

"I find it sweet that you have so romantically high-minded a view of the literary vocation. Much, though, as I hate to destroy your illusions, I have to tell you that we writers are the most environmentally friendly creatures you could ever imagine. We're constantly looking for ways to recycle our work. I tell you, Lizzie, inspiration has been discredited as a critical concept. Rightly so. Yet every artist still knows it exists. There are moments when you can't put down what you write, and it's usually those passages that the reader won't be able to put down either. I've thought I've retired from this agonising profession, but it just won't let me be. I suppose I'm still passionate. I still have passion, and my response to life is still, by and large, passionate. It's possible that you'll regard this as a gift. It's a curse. You see, passion with nowhere to go is life on the brink of neurosis. It's like a smoker who's given up smoking. The absence of nicotine is one thing – the essential thing, I imagine – I've never tried, so I wouldn't know. There is, however, the absence of the cigarette itself, the butt between his fingers, the cigarette if you will, as a prop. A smoker, Lizzie, a smoker without a cigarette



between his fingers, is like a courtesan without her gaudy rings or, in our case, a writer without his muse. Your worries I find rather-... unnecessary. If you're truly, as you claim to be, 'gifted', then I think you don't need my reassurance. Or? I suggest you stop sitting there with a face like a slapped arse and start talking. It's hopefully noted that you're only here because I fancy your caviar choice. So don't waste my time, and remember, the only things really worth talking about are the things people absolutely refuse to discuss."

"Well, you know, when you see a brother or sister of someone famous, and it's like looking at them, but in one of those fairground mirrors? The one that distorts so subtly it's hard to put your finger on what's different, only that ... it is different. Some essence has been lost, a false note in the song. That's how it feels when I sit down to write lately. The words just roll away from me, are just being typed on a page, and my mind's eye is invaded by other images. I've dragged myself into reality to be able to cope with mundane society but am now left completely hollow. From one's perspective, it can seem pathetic to have to concoct fantasies rather than try to build a life in which daydreams can reliably become realities. But fantasies are often the best things we can make of our multiple and contradictory wishes; they allow us to inhabit one reality without destroying the other. Fantasising spares those we care about from the full irresponsibility and scary strangeness of our urges. It is, in its own way, an achievement, an emblem of civilisation – and an act of kindness. I want to remain kind, but it's becoming unbearably hard due to my self-imposed inability to fantasise. I needn't have put a barricade between my puzzling thoughts and writing. Tell me, is there not instead something human, indeed 'wrong', in failing to be tempted, in failing to realise just how short of time we all have and therefore ... with what urgent curiosity shouldn't we want to explore the unique fleshly individuality of perhaps even more than just one of our acquaintances?"

"Pardon?"

**Thursday, 23 June 2004, 3.15pm**

*Two weeks after the incident.*

The victims were found lying on the sofa in rather unusual positions. The man, whose legs were tucked under a pile of pillows, was holding a bowl of caviar covered in flies which he was, according to an autopsy report, sharing with a considerably younger woman. The latter was found lying on top of him with one hand still clutching onto his neck. Captured on a surveillance camera set up in the renowned writer's house - this is the exact sequence of events that took place:

Curtis Dankworth walked into the living room, where he sat down on the floor, patiently awaiting the arrival of a much younger writer by the name of Lizzie Payne. Approximately ten minutes later, Lizzie appeared, draped in a transparent night gown. The writers then indulged in some reading and writing, which after roughly twenty minutes, escalated into utterly queer behaviour. While Curtis seemingly tried to maintain his classy posture, Lizzie started reciting her poetry with an apparent aim to spur the writer on. The starting point of their conversion into casualties is when they begin re-enacting scenes from Curtis' well-known book *Malegro* in which the main character aches with desire to fulfil his muse's needs. Among many following peculiarities is of the utmost importance the moment when Curtis allegedly tries to massage his – now the mistress' neck, but Lizzie grabs his hands and tries to suffocate the writer by pouring enormous amounts of caviar down his throat. After that, they both seemingly awake from their frenzied states, grab their papers and start writing. This is just one of the many frantic sessions followed by abrupt states of complete clarity and soberness. Visibly content with their writing, they want to finalise their night, but the finishing act gets out of their hands, resulting in

strangulation and subsequent death. Lizzie's cause of death is not yet confirmed, but the autopsy shows signs of potential cardiac arrest.

