

A Second Past – Proposal for a Book in Translation

Original Title (Slovene): Druga preteklost

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Title in Translation: A Second Past

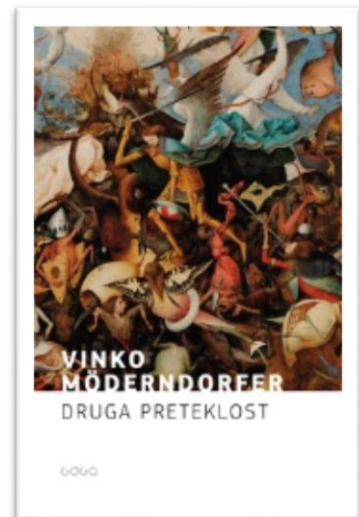
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About the Book:

A Second Past is a monumental prose fresco about the fictional and archetypal Dolina, an Slovene village as it “existed” in the first half of the twentieth century. The book contains a cornucopia of characters. Among the Slovenians are cottage-dwellers, sawmill workers, craftsmen, waitresses, a regular lass, a wealthy innkeeper and a mayor. Among the Germans: the owner of the sawmill and manor lord, and his elegant daughter who first has eyes for a penniless worker, but then opts for the mayor’s son – which helps keep the social order stable. These heroes switch back and forth between German and Slovenian, and linguistic identity is not a great concern of theirs. However, as World War II approaches, a sudden Germanophilia overcomes some of the Slovenes and they are all too quick and ready to get rid of the nice Jewish doctor. But most of them just want to bury their heads in the sand and simply work, live... until the first Partisan resistance operations take place and retribution shooting follows. Suddenly war is raging all around Dolina, and plans for revenge are hatched.

About the Author:

Vinko Möderndorfer is a writer, playwright, essayist, and theatre, film and television director. He began his literary career as a poet in the second half of the 1970s. His works have been translated into many foreign languages, and he has received the most prominent Slovenian literary awards; two of them for his short stories. He is a member of the Slovene Writers' Association, The Slovenian Association of Dramatic Artists, and the Slovenian PEN Centre.

About the Translator:

Jason Blake is the author of *Slovenia – Culture Smart!* and an occasional translator. His translations from German and Slovenian have been selected for Dalkey Archive's Best European Fiction series, and his translation of Jasmin B. Frelih's *In/Half* – a novel which won the European Union Prize for Literature – will be published in 2018.

Sample Translation:

A STORY IDEA

This story was told to me by my friend. I didn't dream it up. Still, I knew immediately that it was my story.

We were sitting on a splendid terrace in the centre of the old part of town. It was a gorgeous sunny day. The sun was, despite the wind, shining right above us. Below the terrace the dark green Ljubljana River wound. Whenever I was visiting my friend, I always said, "This is just like Paris, the Seine and all that." After a while, after we'd finished off the first bottle of wine, I'd usually remark, "This is even better than at the seaside," and add, "If you have a terrace like this, you don't even have to go on holidays." My comments had a soothing effect on my friend, and even though he'd heard them a thousand times before, he always made an attempt to rejoice as if he was hearing them for the first time.

The wind was blowing fiercely.

It took off from the nearby roofs, whooshed onto the terrace, swirled around the garden chairs, then tried its best to tip over our big garden umbrella. It flapped the umbrella and toppled it several times. We finally resolved to hold on to it with one hand each, and with the other we'd grasp our glasses. Each would play waiter to the other. You'd put down

the glass, one hand still holding onto the wooden shaft of the umbrella, grab for the bottle and pour wine into your friend's glass and then into your own. Then the other would return the gesture and favour. Well, that's the spirit in which he told me the story.

