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KUD SODOBNOST INTERNATIONAL

IBIS GRAFIKA

PROZART MEDIA

CATALOG

Table of Sample Translations

Connecting worlds

Connecting the Worlds reading project presents thirty-one excellent literary works from all over Europe, mostly translations from lesser-used languages. The selected works will be published in Slovenian, Polish, Latvian, North Macedonian, Austrian/German and Italian markets and will appeal to a wide range of readers, from picture books for the very young to young adult books and novels for adults. The project highlights cult European authors and their award-winning works – small literary gems that would otherwise not easily reach these markets. The project brings together eight publishers from different countries to raise the profile of authors from 14 European countries.

Over 36 months, 9 publishing teams, 1 translation association, 27 authors, 20 illustrators, 19 translators, 11 editors, 9 designers, 23 project team members, 10 distributors, 19 foreign editors participating in networking will contribute to the success of the project – a total of 138 professionals.

KUD Sodobnost International

KUD Sodobnost International was founded in 2004 and has been publishing children's books ever since, specialising in picture books and high quality fiction. Many of our books have been nominated for major prizes (for stories and/or illustration and book design), with quite a few actually winning the prizes, including the Most Beautiful Slovenian Book of the Year Awards. We are proud that our children's programme is recognised for outstanding quality by the Slovenian Centre for Youth Literature.

Ibis grafika

Ibis grafika is an independent publishing company founded in 1994 in Zagreb, Croatia. Our goal has always been bringing high quality literature to Croatian readers, in the last 10 years we have started introducing more and more translated literature, especially from languages which have not yet been translated into Croatian, or few works have so far been translated. We are best known for our picture book program, for which we have received many awards and recognitions (IBBY Honour list, White Raven's Catalogue, major national literary awards). In addition to the publishing activity, Ibis is also very active in organising and implementing reading encouragement activities –we organise two literary festivals that focus on children's and YA literature in two cities, and we work with schools to promote reading.

Prozart Media

Publishing house Prozart media is the organizer of the International Literature Festival PRO-ZA Balkan and of the Skopje Fellowship Program. We were the first festival that organized Fellowship program in Southeast Europe, 10 years ago, in 2013. Using this platform, we have hosted dozens of foreign writers and publishers in our capital, Skopje. We also publish a wide range of titles in segments such as fiction, YA and children's literature. We have translated some high quality titles into Macedonian language such as books by the best writers from the Balkan region – Danilo Kis, Slavenka Drakulic, Miljenko Jergovic, Svetislav Basara... We publish around 20-30 titles per year. The founder and director of all three entities is Macedonian writer and editor, Dejan Trajkoski.

KUD Sodobnost International
Foreign rights: Zen Petan, zen.petan@sodobnost.com

ELENA OBUKHOVA: *A SHOP FOR STRANGE PETS*

DETAILS: Children novel for 6 to 12 years / 20 x 17 cm / 269 pages / softcover / B&W illustrations / published in 2023 by Prozart media.

In our ancient city of Ohrid live twins Marko and Marika. They love animals deeply and do everything they can to help them, even becoming assistants to the local veterinarian. Yet, despite all this, they're not allowed to keep any animals at home.

A SHOP FOR STRANGE PETS - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Marko and Marika

The day was filled with sunshine and the scent of flowers to the very top, like a favorite cup filled with herbal tea. A light spring breeze was blowing, and down the hill from the Upper Gate, with full sails, two bicycles were racing. The bicycles rang out on the uneven stones of the ancient cobblestones: "Oh-h-rid", "Ohri-i-i-d". They were driven by twins Marko and Marika, or rather Marika and Marko, because Marika was born two minutes earlier and was considered the older one.

These children are a real nuisance to the local residents, but they are also a salvation for all the cats, dogs, sparrows and other representatives of the animal world. They are swimming champions in their age category, and sometimes in the wider area, but in karate training they only receive remarks and reprimands from the coach. Because how can you train with your twin and not get slapped at the first opportunity?

They can't sit still for a moment. Even when they're busy, they can't sit still. When they're not at school or riding their bikes through the streets, they're "helping" their neighbors at the little shop or in the yard, but their favorite activity is annoying the local vet, Tony. They brought him various injured animals so many times and so many times they didn't have the money to pay for their rescue, that the veterinarian declared them both his voluntary assistants.

It's May now, and the nine-year-old twins couldn't wait for the holidays to finally start, because, as always, they have a bunch of school related worries. Just try to get everything done when they give so much homework every day!

The bicycles shook on the stones of the old cobblestones, the bells jingled, and after their sound came Marko's agitated shout:
- There he is, Marika! Turn right! Faster!
There was a crash as one of the bicycles fell. The second one immediately followed, but it fell a little more softly, into the grass.

Marika ran into the alley.

Marko caught up with her. Marika fell to the ground next to someone's fence and began to shout triumphantly:
– Hurray, I caught him!

She grabbed a large gray cat by its hind legs. Its front legs and muzzle on the other side of the fence expressed extreme displeasure.

Marko ran back to his bike and took the sports bag from the trunk. Together, the two of them put the cat in it, attached the bag to the trunk, and headed down to the lake with the captured animal.

The children ran along the quay, turned left and continued up the street along the sidewalk, waving to the policeman on duty in front of the police station entrance and greeting the firefighters, finally stopping in front of the veterinary clinic.

- Good morning, Uncle Tony!
- Good morning, good morning! Bring your idler here.

Marko fumbled a little with the bag and after a short struggle he pulled the cat out of it. He and Marika put it on the table and tried to hold it while the vet prepared the medicine in the syringe. The cat screamed, using all the cat curses he knew and tried to free himself.

But the injection had already been given, and the beast, apparently realizing that the procedure was complete, gave in a little and stopped fighting. Marika took some food out of her pocket, put it in the bag, and skillfully zipped it up before the cat could jump out of it and run away.

– There you go. One more injection tomorrow and he'll be done, – Tony laughed.
– Thank you, Uncle Tony.
– No problem, I'll wait for you around four o'clock to clean the floor. And the grass in the lawn still needs to be mowed. But that's when you have time.
– We'll be there around four, thank you!
– Oh, let's just find Jack, and then the swan.
– Yes, that's right, I almost forgot...

Bicycles are already ringing somewhere in the center. The gray cat-idler has started back home, probably not even realizing that these tanned devils saved him from certain death a few days ago. Well, what can you do, those cats are like that...

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ERMIS LAFAZANOVSKI: HRAPESHKO

DETAILS: Adult Fiction book 20 x 17 cm / 157 pages /
softcover / first published in 2006

Hrapeško: novel about the art of creating and survival, of aspirations and dreams, of vitality and love
Hrapeško, an experienced wine-grower, lives somewhere in the region of Tikveš, at the time of the 19th century. Until one day he leaves the epicentre of the Balkans and goes on his travels, to the West and to the East. Far away from home he learns a new profession and becomes famous. Humorous and serious at the same time the author tells of Hrapeško's fortunes and mishaps, of the art of creating and survival, of aspirations and dreams, of vitality and love, of the homeland and foreign co

HRAPESHKO - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Hrapeshko arrived unshaven.
From afar, he resembles a bandit.
Close up, like a young lad.
Closer still, his head appeared disproportionately small above his shoulders and huge chest that heaved broad and square like a knight' breastplate. His legs were short and his arms extended only to his waist. His midriff was tightly squeezed by a wide leather belt with sheaths from which protruded various tools for gardening and pruning vineyards: cutters, pruning knives, pairs of shears.
He stopped in front of Monsieur Georges and the interpreter, without uttering a word, inquiring only with his gaze as to why he had been sent for and, above all, who these people were who had sent for him.
Each looked one other up and down for several moments.
Georges and his interpreter appeared to be members of the clerical class.
Dressed a la franca, they were both somewhat dishevelled from their travels, neither bearded nor shaven but something in between.
"Respected citizens of suburbia!" announced the interpreter, "This gentleman before you is the great Georges de Bourgogne in person, a renowned and acclaimed explorer of the obscurest regions of darkest Europe, a scholar of comparative civilization and culture and a lover of adventure and good wine. The personal cultural attaché, indeed, of his Highness the French Prince Aberville de Grenoble. The documents in his possession will testify to his position. And what is more, they grant him unrestricted right of travel through these parts."
Upon hearing which words, beads of sweat began to form, although it was yet the dead of winter, on the foreheads of the people in the crowd, including Hrapeshko himself.

“As for myself, I am merely an interpreter and my role in all this is so footling and insignificant that it is not worth even mentioning my name. For this reason, I shall refrain from introducing myself.”
And now.
“Are you the one?” asked the interpreter in the name of Monsieur Georges, who all the while stood quietly muttering to himself something half in French and half in German, so quietly as not to obstruct the interpreter, “Are you the one about whom these people gathered here spin such myths and legends?”
Hrapeshko spat upon the ground and stepped forward, neither bowing his head nor lifting his gaze from Monsieur Georges, who likewise did not avert his gaze from Hrapeshko. The latter slowly approached until he stood just nine inches from the other. Until both could smell the other’s breath, both equally malodorous.
“What a man!” the interpreter exclaimed in the name of Monsieur Georges, which gentleman in the meantime had retrieved from his pocket a piece of rope that he was now using to measure the man before him. “It is true that I have never before seen such a chest as yours. From this fact alone, however, I cannot assess the skill for which these people have vouched for you in your absence. But here! I’ll give you one lira if, here and now in front of all these people, you confirm their tales and legends.”
Hrapeshko took the coin, took a bite at it, and shoved it in his jacket.
He dropped his arms down by his sides. His hands hung by his waist, his waist drawn tight with a broad leather belt sporting loops and sheathes from which various types of pruning shears poked out: wide ones with thin blades, long ones with short blades and shortish ones with thickish blades. The crowd gathered around the three men now held their breath in solemn anticipation. Only the distant rustling of the aspens could be heard, mingled with the faint babble of the River Vardar from yet further off. No one dared draw breath, let alone utter a sound. What might have been the giggles of a few children at the back of the crowd alone hinted at what might be about to happen.

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DEJAN TRAJKOSKI: *FILM POEMS*

DETAILS: Poetry book 20 x 17 cm / 50 pages / softcover /
First published in 2022 by Bata Press

FILM POEMS - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

LOST IN TRANSLATION

At this moment
Somewhere in the world
There are two people
Laying together
As buttons of a shirt
That cannot touch each other
No matter how close they are

CLOSER

It was the day
When the mill wheel was turned by one drop
The wind blew all the rust from the forgotten sickle
And the wings of two birds of the flock fluttered
In flight.

Those were the days when bees drank blood
The honeycomb has painted red
And the lines on our palms matched
One on the another one
Perfectly.

But, time does not transgress:
The winds we get used to
We forget them faster.

This is the picture from our encounters:
We are the place
And a nuance
Between red and blue
From the same flame.

AMERICAN HONEY

The letters of your breath
Like frozen steam they fall
And I line them up
Like a stone that stops water.

Your shadow does not bend over obstacles
So around her
A house I cannot draw.

The grass we lie on
It straightens up
Only in my place.

The color of your eyes
It moves to the corners of my lips.
It bends them like a hook, like an anchor,
Like a halved crescent moon
With a shadow in between.

I always see things where they are not:
When you push me away, I get closer to you.

I think it's strange you never knew.

FLEABAG

The waters
From two fingers
That quench a candle
Touched themselves through the flame.

Like two different books
With same number of pages
Which finally
Found themselves on the same shelf.

And in which
Ambiguous are the words
With a positive connotation.
For example: it will pass.

As if they shape new grammatical tenses
Giving birth to the Present impossible
And the Future painful
From the Past imperfect.

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

They have the same definition of the red color
And they know the air
Previously touched by one of them.

The meeting at the right time passes them by
Like a tear traveling at the same speed
But in different rooms.

Like land and water they are.
Always touched
However, unattached.

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE 2

You both search for a place with round doors
Where one can enter from everywhere.
In which there is teas for dreams, hugs and soul mates.
And where the candles light according to the desire, the need and reasonableness.
When you find it, as drop of water you are, that kissed the cloud, before his cry.
Then, the real questions starts to cut through answers like the sickle through haystack.
Afterwards, almost without exception, the clouds stops crying
Faced with the inability to return to the site
Where one can exit from everywhere.

SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER... AND SPRING

It is springtime.

On water I sleep
Learning the language of fish
In a house of silence.

Almost like twins they are
The leaves that heal
And the ones that kill.

Butterflies are always faster than we are
So we tie a stone to what
From the height we see.

It is spring.

The stone remembers the weight
And the scars are a school desk
On which with water
A prayer we write.

TIGER AND THE SNOW

If she's gone (if she dies)
The presence will become just a verb
And all the verbs - pronouns.

If the sun ceases to reflect from her eyes
It will come down to a flashlight.

The evening and the wind
If not join in her hair
They will stop being a cure.

The first drop that touches the thirsty dust
Will be left without a job
Its scent will be taken away
Like as the abandoned bakery
From our childhood.

I exist in her
Because I exist in myself
And vice versa.

Any other scenario
Is like a badly synchronized TV series.

The meaning was not born before us
So to tell stories of hope afterwards.

If she's gone (if she dies)
The presence will become just a verb
And all the verbs - pronouns.

TALK TO HER

There is nothing further from where you are.
The air embraced by your wings:
I am still breathing it.

Tears are a knife to the cheeks
And they do not drown in the rivers.
So every sigh is like cut love
Between leaf and carbon dioxide.

Sometimes the sounds resembles the past:
No closed door has a story like the open one
And the stones in front of them are always warmer
From waiting.

There is nothing further from where you are.
The air embraced by your wings:
I am still breathing it.

CINEMA PARADISO

To Fernando Pessoa
He lived with the illusion that she was waiting for him

I
I watched her like a soldier
99 days and nights,
Like a black and white movie
Slowly discolored by the paint.

II
The unattainable is a painted reality.
Escape is the most convenient way
Of ignoring life.
You have to run away
To be.
To live
Means to forget.

STALKER

On the screen is a woman who has never seen a swing.
She carries her wasted youth in her cigarette
Like sometimes the only companion
Whom she is looking for, from time to time,
Kissing it till the end.
For her, tears have long been just drops of water
Which will merge with the clouds
In a repeat kiss
Which can only be postponed
And not to be avoided
In that endless cycle of grief
Interspersed with hope
In rare moments
When the cup moves on its own on the table
As if drawn by a strong soul
A soul with grayness perforated
With a grayness, that gives birth.

STALKER 2

Faith and hope.
Even when
The only sounds
Are the creak od the door
Caressed by an unknown wind
And drops from an old faucet
Like rain
That is raining from the inside
From within the house.

AMARCORD

I
It is easy for the people,
They build on the ground.
What about the stars
That float without support.
Millions, millions of stars!

II
Different stories
Scattered in the sea
Waiting for the future
To save them from something
Whose name they do not know.

THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

The look after the lost soul
Will become like a fridge magnet
From a distant city
With an expiration date.

Leftovers are always around:
Cover for love
Time through your eyes
White sadness.

Can it be measured
With a unit of measure
How many
And what kind of tears are needed
For the soul to dry up?

LOST HIGHWAY

Kiss
Like the one
Between the highway and car tires.

It seems
It will bleed
Of closeness.

The palm of my hand on your face
Like lights
On the dark road
To your crossroads
Tiled with 1000 signs
None with my name on it.

Angels do not know what recourse is.
The rain did not teach them.

The unknown in front of us
In the dark
Travels at speed
Of the piano keys.

AMERICAN BEAUTY

Sometimes
The true cry finds its name very late
Only after all the waters have been changed
And that same look from both of them
Has impoverished
And fell apart
Like a plastic bag
That played in the wind.