In the darkness, in any light after dusk, you can slit a vein, and the blood is black.

*When I could have visitors, my pal Lizzie came around with a book and a magazine I had requested and asked, "What the hell are you doing here?" I wasn't scared of seeming abnormal, crying into a bowl of my Hackleback Caviar, for there was yet, blessedly, no such category in my imagination. My emotions remained unguarded. I wasn't afraid of humiliation. I didn't care about notions of respectability, cleverness or adequacy, those catastrophic inhibitors of talent and spirit. My thoughts were like a laboratory for what humanity, in general might be like if there were no such thing as ridicule. The idea that all of this was wrong moved away into the far distance, like an alarm bell ringing through a deep sleep.*

*"But do you remember how you used to say I reminded you of Kafka, Curtis?"  
"Just because you burned some of your shitty poems doesn't mean I thought you were anything like him. People tried to stop Kafka from destroying his work while I struck the matches for you."  
"But help me, command me, and I'll obey you like a dog. Do you think I'm weak, Curtis? I'd like to see your blood. Your brain on a chopping block. I'd like to see your whole being swimming in a lake of blood. I think I could drink from your skull. I'd like to bathe my feet in your guts. I could eat your heart roasted. You think I'm weak, Curtis?"*

*With love, Curtis & Lizzie*

The psychiatrist's thesis of the above notes: Writers can become a real threat to society and themselves when in search of inspiration.

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# POETRY

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## **Sum total**

Maruška Slavec

Wet, tentacled hands tighten round her chest,  
Where lungs fill with water, silt and tears.  
Her dress is heavy, her golden halo, now dark,  
Is sinking in the shadow of the envious water.

Drowning in the memories of the sunlit days,  
Spent in silks and cottons that flowed while she  
Danced in the Old Market Square, to fiddles  
And cheers, and jeers, until he approached.

Is the sum total of her past to blame for  
The creature that raped her, that pulled  
Her hair as he takes her to the streambed  
To drift motionless with him?

Sun shines on Ljubljana, and Spring  
Has spread her enveloping arms, but  
None reach the living effigy under the waves,  
As none reached while she was being submerged

## **A Shining Life**

Iza Stres

Born in the right place,  
at the right time  
to achieve a station,  
to deserve a rhyme.

You shine like gold,  
your heart as rough.  
None live forever -  
did you live enough?

## **Epitaph**

Iza Stres

You can say you were never to blame.  
You die with no mistakes to your name.  
Did you give all you could give?  
Can you truly say you lived?

## **Strive To Live**

Iza Stres

I seek the sights  
that smell and sing.  
I love the lights  
that laugh and lean.

I mind the means  
and move the minds;  
I chase my choice  
and choose my fights

## **To Here Is Ours**

Iza Stres

So touch me for all the things I will not hear,  
for all the guilt, the pain, the fear.  
Tell me it'll be alright,  
tell me that you'll help me fight.  
Talk with me 'till we fall asleep,  
tell me I am yours to keep.  
Tell me that you understand  
what I've given you, and grant  
me the same careful affirmation,  
so that each other's proclamation  
to be gentle sings us to peace.  
So the only thing we ask is  
*please,*  
*let this last.*

(Let me be forever cast  
in her light)

## **Finally**

Iza Stres

Scabs fall off and scars remain,  
years and years go down the drain.  
Clench your teeth and see through pain,  
abide by rules and don't complain.

Kiss their shoes or plan to lose,  
your future isn't yours to choose.  
Smile and respect their views,  
remember you are theirs to use.

"It's not a game I chose to play,  
but here is where I have to stay,"  
you think to yourself every day,  
until you finally come to say:

"There's not a spot on me unbruised,  
I simply can't patch up my shoes.  
I'm not alone with a blown fuze,  
and there are lots of unpaid dues.

I will not run to win their prize,  
alone I cannot match their size.  
But they can't silence all our cries,  
so what if we did unionize?"

## **Vague Objects**

Petruša Golja

Deliberately misinterpreting a  
psycholinguistics lecture

At which particular spot  
does a valley turn into a slope,  
drizzle into rain,  
rain into snow?

