

Miro Gavran

The Teacher of My Dreams

(excerpt)

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Chapter 1

Wednesday

The most miserable creature in this world is a fourteen-year old boy who doesn't have a girlfriend, but has a silly mother, a foolish father and an older brother who knows everything better than he does.

Yes, that's me – a nobody of the male gender, with a heap of hormones that are choking him and driving him mad.

I am a poor thing without any sexual experiences, surrounded by girls who are completely uninterested in us boys of their age.

Unluckily for me, there is a high school across the road from my elementary school. So now, instead of us boys in 8th grade being the main men at our school, the women preordained for us spend the breaks watching the high school men on the other side of the road.

It's just awful!

I have been an 8th-grader for three days now and I feel as if I'm just starting out in Grade 1. An absolute nobody.

That's probably why I started keeping this diary. Out of desperation. Otherwise, I think that anyone who keeps a diary - including me – must be a real loser in everyday life.

Anyone who lives life to the full, who is a success, who has a girlfriend and some standing in society, doesn't have time to keep a diary or any desire for doing anything so la-di-da.

But what can I do when no-one understand me and no-one takes me seriously.

I wouldn't say I was lonely, that would be overdoing it. I have two great mates - I'm thinking of Zoki and Pavel - but I can't open up to them and tell them what is taking place in my soul. That's why I have decided to keep this diary. I would burst if I couldn't write down what I am feeling and what's happening inside me and around me.

(...)

When my parents came back from the parent/teacher meeting this evening, I heard both good news and bad news.

The good news was that the home-room teacher had arranged with our parents that we would be going skiing at Bled in Slovenia during the winter holidays.

The bad news came from the school psychologist, who was at the second part of the meeting to advise the parents on the problems of children in adolescence and how they should be treated. As an example of a child requiring everyone's serious concern and careful supervision of his growing-up process he mentioned – me. He quoted the definition of puberty that I had written in that stupid questionnaire. In my answer to the question: "What is puberty?" I had answered, "PUBERTY IS A STATE OF COMPLETE UNHAPPINESS".

My mother was very embarrassed when she heard that in front of all the other parents, and my dad made the whole thing worse by saying:

"I agree with my son's definition, but I would augment it and say: PUBERTY IS A STATE OF COMPLETE UNHAPPINESS FOR ALL PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN ARE GOING THROUGH PUBERTY".

All the other parents burst out laughing at what he said, while Mum was even more embarrassed and tried to fix up the situation by saying that her husband had actually wanted to say something else. Dad told her that he had said exactly what he wanted to say, and they almost ended up having a fight in front of everybody.

On the whole, they left a terrible impression. And they had gone to the parents' meeting intending to act out the role of a harmonious couple who cared about the future of their child.

For a while, they argued in front of me because of their failed performance, and then they suddenly turned their weapons on me:

"How could you write that? It will turn out that there is something lacking in this family, that we are not good parents", shouted Mum.

"You embarrassed us in front of everyone", said Dad, joining in her attack.

"I only wrote what I thought, and you want to raise me to be like you two, a hypocrite and a liar", I snapped back at them, offended at what they were saying to me.

"Life is a complex phenomenon in which the first to suffer are those who openly say everything they have on their minds", said Mum.

"Ahh, but I don't want to live the way you do", I replied with growing conviction.

"You really do behave like an ordinary lump of hormones that provokes everybody around it", said my father, delivering the lowest blow of all.

(...)

That night I couldn't fall asleep. Whatever I thought about, she was there. Her face, her eyes, her voice, and the way she moves. . . Somewhere before dawn I admitted to myself what I hadn't been prepared to for days. I admitted to myself that I was madly in love with my teacher, Stella, with the loveliest woman in Croatia and even outside its borders, and that I could barely wait to see her again and take delight in being near her.

*In the days that followed, my mental state got worse and worse. Love flooded through me. I became the prisoner of a woman who never left my thoughts for a moment. From the time I

woke up right up until I went to bed late at night, a night without sleep, my teacher was always in my mind. Her image flickered in front of my eyes; I could conjure her up in such a way that I could “see” her as if she was there in front of me, life-size.

Instead of just being a miserable adolescent, with no girlfriend and no luck in love, now I became a pathetic creature. An unfortunate wretch. I was jinxed. There never was such a loser. All my life I had imagined how great it must be to fall in love completely, like in the novels, to fall in love with no holding back, so that you were breathless just at the thought of your loved one. And now, finally, when that love from the stories and the most romantic films had come into my life, it turned out that it did not make me happy at all, but made me so unhappy that it hurt.

Can there be anything in the world as unfortunate as an impossible love? And could any love be more impossible than mine? Could anyone be more miserable and unhappy than a fourteen-year-old in love with his teacher, who was nine years older?

What were the chances of her ever loving me back? One in a billion!

What was even worse, although common sense told me that it would be best to forget her and not hold out any hope, I was like someone who had been shipwrecked and was floating alone in the open sea, but was still hopeful of being rescued. I, too, was still hopeful, hopeful that our love would have a happy ending one day.

I started imagining that in four years time, when I turned eighteen, I would walk into a disco and see her there. She would be twenty-seven then.

I approach her, ask her to dance, and she accepts.

She does not recognize me, because I have changed in the meantime. I have worked out at the health club, persistently, for days, months, and years. I look as strong and powerful as if I am twenty-five. And anyway, the poor lighting in the disco works in my favor.

Luckily, she is not wearing her lenses. (Let’s say that her sight would not be so good in four years time, so that she would have to wear lenses.) Simply put, it does not even occur to her that the young man is her former student.

We dance and talk, dance and talk. Our bodies draw closer together, and they touch from time to time to the rhythm of the music and each time a shock goes through me.

At one moment, she is pressed right up against me. And what is wonderful is that I can see that it pleases her.

We look into each others’ eyes.

Passion and attraction engulf the two of us at the same time. As if in agreement, our lips join.

We give ourselves up to a long, passionate kiss, a kiss that neither of us wants to end.

We walk out of the disco.

I open the door to my sports car that I had bought a month earlier, after I won a million Euro in a quiz. With the rest of the money, I had bought a four-roomed flat on Pantovčak, the best part of town, and that is where I am driving her for a drink.

We go into my flat. She is delighted with the way I have decorated it. She notices a hundred or so hard-cover Russian classics from the 19th century on one of the bookshelves.

We light candles and aromatic oils.

She takes off her clothes, I take off my clothes.

We are both naked, we make love as the fire crackles in the fireplace. . .

Then it hits me that anything like that will only be possible after four long years have gone by. The North Pole ice could melt by then, Zagreb could be razed to the ground by a catastrophic earthquake, and something could happen to her or to me in the meantime. For

instance, she could fall in love with some idiot and marry him. She could bear him two children. There are one thousand four hundred long days in four years, and my unhappiness only grows in imagining what is as unrealistic as it is daring.

I realise that my prospects are dismal or even no prospects at all, just as hopeless as the unbridgeable gulf made by those nine long years that stand between us.

(...)