

Miro Gavran

Try to Forget

(excerpt)

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Second Entry

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When I was sleeping last night, I had that dream again, the one that's been haunting me for eighteen months. I am walking along a dark street in which every single one of the houses has broken windows. The smell of burning swirls around me like a heavy cloud. The whistling wind bites into my very bones.

I am afraid of that deserted street and the dirty houses which make it all look like the inside of an old graveyard.

I hear footsteps, someone is following me.

I have the feeling that that someone means me harm. I walk faster.

And the footsteps walk faster.

I turn around: a man is running after me. He has the head of a German Shepherd dog and is baring his teeth at me.

I start running.

The Man-Dog runs, too.

I can feel him behind me. I run faster and faster, not daring to look back.

The man is drawing closer.

I can already feel his damp breath on my neck.

I stumble and fall.

The Man-Dog leaps at me.

Horror courses through my body.

His sharp nails tear at my skin, as his sharp fangs sink into my neck.

I scream!

-- Nooo! Help, help! - I gurgle, as the blood from my throat squirts into the air like a small fountain.

-- It's alright, Anita, calm down, dear, everything's alright!

I see my parents standing over me.

My scream had wakened them.

-- Don't let them take me, Mama, don't let them! - I repeated over and over, clasped in my mother's embrace and fearful that the dream could drag me back from reality.

-- Everything is alright, it will all be alright - said Daddy, comforting me.

I started crying. I could not hold back the sobs which were choking me.

Daddy touched my forehead with his hand.

My forehead was damp with perspiration.

-- What were you dreaming? - he asked me

-- A man with the head of a dog - I said.

-- Ah, that same dream again - he said in a sad voice.

I knew that his sadness came from his disappointment that I was still having nightmares, even here in Zagreb.

Daddy had hoped that everything would be different when we moved, and that I, too, would be different.

I was unhappy because he was unhappy.

-- Do you want me to sleep in here - asked Mama.

I did not answer her immediately. My breathing became calmer and I wiped the perspiration from my forehead with the sleeve of my night-gown. I said in a small voice:

-- You don't have to, just leave the light on.

-- But ... - said Mama, with a worried look.

-- I'll read for a while.

-- Good.

So I read, right until dawn. My fear of the nightmare stood guard against the sleep which I so badly needed. It is sad when someone is afraid of his own sleep, his own shadows and footsteps.

It is only now that I know how blissful those years were when my dreams gave me rest from reality, and when the strength I accumulated in my dreams was used in reality.

There is no more important sensation in the life of a living being than the even interchange between day and night, dreams and reality.

This morning at breakfast Mama suddenly put down the butter-knife, dropped her glance to the floor and asked me in an unsure voice:

-- Would you like us to go to see a doctor?

-- Why?

-- So that you can talk with him or her.

-- Why?

-- It could make it easier for you.

-- It won't be any easier.

-- It's for you own...

-- Mama, please, I have had enough of psychiatrists and psychologists. If I go to talk with them they ask me about everything, about my whole life, and I don't want to talk about it again, I don't want to tell anyone about what happened, no-one in this whole world.

-- But a doctor is something else.

-- I don't want to talk to any psychiatrists. I just don't want to.

-- But...

-- It's painful, please understand.

-- But if you want to get rid of those nightmares, it's the only way...

-- It won't help me, because they can't help me. They couldn't help in Gradiska nor in Slavonski Brod. No-one will help me to get rid of those dreams, because no-one can help me.

My mother was silent for a while, and then she asked me something unexpected.

-- Don't you like it here in Zagreb?

I did not answer. But she insisted.

-- Well?

-- No, I don't.

-- Why?

-- I don't know.

-- Try to explain it to me.

-- Mama, please, leave me alone.

-- But I have to know.

-- I don't like it here in Zagreb, just the way I wouldn't like it in any other city on the face of this Earth.

My father was just coming out of the bathroom and he heard what I said.

He took a sip of his white coffee, looked at me, and then said:

-- Anita, we love you very much. Very much.

-- I have never doubted that - I answered, and then I started crying.

It's hard for me to write this, it's hard for me to open up. But: it seems to be easier to survive a day which is described in sentences, just as it is easier to bear pain which has been given a name.

But still, I don't believe that I will entrust my awful secret to this notebook, I don't believe that I will ever write about the day when I was left without hope, without sweet dreams, without happiness, and without life.

And now: that's enough scribbling! My books are calling to me, inviting me to enter into their pages and to forget.

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