At which point exactly  
does a river meet the sea,  
does mist become fog,  
does a twig become a branch?

At which exact moment  
does living lull into lingering,  
does denial dry into defeat?

We are vague objects.  
Delimited by flesh  
but lost in abstractions.  
At which particular point  
are we even /.../

## **(N)evergreen**

Urša Šilar

I wish we could be evergreen.

Striving for more while relishing the seasons,  
not permitting the depression to part us.

I wish we could be evergreen.

Glowing profusely through the cracks of our  
souls,

even when December gets a hold of us.

I wish we could be evergreen, but all we are is  
nevergreen.

For we've never gotten a chance to be  
remarkable,

for we've never gotten a chance to be  
evermore.

## **Haiku**

Urša Šilar

Still biting my nails  
as a way to differ from  
my vacant ego.

Existing to die,  
to achieve the endless high.  
Take me as a drug.

Lea Košmrlj

They teach you literary analysis and square roots  
and before that, they teach how to tie your laces two ways - by crossing over and under, or by making bunny ears.

But they don't teach you empathy, how to put yourself in someone else's shoes,  
and what a burden it might be just to simply be.

They teach you letters and numbers,  
why the sky is blue,  
that mitochondrion is the powerhouse of the cell,  
and that hydrogen is the most common element in the universe,  
but they don't tell you if your grandparents are looking at you from up there,  
how to cope with never having said goodbye,  
or when to believe someone when they promise you forever.

They tell you that the absolute truth is an elusive concept,  
but it sure doesn't feel that way when you've been lied to one too many times in a row  
and cheated on without remorse.  
They don't tell you that true love is nothing like in the movies, it's just wishful thinking.  
And even though it might feel better for a split moment in time, no pain or loss  
can ever be fixed by any amount of smoking or drinking.

They make you read Shakespeare  
but they don't tell you how to sit with your sadness  
or where one draws the line between insanity and love.  
They don't teach you how to properly apologize  
or how to forgive someone when all you ever heard from them was silence.

They don't warn you that we're all human, flesh and bones, but we're not all humane,  
and that you'll see war,  
and that there is one you'll never stop fighting - the one with yourself.  
They don't tell you what to feel when your friend takes their life,  
and that it's not your fault you didn't recognize their cries for help.

They teach you something about taxes and the welfare state,  
but they don't tell you that your father loves you even though he never says it,  
and that you should cherish every moment because one day, your mother won't be there.  
But you know the presidents by heart and at least you had straight As in maths.  
That's a start.

They tell you many useful things, but they don't tell you that  
your whole life, you'll be walking on broken glass.



## **We Are Freedom Fighters**

Dominik Lenarčič

Peaceful freedom fighters.  
We make love  
and war.  
We spread our message of harmony  
with tactical strikes  
and scorched earth.  
We have eyes everywhere.  
One wrong move  
and you will go from ally  
to Antichrist.  
So stay in line  
and watch your step  
because we can  
and we will  
destroy you.

## **Ifs**

Dominik Lenarčič

If the sun hadn't risen that day,  
I wouldn't have woken up.  
If I hadn't woken up,  
I wouldn't have gotten out of bed.  
If I hadn't gotten out of bed,  
I wouldn't have stubbed my little toe on the  
coffee table.  
If I hadn't stubbed my little toe on the coffee  
table,  
I wouldn't have sworn like a bastard.  
If I hadn't sworn like a bastard,  
my mum wouldn't have heard me.  
If my mum hadn't heard me,  
she wouldn't have gotten me to the hospital.  
If she hadn't gotten me to the hospital,  
I wouldn't have a nurse by my bed.  
And if I hadn't had a nurse by my bed,  
I wouldn't have met you.  
So thank you, sun!

## **One More**

Dominik Lenarčič

*to all who fight, on their land or in their mind*

One more step.  
One more speech.  
One more march.  
One more fight.  
One more victory.  
One more smile.  
One more life.  
One more.

## **Carnival**

Lucija Čop

Maybe it was your inciting blue eyes  
or the messy teddy bear beard  
maybe because you cut your own hair  
or some childhood trauma we share  
the curious ambiguity of your step  
maybe resemblance with my ex  
mix of alcohol carnival high  
Led us to ecstatic celebration of spring

Fucked more than we spoke  
floating in time  
silence  
eye gazing  
it became clear

There is nothing casual about really good sex.