HER

Today we gave grief a name.
We have banned the fake letters from existing.
In front of us are the pictures that we deleted
Because they reflected reality (because it can only be seen
one of us).
The favorite tone of our voices is on.
We are lying on the moon
Knowing that never again
We won't feel anything that strong
As in the times
When we lay on the moon.
Everything will be with less excitement.
As a kind of repetition.
And it will last
Until we start stroking each other's shadows
A million touches away.
Because, finally, we admit to ourselves:
- there is nothing new for us.
Only repetitions, with a lower intensity.
And, yes, we admit that it is not a big of a problem
As long as we're together.
Then again
Like gods
We will be the saddest and happiest people on
the world
For a while yet.

BEFORE SUNSET

In your apartment
Some things
Cannot be wiped like shoes on the doorstep.

At your home
The lines of the paintings are borrowed
From your temperament.

At your place
Books know what a touch is
And music is a conversation with you.

From your terrace
The flowers grow towards the room
Instead towards to the sun.

They all live outside your presence too,
But get alive
Because of your presence.

In your apartment
The shadows are just a place
Protected from the sun’s rays.

BEFORE MIDNIGHT

I want to be your lantern handle
To not close myself off entirely
To leave some air for you
So that you can say I'm suffocating you
You
My breath for kindling,
My spark from the fire.

I want you to be my lantern handle
To not close yourself off entirely
To leave some air for me
So that I can say you are suffocating me
Oh You
My breath for kindling,
My spark from the fire.

GEGEN DIE WAND

I see what is in front of me
After others see it.

I am neither a lightning
Neither a thunderstorm.

Just a space
Which fills the time in between.

GEGEN DIE WAND 2

I am a chair that nobody seats on
And a folded beer cork
Without a leg from an unstable table.

I am an edge of an unironed sheet
And a heel worn out
From the right side.

I am time
In which the embered cigarette butts
Do not burn your fingers.

DER HIMMEL ÜBER BERLIN

Now I know:
With you
I can be by my self
And not to be alone.
It has never been like this before.
Finally, I understand.
I know.
It's true:
Only two full moons
Can hide
Into each other.

THE MILLION DOLLAR HOTEL

The keys have fallen into the interspace of
the elevator
Whose buttons remember
On which floor they want to go
And on which floor they have to.

Hotel windows are like a well without a bucket
The light bulbs are changed once in a lifetime
And somewhere, maybe not even then.

As if we are crazy, we are afraid of the black spots on
the banana
While the black and white keys of the piano
Make love.

I am telling you about the conversations with the traffic lights
While we blink with our eyes and lips
In their rhythm.

Than you show me
That the same water in the glass is white
And in the sea - blue.

The sound of the trumpet spreads round and round
And I fly up
Than go down.

I will fall into the glass of water
And finally
A mural I will become.

PARIS, TEXAS

I

I knew these people
With their love held in different pockets
Lovers without spring and autumn
A fingerprint on a steamy mirror.

II

No one remembers
The first drop after the rain ends
Nor whose touch is the first to break:
The clock shows distance instead of time?
The doorknob creaks differently with each entry?
The favorite parts of the bedroom become
visible?

III

Together they looked as though they’d invented
the kiss.
As if they were the first people in history to have
kissed.
It’s as if they've loved each other forever
Even from primeval times
When the clouds first merged
And gave birth to water.
I knew these people.
Even an ordinary trip to the grocery store
Was an adventure for them.

IV

I knew these people.
All the opposites that brought them together,
that complemented them
Now they resembled quarreled windows, that forgot:
Hot air comes out from the inside,
As one enters in a person.

V

I knew these people
The red lights of the tall buildings
Don't flicker for them.

VI

A leaf may drown even after it drifts out of a whirlpool.
And plants are also born in a crack on the motorway.

PARIS, TEXAS (JANE TALKS TO TRAVIS)

I knew her
When that happened:
The embrace of their feet in the morning
Became cold.
They turned away from each other
Like in unplanned encounter.

I knew her
When she was there
Just like a silent minute of a wall clock
Suppressed by the sound of seconds.

I knew her
When she didn't know that
The time between accepting reality
And the battle with the remnants of love
Are part of a deal
No one wants to sign.

I knew her even after that
When, unintentionally, she draped herself
In the shroud of the familiar voice.
Until it faded away.

It happens so often:
Some clock hands
Arrive at the same place
But at a different time.

PINA (CAFÉ MÜLLER)

I
On a thin rope you walk
Therefore, I blow the dust from it.

I move the buildings
As if they are chairs,
Just to make a path for you.

The wall you lean on
I bent it
Pillow to be for you.

II

Maybe we are lovers.
Moved by wires.

We fall into each other
Like mannequins
At a time when hugs hurt.

The kiss afterwards
Is like the one after years.

THE COLOR OF POMEGRANATES

The colors are clock.
They measure the time
In blue and red.

The sun wants to drink water:
Feet are sliding through the carpets
Books are drying.

The shells are milk
From which we drink.
As minors and as adults.

Sometimes
The wings fly
Even without a head.

YUMURTA (EGG)

I

The sugar cubes are dancing in the water
Kissing eatchother
Until they melt together.

The spoon stirs tea
Joyfully
It's like it's her first time.

The knife is caressed with the butter
Making music
When touching the plate.

The water is boiling in the teapot
As if testifying
That we are home.

II

Thunder heralds a drop
who separated from her lover
So she traveled
Through oceans of time she traveled,
Until it finally evaporated
Reuniting with the cloud
In the scream of the lightning
That has meant to be born at that time.

YOUTH (SIMPLE SONG)

I remember everything
I'm losing control
I'm ready
I know everything
I caress you with words
I'm pulling your hair out
Slowly but surely
I feel you
Like a miracle
Like than
I'm getting lost
We are not them
We were
Just a whisper is enough
Just a whisper was enough.

YOUTH 2

If I am born again
I would choose the same
Weeping over impermanence
Above your total devotion to me
Which cannot be eternal
And which doesn't mean anything to me now.

YOUTH 3
To Blaze Koneski

When the beloved body and mind
Will change
Where does our love go?
When us too
We will go along the years,
Where does that miracle go?
And what is that thing, that still hurts?

KUD Sodobnost International
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DENIS JANKULOVSKI: *BESTIE AND BUDDY*

DETAILS: 18 pages / Illustrated by Natasha Kostovska /
softcover / first published in 2025 by Prozart Media

BESTIE AND BUDDY - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Roni and Bona are two small, temperamental kittens.
They live in Bestie's home and every evening they listen to her stories, which are the most beautiful in the whole world. And she tells stories so beautifully that the kittens listen like kids in class and learn many new things. That is why they call her Teacher.
In addition to the kittens, the Teacher also has a loyal friend, Buddy. One evening, while Bestie and Buddy were playing the board game "Don't be angry, dude," one of the kittens, Ronnie, said:
- Bestie, what story are you going to tell us tonight, where are we going to travel?
Teacher: - And which one would you like?
Bona: - Any one you choose, they're all beautiful. But if we have to choose one, let it be the one about the unusual planets.
Buddy usually doesn't like to talk much, so he said to himself:
"That's the most beautiful story, I always look forward to it."
Ronnie is a funny little kitten and just asks for something from the Teacher, so he asked her:
- But you'll take us too, right?
Teacher: - Ah, Ronnie, of course, nowhere without my friends.
Ronnie: – Supeeer, we're going to fly, we're going to fly!
Bona: – Hey, Buddy, do you want to fly with us too?
Buddy smiled shyly and nodded in the affirmative.
Teacher: – Great idea, we'll make a great team.
Ronnie: – And what are we traveling with, a car, a train, a rocket???
Teacher: – Ah, Ronnie, Ronnie, we're traveling like we travel every night, in the fantasymobile, and Buddy will drive. Can I can continue now, hahaha.

They got into the fantasymobile, the kittens lay
down on her lap, and everyone looked up at the sky.
– Friends, we are going on our unusual adventure
– said Buddy with his smiling eyes.
Teacher: – There are many, many, too many
planets in space, we can never count them. There are
a few that are the most beautiful and that I always
travel to.
Ronnie: – Can we go to the planet Joy first?
Pleeeeease.
– Ha ha, Ronnie, you're always asking something,
you're so funny - Buddy said cheerfully to himself.

The teacher: – Yes! And we already arrived. On this planet everyone is
happy, playful, merry.
There we were met by two bees that flew around us as if they were
doing the Cinderella dance and singing the words "DADASU, DADASU"1.
Balia the Bee: – Hello, friends, where are you going?
Bona: - We are traveling to beautiful planets.

The teacher: – Yes! And we already arrived. On this planet everyone is
happy, playful, merry.
There we were met by two bees that flew around us as if they were
doing the Cinderella dance and singing the words "DADASU, DADASU"1.
Balia the Bee: – Hello, friends, where are you going?
Bona: – We are traveling to beautiful planets.

Buddy stretched out his hand and Balia landed on his palm. He
stroked it, and Balia smiled.
Woody the Bee: – How nice, can we come too? And we want to
get to know Buddy more! We heard that he was one of the greatest
friends in the whole world.
Buddy, all joyful, then said to himself:
- Hey, on this planet they know me too. Come on, the more, the
merrier.
Together they headed for the other planet.
Bona: - I see a smiling tree that is like a conductor and elephants
singing. I know! We are on the planet Music.
Teacher: – Yes, that's right. On this planet, everyone sings all day
long. Both small and big, they sing, everyone sings.

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DENIS JANKULOVSKI: *BUDDY*

DETAILS: 18 pages / Illustrated by Natasha Kostovska / softcover / first published in 2025 by Prozart Media

BESTIE AND BUDDY - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Hello!
My name is... actually, you can call me Buddy. Bit of a strange name, isn't it? But after you read what I have to tell you, then you will see why that is my nickname, and I believe that you will also want to be called Buddy.
I am 10 years old, and I have autism. I would like to explain to you, if you don't know, why it's harder to communicate for me, why I don't want and can't be where there's traffic and noise, why all this bothers me and makes me feel uncomfortable. But autism does not mean that everything is reduced to I DON'T WANT and I CAN'T. Although I do not speak, believe me that I speak a lot within myself. That doesn't mean I'm not listening carefully. And if I'm not looking at you while you're talking to me, it doesn't mean that I'm absent – I'm present. I want to be with you, I want to play, to socialize. I can do many things. For example, I can draw very well.
I usually sit at the window and look at the playground full of children, I want to be there, but it is hard for me. I know kids are not that loud on purpose, but it bothers me, so I avoid all such places. With my mom or dad, we have our nice rule, every day at 5 pm we go out for a walk. We usually go to the river quay, then in front of my favorite bookstore, I like to collect crayons, I have a very large collection.
Every day we pass by the park where children play cheerfully. I look at them, by the glimpse of the eye so that they can't notice me, sometimes I pull mom's hand, meaning I would like to go and kick the ball at least once.

We keep walking, I am very happy being with
the children and in a position to kick the ball, and then I run around mom, I laugh as loud as I can, I sing. Some of the children stare strangely at me, some of their mothers come and pull their children away, others will tell mom to pick me up. I don't understand why they run away, why should she pick me up, just because I'm happy? Well, I think that's not bad, isn't it nice to be joyful and happy? Strange! My mom takes my hand, and we leave, and that makes me very sad, I don't understand why I can't play too. I want to, but they don't accept me in the game.
And so, I sit again by the window, watching the children.
With eyes full of tears, with the phone in my hands, I play songs. Sometimes I also draw for myself, dad buys me pads every day and tells me, son, just draw, if I have to, for you, I will go to the end of the world to buy you a pad for drawing.

And at school, the teacher would come to my desk, and with a smile she would tell me "Buddy, you draw beautifully, you have talent, keep drawing. One day someone will recognize all that and you will be a world-famous painter or something else related to your talent."
Yes, one can say that it's nice to draw and listen to music, and I agree with that, music is everything to me, but I would feel better if I have somebody's company. That's why I am asking others, loudly, but only inside me, to understand that it is difficult for me to approach first, to address someone and ask – can I play with you? it would be much simpler for me if you call me.

But one day everything changed. I remember well that it was Tuesday. Just like every day, at 17:00 we passed by the children, I looked at them, saw that beautiful colorful soccer ball again, and as if I had the impression that it was waiting for me to kick it. This time just as always, my wish will not be fulfilled. While I was looking towards the playground, suddenly, a girl ran towards me. I got a little scared and hid behind mom. The girl stopped, smiled, apologized for scaring me. She stroked my hair and left. At that moment I wanted to run to the other children at once, but my previous experience taught me that it would be in vain.
We wanted to leave. Surprise!!!! The girl came and handed me some chalk. I didn't take it immediately, but I wanted to, I really wanted to. She was trying to put it in my hand, smiling all the time.

- Take it, let's draw something on the pavement!
At that moment, I wanted to hug her. I didn't answer, I wanted to tell her something, because these words of hers sounded in my head like the most beautiful song I have played on my phone.
"I want, I really want to go and draw." I squeezed mom's hand tightly and she already knew what that meant.
- Buddy, let's go to the summer house where we go every day, it's calmer there.
"But mom, there are children here, there is someone who wants to be with me, and I am alone there." I knew why she wanted us to go there.
A woman came to us and said to my mom:
- Madam, I am Donna's mother, sorry if I scared you .
She watches you every day, watches your son and when she comes home she tells me... mom, there is an unusual child, but there is something interesting in him. When I look at him, it is as if I look at Sarah, do you remember the girl from our previous neighborhood where we used to live? They are the same, shy, but I know he likes to make friends, which child does not? Tomorrow I will go to him and invite him to hang out.
I listen, and I see my mom with teary eyes and a smile on her face.

- Don't worry about the others. Come together and we will tell them everything they don't know, what interest them, what scares them. We will explain to all of them that there is no need to be afraid of this sweet boy.
"Mom, mom, let's go, I'm not scary right?"
Mom just nodded, and Donna took my hand with a smile, and we came to the others. Some left again, some mothers left with their children also. But some of them remained. I sat down on the pavement and started to draw. I love nature and animals, so I drew a butterfly, swan, elephant, sun, stars. Space. While I was drawing, I didn't notice that about fifteen children gathered around me, and I heard voices like... hey, come to see, but I didn't think it was about my drawings. They were peering over me, shouting: well done, well done, you are drawing so good, you are gifted.

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A HOAP OF GOLDEN LEAVES BY IDA MLAKAR ČRNIČ

DETAILS: Hardcover | Illustrated by Peter Škerl | 34 pages |
Age: 3+ | Published in 2025 by KUD Sodobnost International

Leni and Dunja are neighbors, connected by a very special bond. One is still a little girl, the other an elderly lady. Their conversations unfold in Dunja's lush garden, where they play and invent whimsical rhymes. With childlike wonder, Leni curiously explores the world around her, while Dunja warmly shares stories about life. It seems this magic will stay with them forever, but come spring, Leni will move to the big city, and the garden will never be the same...