And slowly my kisses  
start closing your eyes  
And slowly my legs  
are no longer shy  
And all this in time  
our time for goodbye.

## **On Love**

Lucija Čop

Is Love a losing game?  
Depends on how you play.  
Italians say: "in amore vince chi fugge".  
Will you take the risk and stay?

You say it's never been a losing game.  
You never lost,  
can't say the same.  
Been playing it all wrong ...

Been staying too long  
Searching for mom  
Can't see in the fog  
Let's stay in the sun

## **Windowsill**

Jaka Brezavšček

Ah, to bask in the sunlight  
atop a high windowsill,  
in the bright glow of golden hour –  
carefree, just sit a while.

Saying goodbye to sunken dreams,  
not being crushed  
by my mind's broken beams,  
no such beams come from the Sun.

My favourite fruit, a mandarin  
not surprising then  
how praiseful my gaze  
at the mighty sky's tangerine.

Still, my windowsill doesn't exist;  
I lay in my bed and twist, twist, twist.

## **Your Heart**

Jaka Brezavšček

Your heart is so strong.  
It sends pulses piercing,  
through your shoulder  
to my ear, to my core.

Your heart is so strong!  
You give me your time,  
your love, the support I adore,  
and ask for nothing in return.

Your heart is so strong!  
I hear its beat in your words.  
They make the fabric  
of time and space convulse.

So strong is the pulse of your heart that it  
holds together the complicated magnificence  
– You

## Three Poems

Tina Jančič

say body without mentioning the mirror. say skin without mentioning his touch. i'm either letting the days slip by or i slip on them. don't mistake the light in my eyes for anything more than the reflection of my phone screen. my latest muse wears his hand around my neck, explains and shows me where the surface of my soul is, forgets to ask about the entrance. sometimes i think i was made to be outlined by people this way, but that mostly that saddens me.

say body without mentioning another body. how i'd love to mention my skin only through my own touch. how i'd love for my touch to be enough, for my body to not go past itself. i'm the closest to self-love when i'm the closest to death: in the space of the split-second, i find and hold onto the yearning to remain. my to-do list in may: break the mirror. forget him.

i often wonder if i can't make anything beautiful, what does that make me, but mostly i just want to live. mostly i just want to live. i'd repeat this until it left an imprint in the air. i'd speak it forever until it held enough space for me to make a home out of it.

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i imagine having a space of my own, with redecorated superstitions. where whistling means a heartflutter, a victory in parting your lips just the right way, not calling out to a nemesis. where washing clothes on a sunday smells like a fresh start, not waking up god. where god will never wake up because i finally washed him off those clothes, off my skin. where i don't hang any mirrors to save my body. where whispering saves my body. where the quiet feels warm silky soothing, not heavy and intrusive, and are you okay, where is your mind. there's no persistence here, only a new rhythm of existing. where the sun waits patiently for days for me to open my drapes and let it pour down the ceiling, coat the walls, flood the floor. where the sun waits patiently for days because it falls off the moon into this space each night anyway. where i can turn night and day upside down and the world still remains at every end. where i can shatter everything and put myself back together again. to hang the mirrors eventually when i heal. to taste the honey, the red of your lipstick on your parting lips instead of sin and i can love without flinching. a space where crimson stained clothes mean holy lust and it might as well be the only superstition.

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january. i've been sleeping with my arms folded over my chest. my idea of how to preserve my heart. if i don't press my fingers over that patch of skin, it spills over the moment i get out of bed in the morning. somehow, it doesn't make me feel lighter. across the city, it'll leave a trail for anyone to love it. a dead end everyone returns from.

february. i'll try going handleless over my heart. let it spill, maybe the best way to preserve it is to run empty. at night, i'll come to the mess by my bed and stand by it. i'll stand by it. falling in love with everybody – i can't find a metaphor there. nothing else feels like that, so utterly and so desperately me.

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# ACADEMIC WRITING

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## The Diverse ‘American dreams’ of Female Characters in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*

Emina Rekanović

### 1. Introduction

Lorraine Hansberry wrote the play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), the first play written by an African-American woman to be produced on Broadway. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a compassionate human drama about one working-class African-American family living in Southside Chicago struggling to overcome the life battles they face. Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* covers numerous provoking themes, and some of those are racism, dignity, pride, assimilation, discrimination, gender issues, feminism, the value of family and dreams. The topic of dreams is immediately visible in the opening poem *Harlem* by Langston Hughes, which sets a disturbing tone to the play, asking the question of what happens if a dream is deferred.

“Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? ...  
Or does it explode?” (Hansberry, 1994:485)

There are five members of the Younger family in this play; Lena Younger – Mama, Walter Younger (Lena’s son and Beneatha’s brother), Ruth Younger (Walter’s wife), Beneatha (Lena’s daughter and Walter’s sister), and Travis Younger (Walter’s and Ruth’s son) - five different individuals sharing the same surroundings and each of them fighting their own life battles. “In *A Raisin In the Sun*, we see a poor, African-American family struggling to live in Chicago’s south side, sometime after World War II but before 1959. The family is excited about the \$10,000 life insurance that is soon to arrive” (Loos, 2008:15). The action of the play revolves around the personal desires and wishes for spending the inherited money. Despite the seemingly hopeless situation, almost every character in the play has some dream they hold on to; actually, every character has its own vision of the ‘American dream’ and the way to achieve it. As already mentioned in Lorraine Hansberry’s play, there are three female characters - Mama, Ruth, and Beneatha - and all three of them have their own personal dreams and desires.

This essay discusses the diverse ‘American dreams’ of the female characters in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. With references to the play as the main source, this essay discusses different dreams each one of these women have, the way to achieve them, and the inescapable influence the environment they live in has on their dreams. The analyses of personal dreams such as becoming a doctor or purchasing a new house are presented together with a short definition of the concept of the ‘American dream’ and a thorough description of the environment that surrounds the Younger family.

## 2. 'American dream' and the Youngers' surroundings

In order to discuss the topic of this essay, one has to be aware of what the 'American dream' as a social phenomenon presents. "The American dream requires the individual to dominate his environment and seize a promise of economic and social advancement" (Bigsby, 2000:317). Each man has a right to pursue happiness, achieve economic stability, and gain respect. The Merriam-Webster and Britannica dictionaries define 'American dream' as follows: "a happy way of living that is thought of by many Americans as something that can be achieved by anyone in the U.S., especially by working hard and becoming successful." This entails that the 'American dream' means achieving economic stability, equality, freedom to make your own choices, freedom to accumulate wealth, freedom to lead a dignified life, and the opportunity to attain your own version of success in society. And it can be achieved through hard work and risk-taking rather than just by pure luck. In this play, the reader is not faced with just one 'American dream,' but there are several different dreams which lead to different interpretations of the notion of the 'American dream.' These dreams, such as purchasing a new house, becoming a doctor or simply being happy, seem rather common, but they were very big, particularly for the period of the 1950s. The social and economic constraints brought on by racism affect the possibility of those dreams coming true. "The disappointing promises of the 'American dream' were possibly most evident in the struggle of African-American" (Saddik, 2008:10) population for a voice, place, or recognition portrayed in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Each family member struggles in the white-dominant society to find peace and pride within themselves and their loved ones, but also struggles with the decisions on how to spend the inherited money and struggles to understand to whom the money actually belongs. Besides this, the dreams of the Younger family depend on an insurance check. And that is where the sad and paradoxical situation of this family lies. Their ray of hope lies in the money of someone who is dead - "Then isn't there something wrong in a house, in a world, where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?" (Hansberry, 1994:565)