A HOAP OF GOLDEN LEAVES - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Leni walked down the street. The treetops rustled, and the branches drooped so low that she could touch them with her hand. Fallen leaves swirled above her head in a whirlwind.
The girl raised her hands to catch them. Leaves whooshed just above her, like a fiery red dragon with golden wings, then flew away. Disappointed, she ran to the neighbouring garden.
"Donna," she called out loudly and pushed open the garden gate. "I'm here."
The old woman straightened up for a moment and smiled at her. She nodded gently and dragged her rake across the lawn. On the garden beneath the grand maple tree there was a huge pile of autumn leaves.
Leni stopped under the tree, puzzled. Something was different. Donna hadn't invited her for tea as she usually did. She just kept raking. Slowly and quietly.
"Are you going to rake up all the leaves?" Leni asked in astonishment.
"All of them," Donna repeated after her, like an echo.
"How?" the girl wondered. "Are these leaves yours?"
Donna paused for a moment and leaned on her rake.
"They're mine," she said at last.
"But only yours?" Leni pressed on, as if she didn't quite believe her.
"Well, actually, they belong to the tree growing in my garden. So, in a way, they are mine," Donna explained.
Leni was taken aback. "You have so many leaves with golden speckles, you know."
Donna nodded with content and straightened up again. She inhaled and exhaled. Her eyes swept over the garden. It was bathing in warm autumn sunlight. The sun was already low in the sky.
"You've gathered a very big pile of leaves," Leni said in awe, staring at the heap.
"Mhm," Donna agreed. "Just a little more, and I'll have raked up every last one."
"So, you're as rich as a queen?" Leni guessed, furrowing her brow as she paced behind Donna, back and forth, in sync with the rake.
"I am. "I rule the leaves with a royal rake, just like a queen for autumn's sake," Donna laughed, lost in thought over Leni's question.

The girl waited anxiously for her answer.
"Are you rich or not?" she insisted.
Donna looked around her garden. It was lavish, almost fairy-tale-like. Leni often came here to chat. To listen to stories, to play. Whenever something troubled or worried her. Donna's heart ached. In the spring, when Leni will move to the big city, the crocuses will bloom again in the garden. In the summer, a hedgehog will scurry onto the grass, and autumn will once again gild the leaves. Everything will be as before. Except Leni will already be in school.
"I am rich," Donna said at last, "but not because of money."
The girl sighed worriedly. "How long have you been raking these leaves?" she asked curiously.
"Every autumn, I rake them up," Donna said. "If I piled up all the leaves I've raked, the heap would be as tall as a skyscraper."
Leni's eyes widened. "You're joking," she said sceptically.
"No," Donna replied. "Over the years, it adds up."
"What will you do with them? Will you sell them?"
Donna chuckled softly. "Do you think anyone would buy them?"
"Of course," Leni said confidently. "It's a huge pile of beautiful leaves. Look!"
She grabbed a large leaf from the top of the pile and examined it closely. It was a maple leaf with a reddish edge and golden speckles. In the sunlight, it shimmered like dry gold.
"See? It's golden."
"It is. If you put it on your head, you'll be as puffed up as a dame."
Leni placed the leaf on her head and smirked. "A dame flame?"
"No," Donna said. "A dame frame."
They burst into laughter. They could make up silly rhymes for hours.
"Does your neighbour also have a big pile of leaves?" Leni asked cautiously, glancing at the lawn on the other side of the fence.
"Oh yes," Donna said. "Certainly."
"Is his pile bigger?" the girl inquired, suddenly worried.
"Well, his garden has many trees. It has to be bigger," Donna said without hesitation.
"Then he's richer than you," Leni concluded with despair. "Is he a mighty king?"
Donna laughed loudly and shook her head. "No, he's just an ordinary man."
Leni looked at her sceptically.
"Come, let's sit on the bench," Donna invited her.
She took the girl's hand, as if she were her granddaughter and not just the curious neighbour from next door.
"What will happen to your leaves?" Leni asked with excitement
"They will slowly rot and nourish the tree," Donna said.
"And then?" Leni wanted to know.
"They will turn into soil and help the tree grow."
"Then you better lock them in a chest," Leni warned. "So the wizard doesn't steal them."
Donna smiled. "Leni, that wizard story is a fairy tale. I read it to you last time."
"But your neighbour has a bigger pile," Leni said sadly. "Is he a rich wizard?"

Of course not," Donna replied calmly. "He is not a wealthy man. And neither am I. Many people are richer than me."
"How can that be?" Leni was puzzled. "You just said you were rich. Are you actually as poor as a mouse?"
Donna thought for a moment and then laughed. "Many people think I am."
"I knew it," Leni slumped. "What a shame."
Donna fell silent and sank into herself. "Do you remember how we found that baby bird with the broken beak under the tree in the spring?"
"Yes, it died. It couldn't drink," Leni said in a fragile voice.
"That was a shame. But an even greater shame is being so poor that all you want is to be rich."
Leni pondered for a while. "Will you die too, Donna?"
"I will. One day."
The girl studied her curiously. "No, you won't," she finally said and suddenly reached out to her. "Not you. You rule the leaves with a royal rake, just like a queen for autumn's sake."
"And you're a Dame on a train" Donna caught her hand. "Or maybe a duck who likes to cluck?"
"No," Leni said, saddened. "You won't die."
"Of course not," Donna said gently. "I have no intention."
Exhausted from their argument, they watched each other. Carefully. As if they were seeing each other for the first time. Then their eyes wandered over the flower beds and the last autumn blooms. They sat quietly, like two cats warming each other. One old, one young.
Donna broke the silence. "Do you see what I see?" she suddenly asked.
"No," Leni said gloomily. "I don't like this game. Not now."
"Still look at what I see. The wind. Remember: If someone makes a fuss, we laugh in their face."
"Yes, we do," Leni brightened. "Where is it?"
Donna pointed her finger.
Then Leni saw it too. The tree branches swayed deeply. The wind glided smoothly to the ground and spun on one leg like a dancer.
"Hurry, Donna! It's going to blow away all your leaves!" Leni cried out.
The wind spread its wings, and Donna's golden pile of leaves swirled into a shimmering ring. It trembled in the weak sunlight like tiny flames on burnt ground. Just above the earth.
"Shhhhhhhhhh!" threatened the wind.
"Donna, it'll scatter all your leaves across the garden!" Leni fretted.
She jumped up from the bench and tried to catch them. But they were slipping away from her. She stood helplessly among the swirling leaves and stared at them with horror.
"One, two, three, whoever's not weepy, will laugh with glee!" Donna called out.
"I don't have a single whisker of laughter left," Leni said sadly, and hunched her face desperately.
The girl and the old woman locked eyes and burst into laughter, shaking like nuts rattling in their shells. They laughed loudly, from the depths of their hearts, as they always did when they played the game of laughter to trick sadness.

"Donna, stop! My belly hurts from laughing," Leni groaned.
The autumn leaves slowly drifted back to the ground. The wind cautiously slipped through the garden gate and hid among the houses.
The big golden pile of leaves was gone.
"Don’t worry, Leni," Donna reassured her. "I love autumn leaves. But I love the games, rhymes, and funny lines we come up with together even more. I keep them in the chest of my heart. Forever. I am immensely rich." The girl and the elderly woman held hands and admired the autumn, until the darkness fell.
"I have to go home," Leni suddenly remembered and started heading toward the garden gate. "Can I come again?" "Come soon," Donna called out, watching the girl, who was running toward home, with a long gaze. Until a cluster of stars spread over the city and sparkled in the splendour of the night sky.

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YUM-YUM JAM BY MAJDA KOREN

DETAILS: Hardcover | Illustrated by Ana Maraž | 36 pages |
Age: 3+ | Published in 2025 by KUD Sodobnost International

At the restaurant Jejtepijte, Aunt Kuha was busy making pancakes for the Petelinček family. Then she stepped into the pantry to get some jam. But there—a most unpleasant surprise awaited her! Someone had been licking jam from the jars during the night! Who could it have been? Will Aunt Kuha get to the bottom of this? The book was awarded the Golden Pear and the Kristina Brenk Award for the best original Slovenian picture book. In this new adventure, the witty twists bubble up with even more cheerful energy!

YUM-YUM JAM - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

This is the town of Housiehousie.
It has streets and houses and playgrounds and a school.
A river called Whereareyouflowing runs through the town.

Behind the skyscraper stands the restaurant Eat'n drink.
The head chef at the restaurant is Aunt Cookie.

On the street behind the store lives the researcher, Doctor Oneandone Thechickenisdone.

Like any decent town, Housiehousie also has a store, a library, a post office, a school, and a hospital.

On Tuesday, the Chicken family entered the restaurant. Father Chicken, Mother Chicken, and Frances and Sebastian Chicken. "Four pancakes with apricot jam, please! And a glass of raspberry juice for each of us!" ordered Father Chicken.

Aunt Cookie immediately got to work: she mixed eggs, milk, and flour in a bowl and added a pinch of salt.

SIZZLE! went the batter as she poured it into the hot pan.

"I'll just grab some jam from the pantry!" she hummed with delight.

But in the pantry: "WHAAT! What is this?"
All the jam jars were open, and each was missing some jam.

"What in the world! What kind of terrible beast sneaks into the pantry at night and steals jam? I must investigate this at once!" Aunt Cookie muttered.

The pancakes arrived cold at the table.
The Chicken family ate them grumblingly and left home angry.

The sun set behind the hills. The sky was painted with red tinted clouds.
Aunt Cookie turned off the stove, washed the dishes, and swept the floor.

Before locking the door, she spread extra special muahaha super glue on the pantry floor, which she had bought this week at the supermarket.

She knew that the trouble maker who licked the jam at night would unsuspectingly stick to the pantry floor, and in the morning, she would show them what it means to steal jam from unsuspecting cooks.

But Aunt Cookie was too curious to wait until morning. She put on her black midnight outfit with seven pockets.

In the first pocket, she placed a fishing hook,
in case the thief was a fish.
She thought:
"What if the thief is a dangerous beast?" And she stuffed a lion-catching net into the second pocket.

In the third pocket went a clothespin,
just in case the thief smelled bad.

In the fourth pocket, she placed
sunglasses, because who knows, maybe the thief shines brightly!

"I'll take a flashlight too, just in case the creature doesn't shine or if the electricity goes out!" thought Aunt Cookie and tucked the flashlight into the fifth pocket.

Into the sixth pocket, she sprinkled flea powder, in case the thief had fleas.

Into the seventh pocket, she stuffed six sandwiches with cream, snails, and hazelnuts,
in case she got hungry.

She rode her bike to the restaurant, unlocked the door, and suddenly she heard from the pantry:

"Jam-meow, jam-meow!
I'm stuck!
Jam-meow!"

Aunt Cookie ran to the pantry and immediately realized that the thief was not a fish
nor a dangerous beast, had no fleas and didn't smell bad, and that they shone just the right amount.

"Why, you're a jam-cat, that rare species of jam-eating cat!"

But while Aunt Cook was realizing this, she also got stuck to the floor.

"Oh snap"!
Now we'll have to wait until morning for Mara to come and clean the floor!"

While waiting, they ate sandwiches and talked.

"I know, I know, I know! You can get a job at the jam factory in Fruit Hill as the chiefjam taster.

You'll lick every jar of jam and nod if it's good or shake your head if it's bad. As soon as
we're free, we'll go there!" suggested Aunt Cookie.

"Jam-meow, jam-meow!" the jam-cat meowed and nodded.

Mara came at six in the morning. She washed off the glue and freed Aunt Cook and the jam-cat.

The jam-cat got a job that very day at the jam factory in Fruit Hill.

There, she was visited by the greatest Housiehousie researcher, Doctor OneandoneThechickenisdone,
who exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be darned, if that's not a real jam-cat!"

He flew home and wrote in his animal book:

Jam-cat:
A jam-eating cat from the
sweettooth family.
Discovered by Aunt
Cookie in the pantry.
Then he drew it.

And life in the town went on peacefully. The children diligently went to school.

Doctor Thechickenisdone researched unusual animals.

Aunt Cookie never ran out of jam again and could bake delicious pancakes
or fry delicious mouthwatering donuts anytime.

And what about the cat, the jam-cat?
She went to work at the jam factory with great joy.

She licked and tested the jam in all the jars they prepared. It’s quite possible she even licked the jar of jam you have at home.

Bon appetit!

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THE EIGHTH BOOK OF FAIRY TALES BY PETER SVETINA

DETAILS: ?

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THE EIGHTH BOOK OF FAIRY TALES - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Introduction to the Eighth Book of Fairy Tales

Let me tell how everything came about. Not long ago, I was supposed to go to Turin, with Barbara and Guy to Turin. But I was so tired, so incredibly tired, that I stayed at home. And as I, somewhat absent-mindedly, sat in the chair in my study, I glanced at the staircase that leads nowhere and serves as my bookshelf. And what did I see? A cover with the title The Eighth Book of Fairy Tales. I found this cover long ago, somewhere around the corner of an antiquarian bookshop, back when it was still on Appalling or Freeway Street (I can't quite remember), where I used to walk from high school to the city bus: number eight stretched across the entire cover, they ride and travel endlessly upon it, characters and things that are not between the covers. And they aren't there because the cover is everything that remained from the book! Someone had torn out the pages, or the book had been flicked trough and read so many times that it had fallen apart, leaving only its cover. Well, and the table of contents, that clung to what little remained of the book with its last strength. In the table of contents there were – well, actually there is –seventeen fairy tales listed. This is a prime number. A prime number is a number that, because of old age, becomes overgrown with moss and lichen. (For a more precise explanation check a lexicon or ask your older siblings, uncles, aunts, or parents. You could also ask your teacher). But what kind of fairy tale book is this, if it has no fairy tales? I said to myself. But because I was still so exhausted that I could barely move my head, I fell asleep in my chair. I slept soundly. Then I went for a proper walk with my dog, Sintra. Then my daughter, Clara and I cooked a proper lunch. Then I took another proper short rest. And then I sat at my desk and started properly writing fairy tales, one after another, just as they were listed in the table of contents of that pageless book. "Didn't you get any rest at all?" Barbara asked me when she and Guy returned from Turin. "Well, in a way, I did," I replied. "Because Writing is hard work, but it's also a kind of rest." But what matters is this: The fairy tales are here. Here they are, again in The Eighth Book of Fairy Tales.

The Scientific Contribution of Mr. Lettered on Unicorns

Mr. Lettered was a scientist. That means he gathered knowledge. He didn't gather it the way a grandmother gathers lamb's lettuce or a grandfather picks daisies for grandmother. He gathered it by reading a lot, observing a lot, taking a lot of notes and finally writing about everything.
Mr. Lettered studied squirrels. How they live. How they groom themselves, how they eat, what they eat, when they eat, where they eat how they play with their young, how they scold them, how they put them to bed, how they spend their free time, what colours they are, which trees they prefer to climb, what kind of poop they leave behind, what kind of sounds they make, how they communicate. All that and much more.
On that day, he was climbing a tree to inspect their little dens, because the squirrels were away. He peered into the hollows, carefully wrote his observations, took photographs, made sketches, and then worked his way down from branches and trunk.
"Ouch!"
Something pricked him in the buttocks before he managed to get down from the last branch to the forest path.
"Pardon me, excuse me," a voice said behind him.
When Mr. Lettered turned around he saw a unicorn.
"You're from a fairy tale," Mr. Lettered said, and opened his notebook to record this new discovery.
"Do you think so?" replied the unicorn. "Because if I am, then so are you."
"Hmm... wait a minute... oh, great heavens! You're right!" Mr. Lettered exclaimed, lowering his notebook. "Your cognition is astonishing!"
"Cognition, observation, and a touch of caramelization, if you please," the unicorn replied.
"Please explain," said Mr. Lettered, sitting down on a tree stump. "Tell me everything."
The unicorn leaned against a fir tree and explained.
The forest where Mr. Lettered was conducting his research was an ordinary forest, rarely visited by people. On one side, it was bordered by a meadow and a highway; on the other, a swamp, which people avoided. A path ran through the forest, but the landowner constantly threw branches and brambles onto it to discourage visitors.
"So," said Mr. Lettered, he was writing in his notebook. "Do you live here alone with the squirrels?"
No, not at all, if you please, the forest was teeming with life. Squirrels, titmice, blackbirds, a grumpy old badger, some fairies, some gnomes, a merman with his family, and three families of unicorns. The unicorn he was speaking with was one of the three fathers, Franz.
From then on, Mr. Lettered visited the forest at least three times a week. Before noon and in the evenings. It was always lively at those hours. Games, such as throwing patches of marsh peat into the distance and getting the kids to sleep and a glass of beer passing by mouth, behind the neck and such fun things.
After some time, Mr. Lettered compiled his notes and wrote an article about squirrels and their habitat. Of course, he included everything he had observed in the forest: the unicorns, the merman's family, the titmouses, the gnomes, the fairies, the games, and the grumpy badger, everything.
"Professor Lettered! Professor Lettered! What is this!?"
Mr. Lettered's department head stood at his office door, waving a stack of papers, his findings about the squirrels.

"Have you lost your mind?! Are you crazy?! We don't write fairy tales here! We are serious scientists!"
Mr. Lettered's colleagues were indeed serious scientists. Each absorbed in their work. One studied drains, so he spent his days submerged in bathtubs. Another was researching sauerkraut fermentation, so he was constantly buried in a vat of pickling cabbage. A third, a woman, was buried in books, studying the origins of letters. And so on.
"Excuse me," Mr. Lettered protested, "but I only wrote about what I saw with my own eyes, with my own glasses, with my own hands and nose."
"Then you need a psychiatrist," the department head snapped.
"If you allow me," Mr. Lettered countered, "I can show you everything."
He persuaded his superior to visit the forest with him the next day, to experience everything with his own eyes, his own glasses, his own hands and his own nose.
They reached the squirrel's dens. A bird flew past here and there. That was all. Then a single squirrel. And then nothing. Not even a breeze.
"Well, where are they now? Your unicorns, gnomes, and the merman's family?"
The department head, exasperated, sat on a tree stump and soiled his trousers with resin.
"Strange," thought Mr. Lettered. "This is a beech stump! It shouldn't be sticky with resin it's not a fir tree!"
"Well? Well?" the department head fumed, tapping his foot impatiently on the ground.
"Hmm," Mr. Lettered muttered. "Every time I've come here, there was always someone around. Strange. Let's wait a bit."
"Wait! Wait! We've been waiting for half an hour! Nothing! Nothing! Do you understand? Fairy tales! Pure fairy tales! If you do this again, you're fired!"
The department head stormed off.
Mr. Lettered sat down on the stump, on which the department head sat, and had already picked up all the resin, and became buried in his thoughts.
"Pardon," a voice said nearby. It was Franz the unicorn, along with the merman's family and the grumpy badger.
"But you were here all along!" exclaimed Mr. Lettered and burst up from the stump.
"Of course, of course" said Franz the unicorn. "We were here the whole time. Your boss is even meaner than the landlord who throws branches on the forest path.
"Why didn't you show yourselves? So he would see that I'm not making up fairy tales?!" Mr. Lettered flared up.
"To him? That nuisance? No, thank you. Not to him," the badger replied, and the merman wisely nodded in agreement.
They were silent.
"You know what ... well, you don't know, but it's not necessary for you to know," Mr. Lettered said, suddenly cheerful and relaxed. "See you in the evening."
He went to work, gathered his things from office, wrote a thank you note to department head, closed the door, and left. He left his job. Forever. The end. Amen.
How can I not write about things I observe? Should I pretend they don't exist? No, thank you, I won't do that. I prefer that they don't consider me a scientist and say I'm writing fairy tales. That's what Mr. Lettered was thinking as he was walking home.

Since that day, Mr. Lettered has been going into the forest even more often. He also started studying the life of unicorns. And mermen. And fairies and gnomes. All of that. And he diligently organizes his notes and publishes them in books. Wonderful fairy tales! Many who read them exclaim. What wonderful fairy tales! But Mr. Lettered keeps to himself and continues his scientific work. Just recently, he discovered that unicorns prefer oranges more than any other fruit. And why? They impale them on their horns, raise their heads, and the orange juice flows straight into their mouths.
That's it.
Good night.
Mr. Lettred has finished his research for today.

"What are uncles for"
You've probably heard of the Yeti. Did you? Well, you probably haven't heard where the Yeti got its name from. Here's how it goes.
The Yeti usually lives where there's a lot of snow. That's his basic and best and his favourite food. He is stuffing himself with snow until he's exhausted and then he's satisfied. It's less known that the Yeti never stuffs himself with snow alone. If he's alone, he will eat snow, he has to eat it or he starves, but he truly enjoys stuffing himself with snow when he does it with someone else. And when the first one eats snow until he's stuffed, he happily rolls over on his back and says to the other one: "You eat!" Then the other one eats until he's stuffed, and when he rolls over on his back, he says to the first one: "You eat!" They take turns like this until they can still get a snowball in their mouth. Then their stomach hurts, and they go to their den, satisfied. The name Yeti came from this invitation: "You eat!" The words got jumbled in the snow, and only "Yeti" remained.
Since we now know that the Yeti is actually "youeat" we will call him that. This story is about Uncle youeat called Anthony and his nephew youeat called Tony.
Youeat Anthony had a brother Lawrence, who was a little special. Whenever he stuffed himself with snow, his stomach didn't hurt. If a youeat doesn't feel pain in his stomach after stuffing himself with snow, something's wrong. But if he drank melted snow, then everything was fine, his stomach felt tight, and he was satisfied. To melt the snow, he used an enormous amount of firewood. "This makes no sense," he said. "What if I moved somewhere south, where there's water, not just snow?" And he really left. He settled by the sea. There, he was met by a lovely, round, plumber, she fell in love with him, and they opened a business. He drank water where the pipes leaked, and in the meantime, she peacefully fixed the pipes, so they didn't leak anymore. They had three children. The middle one, named Tony, loved his uncle Anthony very much. Every year, when the weather by the sea became unbearably sunny and too warm with a sky as blue as can be, Tony could hardly wait to visit his uncle.
Now he was with him. And he was enjoying it. He was enjoying it immensely.
Uncle Anthony was a technical enthusiast. This means that he loved assembling sleds and inventing and creating machines and devices with which he could race across the snow. Once, when he was visiting his brother, he saw cars on the streets, and at kiosks, he saw magazines about cars. He ordered a few. He tirelessly flipped through them because they sparked his imagination, and ideas for new inventions would burst out of him as he flipped through them.
Uncle Anthony and nephew Tony spent that Thursday morning riding across the snow on new motorized sleds with two stands. Up and down the hill, they jumped over glacier cracks, raced through the powder snow, so their faces got covered in it. They slalomed between boulders sticking out of the high snow. They were racing until late in the afternoon.

Then they remembered they were hungry. Famished!
Tony threw himself into the snow and stuffed himself with it. “This is something completely different from ice cream!” he said. “At home, you can eat only thirty scoops before your stomach starts hurting.” Then he threw himself on his back and exclaimed: “You eat!”
And Uncle Anthony threw himself into the snow. Anyone who saw how Uncle Anthony gobbled snow knew he saw something amazing. Gobble! Gobble! Gobble! And from the snow hole he made, only his head was visible. Then he crawled out, threw himself on his back, and exclaimed: “You eat!” And Tony plunged into the snow again.
And so on, until they were stuffed up to their ears.
“Let’s go inside,” said Uncle Anthony. They barely dragged themselves into their den. Barely. Their stomachs were aching, but they were happy and grinning from ear to ear.
They had to lie still for half an hour before they could get up on their feet again.
Outside, the snow began to fall, and the snowfall turned into a snowstorm.
“Tomorrow will be ridiculously fun,” said Uncle Anthony.
“Tell me a fairy tale,” said Tony and snuggled up to his uncle on the couch.
“About what?”
“About a frog.”
“Hmm.” Uncle Anthony thought for a moment, then began. “Once upon a time, there was a frog princess. She was the biggest, greenest, fattest, loudest. The most beautiful, in short. Everyone was in love with her, both frogs and toads. And because she was a princess, she rode a white horse. But the white horse couldn’t bear her weight anymore. He was stumbling until he finally twisted its hooves and had to go to the doctor. ‘I’ll find a horse that can carry me,’ the frog princess announced and left. Because she was so bulky, she walked very slowly. Slowly she walked... slowly... and she slowly came to a big city. And there were cars. Vroooom here, Vroooom there! She didn’t know how or where to turn. She was too large and too clumsy to cross the road safely. And since she didn’t know what to do, she walked up and down by a parking lot in front of an apartment building. ... You know, there were all sorts of awesome cars parked there. BMWs, big Volkswagens, Volvos, SUVs, two Jaguars, and a few Alfa Romeos, the fast models. ... Oh, yes ... well, and a Citroën. A very old Citroën, which they used to call a frog.
It had big lights in front like a frog, it even looked like a frog. ... It just couldn’t jump. ... So, the frog princess stopped right in front of this frog car. And of course, she didn’t notice it because she didn’t know much about cars. But the frog car spoke to her and said: ‘Princess, I know you’re looking for a horse. I don’t know where you’d find one, but I’ve been sitting here for half a year and no one’s taken me anywhere. If you want, here I am.’ And pooof! Clank! Ratatam! Bong! When the frog car spoke to the frog princess, she was magically turned into a girl. She was very cute. Short hair, a slightly crooked tooth at the front, dimples in her cheeks, and all that. But the frog princess was initially frightened: ‘Oh no, I’m not a frog anymore! What now?’ ‘You’re not a frog anymore, but you can drive a frog,’ said the frog car calmly. Right, reasonable words, thought the former frog princess. I went looking for a horse and found a frog car. This is just as good as finding a horse. Fine. I’m not a frog anymore, but I can ride a frog. Okay. Let it be. The frog princess, now a girl, got into the frog car and drove off. And she enjoyed traveling and driving around ... Who wouldn’t, right? ... The frogs in her swamp were waiting for her, but when they didn’t see her, they started calling her. Croak, croak, croak! ... Since then, the frogs croak. ... Isn’t it nice you know why frogs croak now?!”

Uncle Anthony exclaimed, very pleased with how he had brought the fairy tale to a close. There were cars in it, and the kid would learn something too. He nodded to himself happily and looked at his nephew to see what impression the end of the story had made on him.
But youeat Tony was already asleep. His eyes were closed, and he was breathing deeply and evenly. He was sleeping peacefully.
A boy like him, thought youeat Anthony, watching his nephew, how nice he came here.
His gaze stopped at the window: It's snowing beautifully. Tomorrow we'll be racing again.
Outside, a beautiful snowstorm was raging.

The Miraculous Garlic or a Journey Within
There were three sisters. Two set off into the world, third, the youngest, stayed at home.
At home, they had a windmill where they pressed olives into olive oil. Her parents took care of the mill; the youngest sister managed the business.
One day, the neighbouring land declared war. Many men and women, even older children, went off to fight. For nine days and nine nights, they prepared for departure.
It was a beautiful autumn, and the olive trees bore abundant fruit.
The youngest daughter walked through the olive groves, gazing at the ripe olives, but there was no one to shake them from the trees, to pick them, and press them into oil.
"I will go find my sisters," said the youngest sister. "They will help."
"Where will you look for them when they have gone out into the world?" asked her mother.
"I don't know," the youngest replied. "I will go to the sea."
"The wind will blow you away," her father tried to stop her.
"The sea currents will carry you off, the waves will swallow you," her mother warned.
"The monstrous crocodile will eat you," her father tried one last time.
"You know what," the youngest sister replied, "you have always taught me that peace, love, and wisdom guide us..."
"And now, when we need you the most for the olives, you are leaving too?" her mother interrupted her, trying one last time to persuade her to stay.
"Everything will be fine," said the youngest sister and set off.
She walked on the sandy beach, on the long, sandy beach. Sand was stretching as far as the eye could see, and the sea, only the sea. The waves whispered and washed over the deserted sand.
Suddenly, in the middle of the fine sand, the youngest sister saw a rat, desperately digging with its little claws. It is completely exhausted, barely moving.
"Help me, girl," said the rat.
The youngest sister carefully picks it up and holds it in her arms. Then she walked on.
She sees a wolf, helplessly digging with his paws and trying to free itself from the sand. Everything is loose, the sand is burying it and it's already up to wolf's belly.
"Help me, girl," said the wolf.
The youngest sister gently places the rat on the ground, digs the wolf out, and lifts it onto her back. Then she takes the rat in her lap and they continue walking.
They don't get far before they see an old woman in the middle of the shifting sand. The sand is covering her legs, sinking her to her knees and beyond.
"Help me, girl," she pleads.

The youngest sister puts down the wolf and the rat on the sand, then sets the old woman free.
She places the wolf in the old woman's arms, lifts them both onto her back, and holds the rat in her lap.
They walk on.
The sand is sinking beneath the youngest sister’s feet.
When she’s very exhausted, the beach starts to rise. There is no more sand on the hill, the walking becomes easier. Low plants are sprouting from the earth. When the youngest reaches the peak with her three companions, they see a vast plain and a tree.
She lais her weary companions on the grass and leans against the trunk to rest.
And they rest.
Then the rat stood up and approached the girl.
"Take this clove of garlic. When you are in trouble, bury it in the ground."
The rat says these words and disappears.
Then the wolf stood up.
"Take this second clove of garlic as thanks. When you are in even greater trouble, throw it away."
And with that, the wolf was gone too.
Finally, the beautiful old woman stood up and approached the girl.
"As a gift of gratitude, accept this third clove of garlic. When you are in the greatest danger, eat it."
And just like that, she vanished.
The youngest sister rises and returns to the shore. She is standing at the edge of a low cliff. Beneath her feet is earth, then rock. And below, the waves, only waves, whispering and foaming.
Where are her sisters? How can she find them?
She takes the first clove of garlic and buries it in the earth.
Suddenly, a garlic stem starts sprouting from the ground. It’s rising and rising. Its top piercing the air, growing higher and higher. The stem begins to thicken beneath its spear-shaped tip. It thickens and thickens Then swells and bursts open, revealing white flowers. There are a thousand flowers, looking just like tiny tulips. The wind blows and the blossoms start flying through the air.
One lands in the youngest sister’s hand.
The wind picks up and lifts the girl holding the flower in the air, carrying her over the sea.
For three days and three nights, the wind blows and carries the girl with the flower across the vast ocean.
Then the wind begins to weaken. It grows weaker and weaker. But there is no shore in sight.
The girl holding the flower, is slowly descending toward the sea surface.
What now? she thinks. If I fall into the sea, the currents will carry me away, I will drown.
Then she remembers the second clove of garlic.
She throws it away.
As soon as the clove touches the water, it transforms into a garlic bulb. It grows and grows. The cloves open up, forming a little boat on which the youngest sister lands.
The ocean current carries her away. Carrying and carrying the tiny boat toward a shore across the sea with no end in sight.
For three days and three nights, the current carries her in a tiny garlic boat.
On the third day, enormous waves begin to rise. No clouds in the sky, no wind, just waves, towering waves.
Suddenly, a monstrous crocodile’s head appears before the boat.
The crocodile’s beady eyes are coming closer, its terrifying jaws are near. The girl could see the monstrous teeth and feel the hot breath from the gaping maw.
Fear grips the youngest sister’s heart.