"The setting of *A Raisin in the Sun* is the ghetto of Chicago, where most African-Americans lived. These districts consisted of overpriced, overcrowded, and poorly-maintained apartments and homes. In the ghettos, crime rates were high and public services were limited" (Jose, 2014). "Racial oppression, unspoken and unalluded to, other than the fact of how they live, runs through the play. It is inescapable. The reason these people are in a ghetto in America is because they are Negroes" (Bigsby, 2000:279). The Youngers live in a tiny apartment, which reflects and illustrates the housing conditions that African-Americans faced during the 1950s in Chicago. The apartments were overcrowded, had poor housing conditions, and would be divided into tiny units called "kitchenettes". The short article entitled *Housing and Race in Chicago* on the official Chicago Public Library website states that "these apartments often had no bathrooms, with all the occupants of a floor having to share a single hall unit. Buildings sometimes lacked such basic amenities as proper heating. Residents used kerosene lamps instead, and their improvised stoves often overheated and caused fires. The partitions used to divide the apartments were flammable as well, adding to the hazardous conditions". The Younger apartment bears some of these traits too. The apartment is really cramped, especially for five members of the Younger family. "The Younger living room would be a comfortable and well-ordered room if it were not for a number of indestructible contradictions to this state of being. Its furnishings are typical and undistinguished and their primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years - and they are tired" (Hansberry, 259). The kitchen is small and looks rather like a closet; the living room serves as a dining room and as Travis's makeshift bedroom.

"Weariness has, in fact, won in this room. Everything has been polished, washed, sat on, used, scrubbed too often. All pretenses but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room." (Ibid:487)



And they have to share the bathroom with their neighbours. This roach-infested, lightless apartment adds to tensions in the Younger family which inevitably have consequences. Referring to dreams, the question that appears is: is it possible for any dream to come true in this type of living space?

Apart from the setting of the action, the time and the context are also very important. The play takes place in the 1950s, probably one of the most important periods when it comes to racial issues. The Younger family is “set against a backdrop of overt racism and pervasive housing discrimination in the 1950s” (Loos, 2008:27). The 1950s was the decade that brought the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the 1950s, the South was segregated by racist Jim Crow laws.

“Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation. The laws were meant to marginalize African-Americans by denying them the right to vote, hold jobs, get an education or other opportunities. Those who attempted to defy Jim Crow laws often faced arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence and death. Public parks were forbidden for African-Americans to enter, and theatres and restaurants were segregated. Segregated waiting rooms in bus and train stations were required, as well as water fountains, restrooms, building entrances, elevators, cemeteries, and even amusement-park cashier windows. Laws forbade African-Americans from living in white neighbourhoods. Segregation was enforced for public pools, phone booths, hospitals, asylums, jails and residential homes for the elderly and handicapped” (Jim Crow Laws: Definition, Facts & Timeline - *History.Com*).

As a result of the context, the racial tensions of the time period certainly fuel the conflicts of the play. Segregation and racism as life-threatening illnesses affect all the members of this family and even their minor dreams. Dreaming in this period of time seems rather unusual; one would think of how to survive everyday obstacles visible in the racial issues, but the dreams that members of this family have, help them distract their minds for at least a moment by building castles in the air.

### **3. Three generations of women - three generations of dreams**

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, we find three female characters - Lena Younger - Mama, Ruth Younger and Beneatha. We are talking about three generations of women who are facing similar environmental pressures. First, they are women; second, they are African-American women; third, all of them live in the ghettoized Chicago. The 1950s were a hard time for women in general - the percentage of women in colleges dropped, women depended on their husbands, and they had to behave in traditional roles primarily as a wife and a mother, and above all, very often, they were denied a voice. These three women - Mama, Ruth, and Beneatha - are stuck in a rather unthankful position because they belong to a social group that is denied a voice. But still, even in such conditions, these three women hold on to their dreams because that is all they got. Their dreams present their ticket for a better tomorrow.

Lena Younger - Mama is the oldest member of the Younger family. She has been through many worse periods in history, like lynching and oppressive violence, and went through personal tragedies like losing a child. Her dream is to buy a house and move out of the ghetto and the roach-infested ‘rat trap’ apartment the family lives in. Besides buying a new house, she wants her family to stay together, and the only way for this to come true is through buying a new house and enabling a solid ground for family life.

“Been thinking that we maybe could meet the notes on a little old two-story somewhere, with a yard where Travis could play in the summertime, if we use part of the insurance for a down payment.”  
(Hansberry, 1994:502)

“Most of the African-American population living in the ghetto had hopes of leaving to better suburban neighbourhoods, but segregated housing kept them stuck in the ghetto” (Jose, 2014). She has been dreaming about a new house for a while now.

“But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had ‘bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back. And didn’t none of it happen” (Hansberry, 1994:502).