Then she remembers the third clove of garlic. She eats it and screams in terror.
The monstrous sea crocodile, who already opened its jaw to swallow her whole along with the boat, lets out a groan. It groans as if something has struck it. The strong scent of garlic is so potent it took the crocodile's breath away.
Angry and powerless, it dives into the depths of the sea and furiously slaps its tail against the sea surface. A massive wave rises, carrying the youngest sister for three days and three nights before finally placing her on a shore.
The youngest sister finds herself on a sandy beach. The beach is strikingly similar to the one she had walked on when she left to find her two sisters.
She walks and walks, and in the distance, she sees a hill covered in olive trees. An endless expanse of olive groves, and at the top, a windmill. Just like their family's.
When she arrives, she sees many men and women, and children shaking the olive trees and gathering the fruit from large cloths spread on the ground.
A rat is scurrying through the branches, bending them so the harvesters can reach the highest olives on the highest branches.
Her two sisters run toward her and embrace her without saying any words.
Before the mill stand her father and mother, receiving baskets of olives. Deep gratitude is in their eyes when they see their youngest daughter.
When the youngest enters the mill, she sees a wolf behind the wheel.
It was calmly turning the mill, keeping the millstone moving steadily.
The youngest sister leans against the wall and starts thinking. Watching the wolf and thinking.
"Can you explain, wolf?" She asks without glancing away.
"I can," said the wolf as it kept turning. "The old woman you saved from the sand was Peace. The rat you rescued was Wisdom. And I, whom you carried on your back, am Love. You freed us from the curse that came upon everything when war broke out. It took nine days and nine nights for people to realize their own foolishness. As long a time they took to leave, they needed to return."
"How did my sisters come back?" the youngest asked.
"I brought them home in time," the wolf replied.
"And the old woman where is the old woman? You say she was Peace," she asked.
"She is this mill," said the wolf, steadily turning the great mill wheel. "You are standing in it."
The great millstone in the mill slowly crushed the olives.
Oil trickled from the trough, filling the great stone jars, one after another.

How the Bathroom Arrived in Prehistoric Times

This is a very educational story about how the bathroom came to prehistoric times.
Mr. Vito Windham was a merchant in prehistoric times. In the Ice Age.
Imagine this: everything is frozen. You want a salad, but all you have is iceberg lettuce. You'd like some wine, but all you have is ice wine. What about dessert after lunch? There's only ice cream.
Or this: you go to work – it's a deep freeze. You go to school – a refrigerator. At home – an icicle. Nothing but fridges and icicles everywhere!
If you want to take a bath … Well, head over to the waterfall. And you're lucky if it's not entirely frozen, so the water still flows. Ice-cold, of course.

Want to brush your teeth? Sure, first you chisel a hole in the ice, then dip your toothbrush into the water. Ice water, naturally.

And if you need to go to the bathroom: just head around the corner, there's an ice cave for squatting.

Now, imagine a man, Mr. Vito Windham, who dreams of warming up a little. Just once, to take a shower under warm water.

Mr. Vito Windham was a merchant. As we said. He traded lemons and oranges, and grapefruits. People in the Ice Age were constantly catching colds and needed as much vitamin C as possible to survive this Ice Age. Lemons, oranges, grapefruits, these are rich in vitamin C, they say.

OK. So Mr. Vito Windham crafted a cupboard from pieces of wood he found beneath the ice and wore it like a backpack. It was so tall it almost touched his heels. With this cupboard, he travelled from the ice-cold lands of the Ice Age to the slightly less icy lands of the Ice Age.

There, because it was just a little warmer, lemons, oranges, and grapefruits could grow. But they didn't ripen. Of course not, it was too cold.

"Better unripe than none at all," thought Mr. Vito Windham, loading them into his cupboard and carrying them back to ice-cold lands.

When a person walks, they warm up. Especially if they're carrying a cupboard full of fruit, like Mr. Vito Windham. And since he warmed up, so did the cupboard on his back. And because the cupboard warmed up, so did the lemons, oranges, and grapefruits. Because they warmed up, they could ripen. And after he reached the ice-cold lands, the fruits were sweet, ripe, and juicy, and people snatched them up.

But Mr. Vito Windham was hot and sweaty and needed a shower. "Go ahead, there's the frozen waterfall, there's the ice cave for squatting if you need the toilet." "No, thank you," thought Mr. Vito Windham, wishing for a tiny little bathroom with warm water, and a sink with warm water to brush his teeth like a human being, and a toilet with a flush so everything could be rinsed away nicely. No wonder he wished for something like that. I would too in his place.

And so, Mr. Vito Windham kept carrying his empty cupboard there and bringing it back full of fruit. Over and over again. The Ice Age continued, with no signs of warming up. And Mr. Vito Windham wished only for that tiny little bathroom.

Sometimes, what you wish for really comes true.

It did for Mr. Vito Windham.

One day, as he was walking with his loaded cupboard from the ice-cold lands back home, something trembled a little, and from the sky, right in front of him, a beautiful bathroom fell: a shower cabin, a sink, a water heater, and even a toilet with a proper flush.

Sometimes, things just fall from the sky.

Mr. Vito Windham rubbed his eyes and couldn't believe it.

But whether he kept rubbing his eyes or not, the bathroom was there.

"Hooray!" he cheered.

But now, how was he supposed to manage this? A cupboard full of fruit on his back, and now a bathroom right here. How could he carry both?

Hm.

And Mr. Vito Windham got a clever idea: he transferred the lemons, oranges, and grapefruits into the bathroom and carried it on his back instead. He left the cupboard behind.

The fruit ripened nicely from his body heat inside the bathroom too.

And from his heat, the water in the heater warmed up.

You can't imagine the joy with which Mr. Vito Windham took his shower in the shower cabin. And the toilet, It was fantastic. No more ice cave squatting!
From that moment on, he carried the empty bathroom with delight there and brought it back full. Along the way, he took a shower every now and then. He was so enthusiastic for his job that the ice beneath his feet turned to snow, the snow to water, and the ice in the Ice Age started to loosen its grip. The Ice age started melting.
And it melted away. All the way down to the earth.
Mr. Vito Windham would have kept going back and forth if he hadn't carried dirt into the bathroom because he didn't have shoes. And while he ate oranges, lemons, and grapefruits in the shower, a few seeds fell here and there inside the bathroom.
And so, trees started growing. Right there, in his bathroom. And it turned into a spa, with warm water and tropical fruit. That's how he made his living from then on.
Other spas sprang up, too, and the Ice Age was over.
So, now you know about the Ice Age and how it ended.
But if anyone still wonders how a bathroom could just fall from the sky into the middle of the Ice Age, I have one more thing to tell you.
Professor Esmeralda Munchalot is a history teacher. When the ground trembled beneath Mr. Vito Windham's feet, and the bathroom fell from the sky, at that very moment, history textbook fell from Professor Esmeralda's hands in which everything about the Ice Age was written, and actually everything about all ages.As she was putting it back onto a high bookshelf, she had to step on a stool the stool wobbled and instead of falling herself, she let go of the textbook and caught hold of the shelf.

Well, when the textbook hit the floor, everything inside shook and got mixed up.
At that moment, the bathroom from the chapter on hygiene in our times fell into the Ice Age.
And if you want to know something else: Mammoths, dinosaurs, and all those big creatures.
They say they went extinct in the Ice Age – that's what they teach in school, right?
Nonsense! Not true at all!
They didn't go extinct; they were just flung out of the Ice Age and landed here, in the 20th and 21st century! That's all! That's why they aren't in the Ice Age anymore!
Just take a little look around you'll see: wherever everything is trampled, that's where mammoths have stomped through. Wherever someone coughs on someone else, those are dinosaurs: bronchosaurs and triceratraps.
They don't look exactly as we imagine them. But how can we even know what they really looked like in the Ice Age? Nobody has actually told us. Except maybe Mr. Vito Windham could.
But he stayed there. So we had to reinvent cupboards from scratch.

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HOW TO KNOCK A STAR FROM THE SKY BY JANA BAUER

DETAILS:

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HOW TO KNOCK A STAR FROM THE SKY - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

I am Otto. Otto Locust. You won't learn anything more about me. Except that I drink cocoa with Lucy Light Bulb on Saturday mornings.
We were just drinking cocoa and eating raspberry cake when George Fly from the eighth floor burst through the door.
"Terrifying," he exclaimed, "and absolutely crazy!"
He was already running toward the elevator, I grabbed my brown bag, Lucy and I hurried after him.
"Lily told me," George gasped in the elevator, "to knock a star from the sky for her."
"Lily?!" I exclaimed. "Not Lily Starling?!"
George nodded shyly.
In our apartment building, there are certain rules for boys. If you pass Lily Starling, you stare at the wall. If you meet her on the street, you look at the ground. If she steps into the elevator, you take the stairs.
"Early this morning, when it was still dark, I got up," said George. "I grabbed a beanpole from the nearby garden and went onto the terrace. I wanted to knock down a star, but the beanpole was too short."
Lucy laughed.
"I tried throwing stones. It didn't work!" George panted. "Then I got a brilliant idea. I took my dad's fishing rod and went fly fishing. I cast my line into the sky, and suddenly, the hook caught on something. I looked, stared, and couldn't believe it. It was a star! I pulled, it squeaked, and fell down onto the terrace."
"You're joking," giggled Lucy, who knew everything about stars. But when we stepped onto the terrace, she gasped, "This can't be real! You caught a star with a hook?!"
Star was quietly shimmering on the ground. The golden dust was trickling out from the tiny hole made by the hook.
I took a needle and thread from my bag and stitched up the hole in the star.
"Let it rest for a while, then it goes back to the sky."
"Back to the sky?" George moaned.

should have sensed trouble back then. Lucy ran home for a pillow, while I dashed to the basement for a crate.

When we returned, the star was gone. George stammered, visibly confused.
"Lily Starling... she took it."
"And you just let her?!" Lucy fumed. "Lily, of all people!"
"S-s-she asked me s-s-so nicely."
I stopped Lucy—poor George Fly was love struck as an elephant.
"To Lily's!" I shouted. "We're not wasting any time!"
I knocked on the Starling's family door on the first floor.
"Give us back the star," George squeaked quietly.
"I will not return what was given to me," Lily snapped.
"Lily," I tried, "we'll trade it for our most valuable possesions."
Five minutes later, George brought his dinosaur excavation set, Lucy her gold medal from the astronomy olympiad, and I a treasure map I bought at the antique market.
Lily peeked through the door to see what we had brought.
"Not a chance!" she shouted.
"What if we show the star to the whole world?" I suggested.
"No!" Lily screamed.
"Think about it! TV, newspapers!"
"The king and queen would invite you to the palace," Lucy added.
"The president would want a picture with you."
"You would have the honor," said Lucy, "to release the star back into the sky."
"Ha! Ha!" Lily scoffed. "This will never happen!"
The last option was to call Mr. and Mrs. Starling. Would Lily even listen to them?
Lucy quickly tracked down their phone numbers.
"What did she do now?!" Lily's mother fumed. "Did she steal from the store again? I'll scold her, punish her!"
"Excuse me," I quickly said, "this must be a mistake."
Lucy and I looked at each other.
Otto took a deep breath and called Lily's father.
"I don't have time right now," he said impatiently. "I'm at work testing a new dog food. Do you have a dog?"
"No," said Otto
"No problem, the new dog food Yum-yum is so amazing, you can buy it for your mom, dad, or neighbor."
Then he hung up.
I was out of ideas. I looked at Lucy, who was grinning.
"Ah, that tiny weak star," she said loudly. "I have millions of stars in my room, and they are much more beautiful."
She walked up the stairs and gave us a hint to follow. At the third-floor, I looked back and saw Lily sneaking behind us. She was holding a large jar with the star inside.

George and I entered Lucy’s room and gasped. The ceiling really looked like a magnificent starry sky.
I heard a sigh. Lily Starling had crept in behind us and was staring at Lucy’s ceiling with her mouth open.
"I want a starry sky," Lily demanded. "I must have it."
"Let the star go," Lucy smirked, "and it’s yours."
"No!" George cried. "She’ll stash them like pickles! We’ll never see stars again!"
"Deal," Lily grinned and released the star from the jar.
Lucy helped the star float back into the sky through the open window. Then she turned off the lamp, and the starry sky vanished.
"I’m giving you the starry sky," she said and handed Lily the lamp.
Lily stared at it in disbelief.
"Masterful," I winked at Lucy.
"Brilliant," George gasped.
That evening, the three of us gathered on the terrace. The sky was clear, the stars were shining, and our star was among them.
I noticed the door quietly creak open. Lily Starling stepped onto the terrace, sat in a corner, and gazed at the stars.

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A JOURNEY TOO CLOSE BY EVALD FLISAR

DETAILS: ?

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A JOURNEY TOO CLOSE - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

I'm setting off on a journey again. Not to one of the countries I haven't yet seen (so far, I've visited ninety-nine; this year, I'll round the number to a hundred), but to London. Not by plane, nor by train, but by car. I invite you to join me. As we drive along the highways from Ljubljana to our destination, we can talk about many things.

But why London, and why by car, you might ask. Covering fifteen hundred kilometers in a single day will be exhausting.

The answer to this question may surprise you, but if you stay with me until the end, you'll find much of value for yourself as well.

I've discovered that there is a light within me that shines too dimly and longs to illuminate all (or at least some) of what the mind cannot grasp, yet which the heart (despite advancing years or perhaps because of them) yearns for. I know that many are perfectly content with the reach of their light, however flickering it may be. Many don't even realize that their experience of the world is not even at its best what it could be. Many live like wound-up clocks, ticking from day to day, undisturbed by it. They surrender to emotions (shallow or deep) and thoughts (wise or foolish) without questioning where they come from, how they arise, or where they lead. Many have succumbed to the tyranny of mediocrity and are content with it.

But there are people who are not. Among the masses drifting from one hardship to another, from dullness to yawns and back to dullness, there are individuals who refuse to spend their lives in the corner of unexamined and half-spoken truths. Instead, they strive to break through to greater light, to replace the oil lamp with the sun.

Because we are flooded on all sides by a sea of mediocrity, it seems that such people are few. They appear to be lonely seekers, spiritual Don Quixotes, too eccentric to be taken seriously. But that's not true. More and more people long to rise from stupor to wakefulness, from passivity to action. In almost every person not bound to darkness and ruin, there resides a desire to shatter the confining walls of the everyday and settle in a broader space—to shed the burdens of delusions and breathe freely. I'm not speaking of neurotics or psychotics, of nervous or depressive individuals, but of people who are, by most measures, "normal," socially responsible, educated (to some degree), and (more or less) mentally balanced—yet still unhappy.

Thirty-eight years ago, I published a book titled The Sorcerer's Apprentice. It met with surprisingly broad and deep reactions. Some it awakened from slumber, blowing away their illusions; others claimed it had changed their lives. I'm no longer young enough to attribute this phenomenon to myself. The power of the book lies not in the fact that I wrote it (who am I?) or that I wrote it well, but in the practical wisdom that found its way between the lines of the narrative. This wisdom is not something I invented (or could have invented); it springs from millennia-old insights, from the experiences of thousands of extraordinary people. Now, however, I feel that the book has left me with a special debt. I raised too many questions and found too few answers. That's why I'm setting off on this journey. It feels right to continue in the direction I've been carried—not just out of a sense of responsibility toward those whom The Apprentice has led to deep realizations and shifts in consciousness, but also out of a desire to stay on the path. Because now, it's too late to leave it without jeopardizing my health and peace.

During the drive from Ljubljana to London, I'll mostly be thinking (something that's nearly unavoidable while driving on the highway). Thinking and searching for answers to questions about the conditions for a successful journey from birth to death. About the rules for living in one's center, not on its periphery; for ensuring every response is proportionate to the challenge; for aligning oneself with the flow of events. Of course, there are more questions—many more—posed by others, by myself, and by time.

The answers lie somewhere beyond the mountains known as psychology, philosophy, science, and religion, beyond the cliffs (illuminated by the floodlights of rationalism) that block our access to the unknown plateaus behind them. Yet it is precisely there, on those plateaus, that we might find answers to the questions tormenting us. There are many questions and even more questioners, so the goal of this journey is to break through—by cunning if necessary—to distant lands beyond the mountains of obvious truths. Perhaps a treasure awaits us there that we've long sought (or at least, in the form of nameless spiritual anguish, sensed that it exists).

Since I don't know what we'll find beyond the cliffs of accessible truths, I can only assume one role for this expedition that will hold credibility: that of the expedition leader—especially since I already know some paths across the mountain range of obvious truths (a few, not many) and because I've glimpsed (if only briefly) those secret plateaus at least twice in my life. Anyone who trusts me enough, is curious enough (or is in such dire straits that they'd go anywhere with anyone) is welcome to join me on this drive to London.