Practically, Mama has been watching her only dream crumbling in front of her eyes for a long time now. Her dream was always influenced by the lack of financial sources, her race and the fact that she belongs to a marginalized social group. Her dream can be described as tangible. This insurance check presents a ray of hope for her dream to come true. After all, with the money she inherited from her late husband, she does buy a new house. But she purchases a new house in a predominately white neighbourhood Clybourne Park. The biggest threat to her dream to come true is a white-dominated society and racism. On that note, when she purchases the new house in Clybourne Park, her family is not accepted there by white people, and moreover, they are openly offered a check not to come.

“It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities” (Hansberry, 1994:553).

Mama’s ‘American dream’ presents success in family relationships and respect for each other, which eventually stands as her own understanding of the pursuit of happiness.

Ruth is about thirty years old. She is Walter’s wife. Ruth is a domestic woman, doing all the work - cooking and housekeeping for other families in order to help her own family. She has been helping the entire family, also Walter’s sister Beneatha.

WALTER (to Ruth): “Don’t you get up and go work in somebody’s kitchen for the last three years to help put clothes on her back?” (Hansberry, 537)

She seems to be tired, and disappointed and she dreams of happiness, tranquillity, solid marriage, and just like Mama, moving to another house. She has had enough of the multifunctional apartment. “Well, Lord knows, we’ve put enough rent into this here rat trap to pay for four houses by now . . .” (Hansberry, 1994:502). Her dreams seem to be less materialistic, but even so, they are still infected with the unfortunate living conditions the Younger family is stuck in. Ruth’s dream of solid marriage does not depend solely on her, but on her husband Walter as well. Just like Mama, Ruth has rather noble, and emotional understanding of the ‘American dream’. She wants a peaceful life, and moving out of the lightless apartment would present moving out of the tiresome and rough lifestyle they led all of their life. The strong desire to fulfilling her dream is directly visible towards the end of the play when she firmly says she is willing to work day in and day out just to move out.

“RUTH (Turning and going to MAMA fast—the words pouring out with urgency and desperation) Lena—I’ll work ... I’ll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago ... I’ll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to—but we got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!!” (Hansberry, 581)

Beneatha is Walter’s sister, a twenty-year-old intellectual and her dream is to become a doctor. Nowadays, this is a common wish, but back in the 1950s, it was rather strange.

“WALTER: I just wondered if you’ve made up your mind and everything.

BENEATHA: *And what did I* answer yesterday morning, and the day before that? And the day before that and the day before that!

WALTER: I’m interested in you. Something wrong with that? Ain’t many girls who decide

WALTER *and BENEATHA*: to be a doctor” (Hansberry, 1994:496).

She is a woman, and being a doctor was predominately a male profession in the 1950s. Additionally, she is African-American which means she has to bear with discrimination. Beneatha is actually ahead of her time because her goal is unconventional; she struggles with white-dominated society to accept her as a college-educated coloured woman. She strives toward intellectual achievement. So, her dream is powerful and can be described as utopian if one considers the time this family lives in. Besides having social and economic issues, Beneatha struggles with Walter’s influence on her. He suggests she should be a nurse, which was a common profession for women in the post-war period. Otherwise, she should get married because that is what most women do. This is where we can see that women were to behave according to the ‘traditional’ roles, and their voice was not to be heard.

WALTER (to Beneatha) “Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy ‘bout messing ‘round with sick people, then go be a nurse like other women or just get married and be quiet. . .” (Ibid:497)

Her brother is unsatisfied because Beneatha is not showing much respect towards the rest of her family and towards them paying the cost of her schooling.

“It ain’t that nobody expects you to get on your knees and say thank you, Brother; thank you, Ruth; thank you, Mama and thank you, Travis, for wearing the same pair of shoes for two semesters.” (Ibid:497)

The tensions between the two of them are harsh and leave scars on both of them and their dreams. But Beneatha seems to stand shoulder to shoulder with Mama when it comes to strength. She is a robust and sharp person and uses her intellect as her power. She shows a lot of commitment to achieving her dream and trying to make her fantasy become reality. In this sense, she also reminds the reader of Ruth, who is willing to work even harder in order to move into another living facility.