Naturally, we'll face all sorts of reproaches. The uninformed will say that our conversations on German and French highways deal with mysticism, magic, religion. Some will say there's nothing to seek because everything is already clear. Others will say nothing but smirk condescendingly—as if to say, We know what you're up to. The most pitiable minds will dismiss our search without delving into it, for that requires effort, and pitiable minds consider themselves too illustrious to need exertion.

It's entirely possible we won't reach the plateaus beyond the mountains of obvious truths. The sheer mass of established knowledge is daunting, and as we hack through the thickets of opinions, theories, and proofs about everything under the sun, we'll often be tempted to stop, to settle in the lap of a pleasant dogma or a comfortable hypothesis. We'll run out of will, courage, direction. But because we're aware of these dangers, we'll use them to our advantage. We won't give up until we ascend to heights where breath grows short, where shadows are sharp as cutouts, and where our eyes are opened to the astonishingly simple truth about all we are and all we do.

At the start of the journey, we must gather ourselves, orient ourselves, determine what's possible and what isn't. We must clear away the cobwebs obscuring our vision, rake through the leaves of withered opinions and once decorative but now worn out half-truths with which we've furnished our spiritual spaces.

The first question we'll tackle on the highway to London may not excite experts in Indian philosophy, but for most of my fellow travelers it will pose a serious obstacle. One of them phrased it like this:

"I, too, am interested in non-European worldviews and the nature of things, but I can't reconcile myself with the central tenet of Indian religion or philosophy—that everything is maya, or illusion. Does this mean the world doesn't exist, that we're merely imagining it? That there is no matter and everything is just a dream?" Stay with me, dear fellow travelers. We'll do our best to find an answer to this question as well.

Since you'll likely take many photos during the drive through Alpine valleys, I'd like to share with you, dear fellow travelers, what Roland Barthes wrote about photography in his book Camera Lucida. In his view, photography is a violent thing. Not because it depicts violence, but because it violently fills the gaze each time and because nothing in it can be refused or reworked. The photograph says: This is how it is. It does not say: This is how it was—in fact, it even blocks memory in a peculiar way.
"One day," Barthes writes, "I was talking with friends about childhood memories. They had more than enough of them, but I, who had just been looking at old photographs, had none."
Do you agree with this? I don't share Barthes' perspective. To me, every photograph says This is how it was, especially those capturing moments from my past—including the ones I took myself. (This is how I saw things, this is how I captured them, this is how it was.)
And yet: although one of the photos I keep vividly reminds me of a school trip long ago, it refuses to tell me what interests me most. The photo informs me of what happened fifty years ago but lacks an explanation of why it happened. It lacks the story. It says: This is how it was, not: This is how it was because...
The photo doesn't tell me why my classmate Joe (let's say his name was Joe) and I disliked each other or why our initial conflict (over what?) escalated into a prolonged period of petty cruelty that nearly ended tragically at least once (when Jože pushed me into a lime pit in the schoolyard). Most of the time, it made life so bitter for both of us that we wanted nothing more than reconciliation—though each of us was convinced until the end that the other should apologize first.
Why did we project our anger at the world onto each other? A world that refused to stay within our grasp? Why was the other always "at fault," doomed to suffer because one of us failed to prove clearly enough that he was better? The photo doesn't hold the answer. Neither does memory. Perhaps this isn't a flaw of memory or photography. Perhaps there is no answer.
The photo reminds me of a school trip where Joe played one of his nastiest tricks. The teacher entrusted me with the role of "official photographer." A few other kids were snapping away with their Russian cameras, too—including Joe. The class huddled together, smiling before monuments, churches, and waterfalls. I took my task extremely seriously. I selected compositions so meticulously that I often made the teacher and some classmates laugh. I was most honored when classmates asked me to photograph them in friendly pairs or groups. To emphasize how challenging photography was, I put so much effort into framing each shot that the subjects grew impatient and yelled, "Just press the button!"
I realized that posing was almost as hard as photographing (and it's impossible to say which is more creative), but I only registered this as a minor irritation. The irritation paled, however, beside the rage I felt at Joe's attempts to sabotage my efforts. If he wasn't making silly faces or covering someone's eyes during group shots, he'd "accidentally" step in front of the camera just as the subjects yelled, "Press it!" Twice, I complained to the teacher, who scolded Joe. But he didn't care.
Despite that, I was happy in the awareness that this was my first "official assignment." That I wasn't just playing around but doing something real. Of course, I did it with the stiff self-importance of someone unexpectedly thrust into the spotlight, unable to hide his blooming pride. That's why I was even more shocked when, after returning home, I reached into my bag to take the exposed films to be developed—only to discover they had already been "developed." Some unknown villain had pulled all eight rolls out of their protective casings and exposed them to light!

Three days later, Joe triumphantly brought his photos from the trip to school. I'll never forget the pain I felt as the excited class crowded around him, shouting "Is that me?", "Look at you!", "Half your head's missing...", while I sat brooding in the corner of the classroom. Until Joe came over, placed a photo in front of me, and said: "And one for the official photographer," followed by general laughter.
How did that photo Joe shoved into my hands end up in an old shoebox alongside other pictures from my early youth? Hadn't I torn it up then, kicked Joe between the legs, and run out of school into the woods, sobbing loudly until I collapsed, scratched and bleeding, onto a bed of pinecones, swearing loudly that I would kill him?
Or had Joe kept the negative and made another print? There was no other explanation—but how did it end up among my photos? When did he give it to me? The photo shows two hysterical girls (whose names I don't remember) posing with their arms around each other's waists, making silly faces. Next to them, a classmate nicknamed Pimpek stands with his knees comically bent, giving the finger. On the right, a small, dignified figure of a boy stands blushing—I recognize myself. Actually, I recognize myself more by the camera in my hands; it was my first, a gifted Leica, and how proud I was of it!
Back then, with the camera in my hands, I thought I was immortalizing a moment in the life of a group of people, stealing a fragment of time from the world—a moment that would never repeat. On film, it would be eternally preserved as part of the history of my presence in the world; the photo would say: I was there. How differently would we perceive history—say, the Greco-Persian Wars—if we had photographs of the Battle of Thermopylae? Or the Crusades?
When Joe destroyed my negatives in elementary school to win friends with his "documentary evidence," what hurt me more than being the innocent victim of his malice was the fact that I was left "without" the trip, "without" the experiences I had wanted to rescue from oblivion with those photos. It felt like he had stolen a piece of my life.
But later, when I was already in London, holding the only surviving photo from that distant trip, it seemed far less "alive," far less reliable than my own fading memory of that day. In fact, in a way, it felt dead, motionless—a nail in the coffin of a moment that had vanished forever the instant the shutter clicked. The moment was gone; the memory of it had become static, as lifeless as the photograph meant to preserve it. The photo didn't answer my why, so instead of bringing the past closer, it took it away from me.
Photography is the inventor of mortality, Susan Sontag wrote in her essay on photography. The expression on a face, the glint in the eyes, the gesture of a hand, the posture of the body—all frozen the instant the shutter opened. In most cases, frozen awareness of the lens's presence, frozen in the act of posing for what was supposed to be a document of a living moment.
Portrait photos are like death masks, and whenever people show me their family albums, I feel like I'm walking through a cemetery. Once, I asked: "When did your father die?" The hosts, shocked and almost offended, replied: "He's not dead, he's right here!"—and introduced me to a man a hundred times more alive than his photograph. But was the moment his portrait was taken ever truly a moment of his life?
Even though I believe a photograph says this is how it was (and not, as Barthes claims, this is how it is), that doesn't mean it conveys the dynamism of the event. In truth, it says: This is how it was in the split second the shutter opened. A moment before and a moment after, it was different. The past is a chain of moments that were never photographed. The past can only be imagined in relation to a photograph afterward. Does that mean Roland Barthes was right?
Is that why one of the goals of my trip to London is to sift through the mess I left in the attic of the house where I lived for fifteen years—because it didn't seem important enough to bring it back to Ljubljana when I moved home? The hope that, among piles of letters, bills, drafts of radio plays, and unpublished short stories, I might also find a stash of negatives from my travels, the ones I know I never took to Slovenia? Is that mess still there? Or have the new owners cleared it out?

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CATCH THE BLUE BEAR FOR ME BY SILVIJA ŠESTO

DETAILS: 5+ | 36 pages | 22 x 24 cm | 2018

Sky, a young boy, gets a stuffed toy for his birthday – a blue teddy bear. It is the best teddy bear in the world, but Sky's mum does not let him take it out of the wrapper. "It will get dusty," she says. When Sky's younger cousin comes to visit, she grabs the bear and unwraps it, and Sky is excited to finally get the chance to enjoy his teddy bear. However, Sky's mum lets the little girl keep the bear. The injustice that was done has to wait a whole generation until it is undone, when Sky wins a teddy bear from a claw crane and gives it to his son.

CATCH THE BLUE BEAR FOR ME - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

P2-3
Sky got a blue bear for his fifth birthday from his Aunt Đurđa.
The blue bear was gorgeous. It had a blue satin bow tie around its sky-blue neck. Its body was as soft and tender as a dandelion, and its little nose was so precious you just had to fall in love with it at first sight.

P4-5
Sky's mother, Tuga, laughed because aunt Đurđa got the same bear for herself. She could not resist it, she said she just couldn't help herself. Sky's father said aunt Đurđa actted like a child, because who else as old as her would sleep with a stuffed animal. She admitted that the blue bear kept her safe at night and that's why she kept it on her pillow.
The blue bear was wrapped in transparent cellophane. Sky put his little arms around it, and as he was going to unwrap it, his mother jumped up saying, 'Stop, don't! You should leave it as it is, don't you see how delicate it is? It will be covered in dust before you know it.'

P6-7
Sky was sad, but he listened to his mother. He played with the wrapped bear like nothing happened. The only problem was, the cellophane made a lot of noise every time Sky touched it or hugged it. Shhh, Shhh... Sky thought that maybe his father would be more successful in convincing Sky's mother to let him unwrap the bear. However, neither Sky's father nor aunt Đurđa said anything that could change his mother's mind. Later came the celebration, and Sky's mother brought out a cake from the kitchen. Sky blew out all of his five candles and before he went to sleep, he put the blue bear on a shelf above his bed.

P8-9
'It's better this way,' Sky kept telling himself in his best effort of consolation. 'My blue bear is from outer space and he has to wear a space suit because he can't breathe the same air as us.' Sky sighed sadly as he fell asleep.
Every morning, as soon as he opened his eyes, Sky poked his bear, but that awful cellophane would always met this with a loud shushhh shush shush. Beneath it, the bear stood distant, just like an alien.

P10-11
The closest that Sky ever came to unwrapping the bear was the time when he had the flu. Burning up and sniffly, he sneaked into the kitchen and got a toothpick. He wanted to at least pierce a hole in the clear cellophane.
'Maybe the bear needs the air, maybe he is not an alien after all?' Sky thought while he was sneaking back to his room, toothpick in hand. Just as he was going for the horrible barrier that stood between him and the softness of his bear, his mother entered the room with his medicine and a cup of warm tea.

In his attempt to pierce the cellophane, which was so abruptly interrupted by his mother, the blue bear leaned toward the edge of the shelf. 'Look out, Sky, it will fall on your head' mom said, and set the tea down with the medicine right beside it. She then straightened out the bear and left the room. Sky looked at the bear as he gripped his little hand tighter around the toothpick under his duvet.

P12-13
That night, Sky dreamt he was running in a field together with his blue bear. There was a moment when he could no longer tell the bear apart from the sky. He was hugging the bear and they were flying together. He was sure of that because a bird joined them, andit didn't seem to consider it odd that a boy and his bear are flying with it. Actually, they flew together happily for a long time.
Sky could still feel the wind in his hair when he woke up. He glanced at his blue bear wrapped in cellophane. It didn't look like it just flew with him. It looked exactly as it always did – like it never moved an inch.

P14-15
When Sky turned six, the whole family gathered in the living room for his party. All of Sky's favourite toys were there too, stashed away in the drawer under the TV set. All except the blue bear. He decided to ask his Mother if he could finally unwrap the blue bear, thinking she would cave in because it was his birthday. Sky's Mother then remembered that she, too, had a doll that she kept on a shelf and her mom and dad never let her play with it so that she wouldn't break it.
Hmm... Sky wondered, how could the blue bear break? It could get dusty, just like mom said, but that's all. Anyway, his Mother washes some of his toys in the washing machine and they come out as good as new. He always opened his toys, and he always played with them. Only the blue bear was different...

16-17
It was a Sunday, just as the family was getting ready to sit at the dinner table, when Sky's uncle and aunt, together with their daughter Modrana, came to visit. It was a long time since they last visited. Modrana had just turned five and she was one of those girls who were interested in everything. Five minutes into the visit, before they even started slurping their soup, Modrana had already stuck her nose into every drawer in the living room. Aunt Lola had to try very hard to sit her at the table and keep her there until the end of the meal.
After the meal, the parents decided to have a coffee and they sent Sky and Modrana into Sky's room to play. Modrana kept hopping around and knocked down the coat hanger on her way. Five coats, two jackets and three hats ended up on the floor. Lola was angry and threatened her, waving her pointer finger and saying she wouldn't get a single piece of cake if she didn't start to act politely.

P18-19
Unfortunately, as soon as she stepped into Sky's room, Modrana literally flew to the blue bear, seized it with both of her little hands and freed him of the cellophane which at that point was not even that clear because it had been there for so long.
Shhh, shhhh... Sky didn't even have enough time to warn Modrana about the bear, and how it stays in its wrapper. It didn't take longer than a second for Modrana to put her arms around it, refusing to let go. She hugged it, kissed it, pulled its ears, knocked on its glass eyes, twisted and turned its tail.

P20-21
Sky asked her to give him back the blue bear because, beside it being his toy, this was the first chance he got to actually touch the bear, stroke it, pull his little hands through its soft fur. However, none of that happened. Modrana had such a tight grip on it that they seemed to be glued together.
Then Sky's persistence, with a little help from his wit, almost won – he'd tried to distract her with his other toys – Modrana's mom called for both of them. The dessert was ready. Not even thinking about letting go of the bear, Modrana sat down at the table. She ate not one but two pieces of cake, never letting the bear from her grip.

P22-23
Sky's mother saw that the girl has the bear in her arms, and that it is no longer in its protective wrapper. At first she nodded, and then she shook her head left and right. Finally, she asked the girl why she had such a tight grip on the bear and if she wasn't afraid that she might smother it. Sky could see that his Mother was worried about the bear – the girl was still twisting its tale, pulling its ears and poking its eyes and body. Sky was tired of her behaviour and he was looking forward to the guests leaving. He would finally be able to get a hold on his blue bear. His unwrapped, soft blue bear. He sunk into his thoughts like they were the soft plush and he almost fell of his chair.

P24-25
'Noooooooo' Modrana screamed. 'I'm not giving it back, I want the bear!' No matter what aunt Lola and uncle Bartol said – they tried to explain that it is not nice and polite to take someone else's toys when they are visiting them – Modrana was screaming so loudly and holding the bear so tightly that Sky's mother gave in in the end, just to get the girl to calm down. 'All right, you can have the bear. We haven't seen you in a long time anyway so we didn't get you a present for your last birthday.'
Sky was devastated. Large tears came rolling down his cheeks and onto the pillow. What used to be the bear's spot was now so empty that he could not bear to look at it. He cried himself to sleep, angry with mom and dad, angry with Modrana, angry with the whole world. That night, he had his last dream about his blue bear – free of the cellophane, but sad and alone, left in a corner of Modrana's room.

P26-27
At first, Sky's parents tried to find a store that could sell them a bear just like the one they gave to Modrana. 'Do you happen to have a blue bear? Do you have the blue bear? Excuse me, do you by any chance have a blue bear?' They asked the same questions in every store they went to, even the ones that didn't really sell that many toys, the ones where parents go once a month to get food. 'We don't have it.' was always the answer.
Unfortunately, Aunt Đurđa didn't have her blue bear anymore. A sweetheart that she was, she gave it to her little neighbour whose parents couldn't afford toys. Until then, the boy spent his time drawing all kinds of characters on a paper and then cutting them out so that he could play with them.

P28-29
Sky's parents got him a stuffed cat, a stuffed elephant, monkey, rhinoceros, kangaroo, dog... They even got him a blue bear, but it wasn't THE blue bear. The fact that it didn't have protective foil on and Sky's mother unwrapped it right away wasn't much consolation.
Sky was heartbroken and he stopped playing with his toys altogether. He took up reading and he read picture books. On the one hand, that was a good thing, but that kept not only the other hand empty, but his heart as well. He missed his alien, blue bear, his blue bear.

P30-31
Many years passed. Sky grew up, he read all the picture books and then all the books that had ever been written. He graduated from all the schools that needed to be graduated from, he fell in love with beautiful Olinka, he got married, moved away and had a beautiful son, Kuzma.
Every Sunday, he would go to lunch at his parents' house with Olinka and Kuzma, and every single time he would glance at the place where the blue bear once watched over him as he slept. His room was still the same. His mother kept all of his other toys and a mountain of beautiful picture books. Little Kuzma loved spending time there, playing and reading.

P32-33
One summer, on a Sunday, little Kuzma went to the fair with his parents and grandparents. They walked around the fair, watching people gorging on the fair food, children having fun on the merry go round as they yelled out in excitement or rushing around in the bumper cars, crashing into one another.
There were a lot of different things there. There was even a large parrot that was not ready to part from its current owner. You could see that right away because it would say a word, and whenever someone approached it, it would turn away its head in protest.

P34-35
And then dad, mom and little Kuzma noticed the small glass box full of stuffed animals. You needed only to put a few coins in and a large metal spider would be in motion. It hung above the toys, ready to snatch a stuffed owl, kitty, octopus, duck, shark, hedgehog, turtle and bear. Yes! Among the sea of toys, a skilled player could catch the bear, the blue bear!
In front of Sky, behind the glass barrier, the bear looked at him. Yes, the same bear that he had all those years ago and that he never got over.
Sky put the money in. The metal spider began on its course. He knew what he wanted to catch, but when he heard Kuzma's cheering, "Catch the blue bear for me, get me the blue bear!" he knew he had to by all means catch the blue bear.

P36-37
The first try wasn't successful. He didn't catch anything. Kuzma looked down to the ground, and Sky couldn't say that he wasn't disappointed. He put in two more coins and out came... the little duck. Kuzma put his arms around it, but pretty soon he gave it to his mom and said that the duck was going to be his little sister's once she's born.
On the third try, Sky put in two more coins and, remembering his childhood, he steered the metal spider carefully and precisely to the blue bear. And there it was! The spider wrapped its metal legs around the bear's nose and moments later the bear was in Kuzma's arms.
Kuzma hugged the blue bear, Sky hugged Kuzma, and mom hugged Sky and Kuzma.

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ME AGAINST MYSELF
IVA BEZINOVIĆ-HAYDON

DETAILS: 32 pages | Hardback | 200x200 mm | Age: 5+ |
Picture book | Publication date: 2025

In this story of self-love and acceptance, we follow the inner monologue of our hero – a conversation between me and myself. The story follows a day in the life– a day when everything seems to be a struggle, from the decision to wake up, what to wear and what to have for breakfast. Finally, after trying to abandon themself, the protagonist realises that no matter how fast you run, you cannot escape from yourself – so the best thing is to treat yourself with kindness.

ME AGAINST MYSELF - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Spread 1
Since early morning, I felt NERVOUS.
My skin was itchy, my hair was messy, my voice was creaky, and rage oozed out of my pores.

Spread 2
“I need to get away from myself,” I whispered with a smirk.
Today, I will run away from myself.

Spread 3
A few weeks ago, I was reading an unpublished book of wisdoms great and small.
“No matter how far you run, you can never escape yourself,” it said, somewhere around the fifth chapter.

Spread 4
“That can’t be right.
You should be able to take a break from yourself.”

Spread 5
The morning started with an argument about getting out of bed.
When I put on skinny jeans, I convinced myself that the wide leg looked better.

Spread 6
At breakfast, which I barely settled on, I kept reminding myself I needed to study more.
NO
I
DON’T!
That’s the end of it.

Spread 7
“I’m going for a walk.” I decided.
“I’ll leave myself out there on a bench, and I’ll come back to get some rest.”

Spread 8
I walked for a long time.

Spread 9
I would walk quickly, then slow down. I made sharp and unexpected turns into unfamiliar streets. But there I was – wherever I turned.

Spread 10
My mind kept wandering from one topic to the next. I imagined I was someone else and somewhere else to get a fresh view. But I would breathe in – and there I was again.

Spread 11
I GIVE UP (illustration top left)
I sighed.
“I knew it!” I yelled at myself. “You always give up so easily.”

Spread 12
“Maybe” I replied.
“Although, this morning I really did try. But the book was right. You can’t run away from yourself.”
“Seems like it.” I reluctantly agreed with myself and fixed my shoelaces.

Spread 13
“Hey”
“Hey?”
“Since I have to drag you along everywhere, maybe we should try to get along better.” I suggested.
“I can’t make any promises. You can be a pain sometimes.” I shrugged.
“But I can try to be kinder to you.”
“Thank you.” I gave myself a hug at the traffic light.
“That’s enough for me.”

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THE YELLOW SCARF BY SILVIJA ŠESTO ILLUSTRATED BY ANA VUJASIĆ

THE YELLOW SCARF - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Chapter One

I felt like a car running out of fuel.
That's the first thing I thought when I woke up. I woke up under the sky. Slept under the sky.
Outside! In the rain. Under a tree. In the tree. In a hole. In a hedgehog's house —or who knows whose house.
My last thoughts before falling asleep were how silly I was, what a fool I was, and what my parents would say, what my classmates would say, what everyone would say. Would they look for me? Would they find me? Would I find my way back? How would it all end? Would they even notice I was missing?
And again, that terribly strong thought: how stupid I was, and how they would all laugh at me.
It was as if I heard laughter in the distance—or the rustling of the leaves sounded similar— or maybe the leaves themselves were laughing at me? As soon as I peeked out from the hollow, I became a target for raindrops that had settled on the branches for a while and then, maybe seeing my messy head, decided to end their droplet lives, concluding that the ugliness here on Earth was too much compared to the sky's blue beauty.
— Plop, plip, splat, splash! —
The last drops, already half-evaporated, fell on me in disgust, but unable to return upwards,
and after the final plop, the rain stopped. For a moment, I thought, "Fall more, keep falling,"
just so I wouldn't feel alone, even if the drops didn't exactly choose me— since I'm not a squirrel or hedgehog, nor an owl or bear or fox. Just an intruder. Maybe I took over someone's home last night.
I remember thinking it would be best to go somewhere—anywhere—and not come back,
from shame. Then, soaking wet, I fell asleep like a log, curled up like a little ball. The storm calmed down, the rain thinned into a shy drizzle, and somehow I fell asleep again, though I'm not exactly sure how.
When I fully opened my eyes, I felt like a car that...
Well, I already said that, even though I've never actually been a car to know what that feels like. And yes, I felt hunger—a really bad kind of hunger. I've never been that hungry before.

All other feelings vanished. Sleep had probably cured my exhaustion, but hunger...
I thought of those survival shows where people eat grass and weird plants. I imagined myself on a lazy Sunday, sitting on the couch watching one of those people start a fire like a caveman, skewer a freshly caught fish on a stick, and roast it—While I, full from lunch,
was chewing on a third slice of Grandma's apple pie. I kept shifting on the couch, and if laziness were measured, someone would probably conclude I was even lazier than Sunday itself. Those memories made my hunger worse. It felt like I hadn't eaten in a hundred years.
My eyes landed on the tree bark of the tree that sheltered me last night. Not exactly polite to eat your host, especially one so hospitable—but the bark didn't look tasty anyway.
I clenched my teeth.

[News at 17]
Meteorologist:
The storm that happened today is probably the strongest in the last hundred years in this region. Not even the oldest residents remember such winds and such destruction. Just look at what the storm did to century-old trees in the city park...
(headline on the right photo) The consequences of the raging storm in Zagreb
(headline on bottom photo) Zagreb: The wind tore off roofs and toppled trees. Zagreb looks unrecognizable after yesterday's storm.
Long-time Resident:
I don't remember anything like this. Neither does my wife Marica—and definitely not my mother-in-law. Look at this pine tree—My father planted it when I started school. And now it's gone.

I was staring at a troll on top of the wardrobe that my mom stuck up there next to some moss. Yeah—she even put moss up there because a room, she says, "needs a bit of greenery." But so this doesn't become a story about my mom—who, honestly, cares more about that moss than about me—let me tell you what happened to me and why I keep replaying the same film in my head. One day, if I'm lucky, I'll make that film —
because my biggest dream is to make a film like that. For myself. And for all the others who'll recognize themselves in it. I love documentaries, but this film will be a fiction based on a true story. And I hope it feels just like the best documentaries, as it should since I will make myself the lead actor, director and writer. I just know there isn't anyone who could portray my stupidity better than me, and I wouldn't even have to act.

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THE CONTENTS OF THE YELLOW FOLDER BY VLASTA GOLUB

DETAILS: 215 pages | Hardback | 130x200 mm | Age: 12+ |
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When an acclaimed YA author is confronted by a quiet but sharp-witted teenage boy named Lovro at a school event, she's asked a question that leaves her speechless: Why do all your novels focus on girls? This seemingly simple query unfolds into a transformative journey for both the author and the boy.

THE CONTENTS OF THE YELLOW FOLDER - SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Chapter 1
How Not to Be Fake

I will begin this story, my dear reader, in a way quite unusual for this modern age. I will start it in a completely old-fashioned manner, entirely in the spirit of times long-gone and in the style of writers who often, at the very beginning of their novels, would directly address their reading audience just like this.
I thought long and hard about how to start the story I want to tell you. I wrestled with the idea of whether I should begin writing it in the present tense and first person, in the past tense and third person, in the present tense and third person, or in the past tense and first person. Complicated? Yes, it seemed that way to me too.
If I were to choose the first option, the first sentence of the novel would be: "I'm sitting in my best friend Luka's room." If I were to go with past tense and third person, that sentence would be a bit different: "Lovro was sitting in his best friend Luka's room." The third option would go like this: "Lovro is sitting in his best friend Luka's room." And the fourth one like this: "I was sitting in my best friend Luka's room."
Each of these four possibilities I was intensely considering has its own advantages, but also its downsides. If I started writing in the first person and present tense, you, my dear reader, would probably get the impression that the events are happening right now, in this very moment, before your eyes, as if you were watching a film. There would be a certain immediacy to it, and perhaps you'd even get the sense of a sincere confession.
However, that would really only perhaps be the case, because behind the sincere confession of fourteen-year-old Lovro, it would actually be me hiding; a middle-aged and somewhat old-fashioned author who likes to think she understands the problems of young people, guided by the experience of motherhood over two children who already went through the rollercoaster of teenage years quite some time ago. And there's a trap hidden there—one I wouldn't like to fall into.

“Lovro was sitting in his best friend Luka’s room.” That version of the first sentence would point to an omniscient narrator. So, the narrative voice would not only know the events but also the internal states of the main character. That style of narration, on the one hand, allows for various digressions from the main storyline, but on the other hand, it can lack immediacy, as the narrator remains at a certain distance.
It’s similar with the third option. The narrator knows everything about Lovro; this narrative voice, although present somewhere nearby, right next to him, right at this moment, still maintains a certain distance.
In the final option I considered, the main character would be recounting something that happened to him in the past, in a confessional tone. Behind that protagonist and his sincere confession, again, it would be middle-aged me.
In any case, whichever narrative mode I choose, I must stand behind my protagonist. I must give him the lines he will speak, I must delve into his thoughts and emotions, I must consider the motivations behind his actions, I must think like him, I must move into his mind. I must be him.
How can I do that without being fake?
Given that I’ve already written a few novels, you might quite logically, dear reader, wonder how I handled this problem before. And I’ll tell you quite honestly that there were doubts then as well—although smaller ones. Namely, in all three novels I’ve published so far, the main protagonists were girls. It was, after all, easier for me to move into their heads and into their lives, and I liked to believe that my writing didn’t come across as too fake.
You might quite logically think again, my dear reader, why don’t I just write another novel about girls, if I already believe it’s easier for me and I come across as less fake that way? And once more, I’ll be completely honest with you — the reason lies in a boy. You’re probably already guessing! Yes, I won’t draw it out — that boy’s name is Lovro. I’ll tell you how we met.
The spring morning sun was shining through the large window. The sunrays touched the long rows of wooden shelves. The spines of books in various colours, lit by the sunlight, drew attention like actors under spotlights. The letters were too small, and the prescription of my glasses wasn’t quite strong enough for me to make them out. My gaze wandered.
Seated on blue upholstered chairs arranged in a semicircle, in front of me were the children. I stood at the centre of that semicircle. Sixty pairs of teenage eyes, pupils from year seven and eight, were fixed on my face, eagerly awaiting an answer. The flow of words that had, until then, been pouring continuously from my mouth — and had flowed freely, just as it always did whenever I had the chance to present my novels and speak about my protagonists at literary events — was suddenly interrupted by a question.
To my great surprise, it was asked by a boy.
I had noticed him at the very start of the event. He sat in the third row on my left-hand side, a little apart from the others. He had placed his backpack beside his chair, and his gaze often rested on it. As if he were guarding something very precious inside. Or perhaps he was simply using it to avoid eye contact. While the others laughed at my jokes, reacted to the excerpt I read aloud, and responded to my questions — as I once again tried to keep the session interactive — this boy, whose black curls fell across his forehead and part of his cheek, and whose eyes were framed by large glasses, was the only one who didn’t react. He appeared disinterested, as though he was just waiting for it all to be over.
During my talk, I kept glancing his way. I tried to make eye contact, but our gazes never met. His head was bowed, his eyes firmly fixed on his refuge. The only thing I could see were his thick black curls gleaming in the sunlight.
And then, quite unexpectedly, from the left side of the semicircle, behind large dark-rimmed glasses, emerged a gaze from a pair of big blue eyes—and immediately after, from the same direction, came the question:

"Why are girls always the protagonists in your novels?"
I was taken aback. For several reasons. The first was that, most often, at my literary events, questions were asked by girls. The second was that not only had the question been asked by a boy, but it was the very same boy who, until a moment ago, had completely ignored me. The third, and perhaps the biggest reason for my sudden confusion, lay in how the question was phrased. It sounded like it had come from an older person, someone familiar with the kind of terminology often used in reviews or literary criticism. Also, I shouldn't forget the fourth reason that contributed to my utter bewilderment, which was so intense it actually made me momentarily speechless.
To tell you the truth, it also stemmed from my own uncertainty about the motive behind the question. Because of all this, I wasn't quite sure if I should answer honestly and admit, in front of the entire audience, something I had been asking myself for a while now—something that had been quietly gnawing at me from the inside.
All eyes were on me, staring intently. There was complete silence in the library. It seemed to me like it had lasted too long, so I said:
"I understand girls better."
After that sentence, the silence deepened. Everyone was expecting me to continue.
"I mean, don't get me wrong... I'm a woman, so it's easier for me to get into a girl's head..."
I paused again. He waited a bit and then asked a question that sounded a little stern:
"So, you write about girls because it's easier for you?"
"Well, you could say that... although, there are a lot of male characters in my books too..."
"But they're secondary."
"Well, not necessarily... all of my heroines' best friends are boys..."
"But you don't write from their perspective."
"True. Actually, I've thought about how I'd like to write a book where a boy is the main character...only, I was afraid it might come off too fake..."
"What does 'fake' mean?"
"False. Don't you guys say 'fake' for anything that sounds or looks false?"
"We do, of course. But what I meant was: what's fake in literature, and what's true?"
(...)
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I'm not sure how many days had passed since that conversation Lovro had so abruptly ended, when suddenly, from somewhere at the bottom of my big black bag, my phone started ringing.
(...)
On the other end—it was Lovro.
"Good afternoon. It's Lovro."
"Yes, I saw. Good afternoon, Lovro."
"Sorry, am I bothering you?"
"No, no, you're not."
"I hear some noise, so I wasn't sure..."
"Oh, that's just the traffic. I'm on the street, just coming back from the store."
"Should I call back later then?"
"No, it's fine. Go ahead, Lovro."
"Well, I'm calling about that manuscript of mine."
"Yes. Go on..."