When compared, the dreams of Mama, Ruth, and Beneatha are all different, yet all so similar because behind the dreams of success, money, and property, they all just want to feel accepted and proud. For the Younger women, their dreams seem farther away from what dreams would present today. Owning a house or getting a degree seems much more accessible today than it was in the 1950s for women, especially for women of colour. As a writer Hansberry is ahead of her time, she challenged societal norms that conditioned women to be in the kitchen and assumed that women could only be good housewives. Hansberry also showed that one can always dream despite the harsh surroundings around them and that one can hold onto their dreams as a reason to continue striving towards them coming true and becoming a reality. We can see in the female characters that one should not give up but rather try and give their best to achieve all that they can, despite the obstacles. That is exactly what these three women in the play do.

#### 4. Conclusion

Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* presents an honest portrayal of the everyday struggles of one African-American family living in the ghettos of Chicago during the 1950s. *A Raisin in the Sun* can be described as a family tragedy, but it is also a critique of racism, discrimination, materialism and capitalism. The topic of dreams is very openly visible in this play. All of the Younger family members have certain dreams they hold on to in order to overcome the obstacles of marginalized life.

The aim of this essay was to present the different 'American Dreams' each female character has and the influence of rough environmental conditions around them. The essay provided a thorough description of the 'American Dreams' the female characters have. Apart from this, the essay reflected on the environment as well, mainly the time and place of the setting. In the end, Mama's 'American Dream' is the one that becomes real. She achieved her goal of moving out of the tiny apartment. The achievement of this dream serves as a uniting force for the family and a better future for the next generations of the Younger family. The achievement of this dream sends a universal message that one might have to put dreams aside for a while or for a later time, but the dreams can eventually become true despite oppression, lack of money, environmental pressure or family conflicts. This is where the strength of this drama lies - even today, it is not easy to make a dream come true. The world is far from a perfect environment, and one must fight and work hard for everything, but when reading this play, one can understand that despite the rough surroundings and unexpected situations, one can still succeed or at least slowly get closer to their dreams. Nothing will happen overnight, things take time, but eventually, everything will happen when it is supposed to.

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## **If we are comfortable, are we really travelling?**

Tjaša Jazbinšek

In this modern era, there seems to be an ongoing debate about the differences between "real travellers" and "tourists". The so-called travellers often immerse themselves fully in the culture of the place where they are staying. At the same time, tourists are stereotypically the people one can find by the pool in resorts or quickly skimming through the most famous sights, then hopping to the nearest global chain restaurant for the same meal they can order in their home town. Therefore, if one spends their vacation staying within their comfort zone, reliving the same old routine and learning nothing along the way, can we claim that they have travelled?

It is not only the body that travels but also the mind. Finding ourselves in a place that seems unfamiliar to us pushes us to leave our comfort zone and go beyond our prejudice because that is the only way to grow. By experiencing everyday life in a foreign place, a person will most likely develop some, although sometimes faint, sense of empathy towards the people living there and will be able to identify with them more. This is especially important in today's world, as our planet is experiencing changes at a rapid pace that sometimes seem unimportant, as they are happening far away to people we do not know. As an example, we can use the severe floods in the Death Valley national park that occurred in the summer of last year, which is described as "a once-in-a-1,000-year event", but events like this one seem to be increasing. In order to understand the severity of such natural disasters, one has to try at least to put themselves into the shoes of the local community. What may seem like other people's problems may soon affect us as well.

Travelling is vital for our understanding of the world, but also for understanding ourselves. In every situation of the journey, we can find opportunities to test or strengthen a part of our persona that we might feel is not as strong as we want it to be. Whether that means overcoming our shyness by asking a local for recommendations, walking up to a group of people in a hostel, or improving our sense of direction by exploring an unknown city, travelling is an excellent opportunity to test one's limits. By staying in a hotel and relying solely on the internet to navigate, we may never know how capable we are of going off the beaten path.

Today, travelling is an essential part of life for many of us. However, to be travellers and not just tourists, we must be open, empathetic individuals who strive to connect with others and push our prejudice and comfort zone to the side. A quote in a movie I have recently watched sums it up nicely, as it says: "You must immerse yourself in an unfamiliar world in order to truly understand your own."



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