“I was thinking… I don’t know if it would be okay with you, but I wanted to suggest something.”
“I’m listening.”
“You said you’d like to write a novel where the main character is a boy.”
“Yes, for a change of pace.”
“But that it’s a bit hard for you because you’re a woman.”
“Yes. And on top of that—a woman of a certain age, ha ha…”
“Right, well, um… what if you used my manuscript as a blueprint?”
“You mean take your story and turn it into a novel?”
“Exactly.”
“But that’s your story. Your novel.”
“The story is mine, but I could never publish the novel.”
“Why not? It would be a good one.”
“Even if it really turned out to be good—I wouldn’t want the publicity.”
“You could publish it under a pseudonym.”
“No, honestly, I just couldn’t.”
“I don’t know, Lovro… I’d have to think about it.”
“You said it was good.”
“Yes, it is. It really is. But I’d have to fully identify with you. I don’t know…”
“Well, think it over then—and let me know.”
“Okay, I’ll let you know.”
“Alright. Goodbye.”
“Lovro…”
“Yes?”
“I just wanted to say one more thing… your novel isn’t fake.”
“Okay.”
He ended the call before I had a chance to say goodbye. That evening, I picked up his manuscript again. And after reading it through a second time, I closed the yellow folder and sat in the armchair for a long while. It was morning by the time I turned off the tall standing lamp. I reached for my phone and typed out a message:
I’ve decided. I accept your proposal.
I sent it to Lovro, hoping he would see it when he woke up a few hours later.
But my phone quickly pinged back with a reply:
ok
And then I wrote to him again:

I’ve also decided I won’t worry about whether it turns out fake.
His reply came just as quickly:
ok

THE YELLOW FOLDER

I was sitting in my best friend Luke's room. I had been talking for a long time, a really long time—more than half an hour, maybe even an hour. I really don't know how long my monologue lasted. I just needed to unload everything that had built up in me lately. And Luka is the perfect person for that. You can talk to him for hours. He won't interrupt you. He'll sit at his computer, playing a game, and you'll only hear the sound of keys tapping, and every now and then, when you ask him something directly, he'll reply with something like: "Yeah, maaan..." or "Yup, mate..." or "Oh, yeahhh..." Meanwhile, you won't even see his face because Luka always sits slouched in a high gaming chair facing his computer, so the only place for his guest is to sit on the bed behind his back. Actually, you don't even see his back. You just see a few brown tufts of hair poking out from behind the tall chair. And really, if from time to time behind that chair back you didn't hear one of those three signature phrases he always says, you'd feel like you weren't actually talking to Luke at all—but to the backrest of the chair. Turns out Luke is a great listener. Only, the problem with the whole situation is that you might get the impression Luke doesn't actually hear you. But maybe that's not such a bad thing—because at the very least, if you tell him something confidential, you can be sure no one else will ever find out. And besides, it's good that you were at least able to get some things off your chest. That's how it was that afternoon too. I told him: "Hey, mate..."
He didn't respond with any of the usual three legendary phrases.
"Hey, Luke..."
Still nothing. Not even a twitch. Just the sound of his fingers clacking against the keyboard. I leaned forward and looked at his desk where he usually kept his big, blue-glowing headphones. They weren't there. I got up from his unmade bed and approached the back of his chair.
"Luke, hey, Lucky... is this how you listen to me, huh?"
Sometimes I call him Lucky Luke. Because Luke really does look like a skinny cowboy who acts totally cool, and whose keyboard is his revolver—from which he shoots faster than his own shadow. He fights desperadoes and rights many wrongs before riding off into the sunset—or more precisely, before slumping from his gaming chair straight into bed and drifting off to sleep. And maybe in his dreams, he even sings: "I am a poor lonesome cowboy..." The only difference between Luke and the famous comic book hero is that he doesn't wear a cowboy outfit, red scarf, and hat. Luke is always in hoodies, and in those rare moments when he's not at his computer, he compulsively pulls the hood over his head. And if Luke is Lucky Luke, I'm probably Jolly Jumper, his loyal horse and best friend. Still, despite all the "benefits" of Luke's unique way of "listening" to my venting, I couldn't shake a small desire that my friend would just... notice me. At least a little bit. And when I saw how the large headphones on his head were glowing blue, I truly started to feel like a horse. He caught me out of the corner of his eye and quickly tugged off the headphones—but didn't look away from the screen.
"I was telling you something, Luke."
"Yeah, man..."
"Are you listening to me?"
"Yup, men..."
"And? What do you think about all that?"
"Oh, yeahh..."

He still didn't take his eyes off the screen. I knew there was no point saying anything else, so I randomly pulled a volume of Alan Ford from one of his shelves overflowing with comics. I dropped back onto Luke's bed, sinking into a pile of messy blankets, opened the first page of the comic, and stuck my nose into it to take a sniff—because that's what I always do before reading any comic or book. I love the smell of paper, especially when the ink is freshly printed. This comic didn't smell fresh—it wasn't new. It was one of the older ones from Luke's massive collection, and it smelled like dust. And right at that moment, as my nose inhaled the dust from Alan Ford—dust Luke hadn't bothered to wipe from his shelves or comics in what felt like centuries—the door to his room swung open. I sneezed like an elephant. I saw a tiny glob of snot fly straight toward the door. And there—standing in the doorway—was HER.
The person who always makes me freeze up and mess up in the most ridiculous ways. And to be completely honest, the person who's also the secret reason I go to Luke's house so often. It was Nela, Luke's older sister.
So—Nela. Hm... Nela. Phew. I don't even know where to start. This is where I'm supposed to describe the girl who has some inexplicable power over me, because I genuinely become a total dope in her presence. And although I can usually talk for hours, never run out of things to say, and—according to my language teacher—have a very rich and developed vocabulary, when Nela's around... I go mute. Completely unable to string together even a single coherent sentence. Compared to me, Luke, with his three default phrases, is practically a master orator. That's why I'm afraid I won't be able to describe her well enough. Actually—I'm sure I won't. All I can do is list everything about her that I think is amazing: Long red hair, soft and pale skin on her oval-shaped face, stunning green eyes, gently arched eyebrows, full and juicy red lips, a small upturned nose with a piercing in the left nostril... seriously, everything about her is beyond amazing. She looks like she was drawn by a comic book master.
And that day—she looked exactly like that. Like a true superhero. She appeared in the doorway of Luke's room like a living work of art. More beautiful than any picture I've ever seen. Her hair was loosely tied into two pigtails, with countless red strands falling over her shoulders. She was wearing a tight cropped t-shirt which showed her belly button. One of her hands was resting against the doorframe, and the thumb of the other was tucked into the pocket of her tight little shorts. Her long legs stood out in stockings that looked like a ripped-up net, with three large holes, and black, military-style boots that reached halfway up her calves—lace-ups with really thick soles. There was something firm and determined in her posture. More precisely—boldness.
My eyes stopped at her boots. And I totally froze. What I saw on the top of her right boot—clear and glistening against the black background—completely shocked me. I thought I would sink into the floor from pure shame. My brain kicked into overdrive, and I started praying silently, desperately, that Nela wouldn't lower her gaze and notice the thing that made my cheeks and ears burn like fire. Because, right there—on the very top of her right boot—was the piece of snot that had launched from my nose earlier when I'd sneezed like an elephant. All because of Luke and his stupid comic, which he probably hadn't dusted off in his entire life. With her deep voice—soft and smooth like velvet—she said:
"Bless you."
And right after:
"Hey, kiddos, are you up to something you're not supposed to be doing?"
Luke said:
"Oh, yeah..."

And I mumbled:
“Thrcmbl…”
And it was terrible. I wanted, at the same time, to say “Thanks” for the blessing, and “I’m just reading a comic”, and also toss in something clever and funny… But instead, I managed to say none of that and blurted out something completely dumb and meaningless. What a disaster! I felt like smacking myself with the comic I was holding. Instead, I just lifted it a little higher to try to hide the growing redness on my face. Although, I knew that attempt at hiding was useless—because I could feel my cheeks, nose, forehead, and ears burning. And Alan Ford, in all its comic book dimensions, couldn’t possibly cover that much surface. But she just kept going, like she hadn’t noticed a thing:
“Of course, you’re dorking around. As usual.”
“Yeah, man…”
Luke replied in his ordinary fashion. And I said nothing. I just gripped the comic tighter like someone might try to snatch it away. She was chewing gum and lightly swaying on her thick soles, as if she were about to start dancing.
“I’m heading to the shop to grab some drinks. Ed’s coming over. Open the door and don’t be antisocial losers—actually talk to him if I’m gone a while, okay?”
“Jeee, meen…”
Luke replied once again, and I wasn’t even capable of saying a single lousy “okay.”
I just nodded my head up and down like some kind of clown, which looked especially dumb because I smacked my nose on the comic book while doing it. Then I pulled it away from my face and kept nodding all the same. It went on for quite a while. Or at least it felt that way. But I had no idea how to react. Besides, when she mentioned this guy Ed was coming, something clenched in my stomach—a kind of bitter twist that really stung. I figured he was probably her boyfriend. She smiled, turned on her heel, and vanished from the doorway. I lowered the comic from my face and felt my mood sink along with it. The only comforting thing about the whole situation was that Nela hadn’t noticed the shameful snot blob that had flown from my nose and landed on her boot. And if she saw it later, she'd probably think something dripped on her while she was outside. At least, that’s what I kept telling myself. I sat there for a while, totally slumped, surrounded by Luke’s chaotic mess of bedding. I mean, I knew I never stood a chance with Nela. She’s a whole four years older than me, already a senior, and she’s starting university this year. To her, I’m just some kid—an awkward little friend of her totally antisocial brother. Because yeah, I admit it—it’s true, and there’s no point denying it. I suck at sports, I’m generally clumsy, and I gave up trying with any kind of athletic activity ages ago. I’m not exactly surrounded by a bunch of friends either. But Luke—Luke’s a whole different story.He’s the world champion of being antisocial. His world is gaming, and to him, no other world exists. He somehow gets through school, mostly sits next to me or alone in the back row, speaks as little as possible, and acts like everyone around him is stupid. Even though I know he doesn’t really think that. I think he’s just hiding from the world. That’s why he always pulls his hoodie up over his head—like he’s saying, “Leave me alone. I’m not here.” Luke’s antisocial tendencies are so strong, it’s like a condition. For example, he never goes to the store—or anywhere—by himself. If we go to the movies, I have to be the one to buy the tickets. He’d never call me first or just drop by my house—God forbid he’d have to talk to my mum. For him, that’s unthinkable. But I knew that, so I never insisted. I accepted him the way he was—just like he accepted me the way I was. And even though I knew that Nela didn’t see me as any kind of guy she could fall for—and that the thought never even crossed her mind—the idea of this Ed, someone she was in love with, gave me a horrible feeling of jealousy. Stupid, I know. But I couldn’t help it. I almost asked Luke who Ed was, but at the last second, I realised I probably wouldn’t get an answer—because, well, we all know how Luke communicates, right? So I gave up on the idea. And besides—what kind of name is Ed, anyway? I started wondering if it was short for something.

The doorbell rang. Luke didn't react.
"Luke," I said. "Someone's at the door."
"Oh, yeah..."
Obviously, it never occurred to him to answer it.
"Do you want me to get it?"
"Yeah man..."
I got up from the bed decisively. I figured it had to be that Ed, and even though I was jealous, I was also really curious to see what kind of guy Nela could have fallen for. I decided to put on an act. I wanted to look as old and serious as possible. I wanted him to see me as a threat—a serious rival who could totally shake his standing. So I straightened my slouched back, puffed out my chest, pushed my chin forward, furrowed my brow, and narrowed my eyes into two tight slits. I even wanted to take off my glasses, but I'm way too nearsighted—I wouldn't have been able to properly see my dreaded opponent. Instead, I added a special kind of swagger to my walk, went to the door, and opened it. And then—I saw him.
"Hey, hey! You must be Nela's little brother. I'm Ed."
I've already described how I totally freeze up and turn into a bumbling idiot in front of Nela, unable to get out a single coherent word—let alone a sentence. Well, the exact same thing happened just then. Not a word came out of my mouth. I just awkwardly nodded my head up and down, then side to side, and then up and down again. It was ridiculous. But I was completely thrown off. And honestly—who wouldn't be? Because Ed spoke to me gently and kindly, with a voice that was soft and silky, almost like a girl's. Given that I was just nodding my head in all directions, probably looking like I was doing some terribly uncoordinated exercise routine, he asked:
"Is Nela home?"
And what confused me the most—besides his kindness and that gentle voice, which completely shattered my tough-guy act was his appearance. The silliest part of it all was that I wasn't entirely sure anymore whether the person standing in front of me was male or female. I stopped bobbing my head, but now I was just staring—mouth open like a gaping fish. The way Ed was dressed was also confusing. Everything was kind of on the edge—each piece of clothing had a touch of something typically worn by women, but not quite. For example, Ed wore a trench coat with a wide open collar, cinched at the waist in a way that emphasized a slim figure. Around the neck was a colourful scarf, and beneath the long coat, wide-legged pants peeked out—cut off at mid-calf. The shoes were a low-cut version of Nela's boots, with thick soles and laces. I somehow managed to squeeze out:
"Come in..."
Ed stepped inside. Tall and incredibly thin, with a kind of fragile appearance. His brown hair was cropped very short, which made his pale face and large, warm brown eyes stand out. He smiled at me—politely and gently. I pointed toward Nela's room. He walked ahead of me, and that's when I noticed the small backpack on his back—it had glittery details. In that moment, it hit me. I was completely sure: Ed was a girl. And all of my jealousy had just been one big, ridiculous misunderstanding. Ed wasn't Nela's boyfriend—she was her friend! That name—Ed—was probably just a nickname. Maybe short for Edita or Eda. A rush of relief washed over me. And with it, my voice returned. I suddenly started chattering cheerfully:
"Nela will be back soon. She went to the shop to grab some drinks. She said you'd be coming, and that we should hang out with you. Luke and I. Luke's Nela's younger brother. I'm not. I mean—I'm not her brother. I'm Luke's friend. And Nela's too. Luke and I are in the same class. But I opened the door because Luke's playing a game. Actually, Luke's not very sociable. I mean, more accurately, he's totally antisocial."
"From what I can tell, you're not. Antisocial, I mean."
I opened the door to Nela's room and, for the first time, stepped into a realm I had only ever caught a few longing glimpses of—walking past it during my visits to Luke's house.
"Me? Oh, nooo... Uh, make yourself comfortable."

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