I don't know how we came to it. Probably by chance. As is the custom around here. First about wine, then about the view, then about the weather, and next thing you know we're on to politics. In our country talking politics lasts until evening. There's no end to it. Friends turn into acquaintances and acquaintances into enemies. Though that had never happened to us. The story he told me that day had a political dimension to it, as he emphasised several times, and its beginnings stretched back to before World War II before stretching forward to four decades after the war, and we all know that many people in this country, including also my friend, experienced those times as politically disadvantageous ones, totalitarian torture and that sort of thing. But the story he told me was in essence of the completely normal and everyday variety: Boy meets girls. Boy and girl fall in love.

"There!" I cried, "That's my story!"

The friend, who just like me was holding tight to the wooden shaft of the immense canopy, since the wind was blowing fiercely and trying its best to remind us of the well-known Slovenian fairy tale "My Umbrella Can Be a Hot-Air Balloon," looked animatedly at me and asked, "Are you gonna write it? You have to write it! It's a horrifying story!" He was getting even more animated. "Such stories have to be told so people will know what sort of atrocities occurred."

Instead of giving a concrete answer to a concrete question, I drained my glass of white wine, smacked my lips and, again, for the I-don't-knownth time on that gorgeous but windy afternoon, said, "if you have a terrace in the middle of town like this, you don't even have to go on holidays." Then I stretched my hand with the empty glass over to his side of the table.

The friend put his glass down and, with his free hand, grabbed the bottle by the neck and started to fill my glass. "Tell the truth about those times. Tell how people suffered. Vindicate them!"

I watched the yellowish and perfectly chilled *šipon* flowing into the glass. Tiny bubbles, pearls of the precious libation, gathered along the edge, while dew collected on the outside surface of the glass. I swallowed my saliva. "Boy meets girl. Girl meets boy. That's how all the finest stories begin," I say, but the wind, as if it wants to partake of the

conversation, huffs and puffs underneath the umbrella's canopy. The friend holds onto the shaft with both hands. I also put down my glass and grab the shaft. And so we fight the wind for a little while. But because the friend's glass is empty while mine is full, and that's not couth, I keep holding with one hand and use the other to pour wine into his glass. The wind, as if it has something against afternoon drinking, rushes against the umbrella and tries to lift us up off the terrace and send us on a little flight over the streets of the old town.

Then it calms down a bit. Takes a breather. Enough to let us drink. Each of us still has one hand on the shaft. Just in case.

"This story is horrifying!" cries the friend and finally concludes it, in short and scenic sentences. Actually, I wasn't listening all that carefully because I know what sort of story it is. In those times, right after the war, which must be specially emphasised, since we Slovenians had a another little war after the big one, and the Balkans had an international slaughter, well, in the times of World War II and right after it stories like the one the friend is telling me were frequent. Family tragedies lined up into a dreadful combination of plots and plaits that a writer would have a hard time dreaming up. Life has a mad sense of tragedy. Life has a horrifying imagination that not even a Nobel-worthy writer can match. Life is the greatest creator of stories, I think, as the friend's story nears its end.

"And that butcher or deli or little inn where those two kids met is still there," concludes the friend.

I nod. I too know that village and that street, I can even remember the exact place, though I'm not sure it's still a butcher's or deli or anything of that sort. Not long ago I visited the little town which, by the way, is the birthplace to which I never willingly return, I went down that very street and, who knows why, lingered before that very house where once stood the building my friend is telling me about. What was it called again? What was it that was written on the sign over the entrance?

"Now it's a shoe store," I coldly inform the friend and the wind again is trying its best to carry us over the rooftops of the old town.

"Really? Just a few years back it was a butcher's and a deli. I don't know how good it was towards the end, but in my day it was the best around. We went there for sandwiches when we were in high school. And the girl who worked there, Mojca was her name! She had such a pretty smile and she was always in a good mood. She was the only reason we went there. She was so sexy. Huge tits. And she'd joke around with us. Before school we'd all rush

over there. Because of her tits. Anyways, she was already married to him back then. To Peter. Peter was his name. Remember?" he asks eventually.

I shrug. I don't know. I can't remember all the details. I'm ten years younger than the friend. But I know the butcher and deli. It seems familiar to me. It all seems very familiar to me. As if I have already heard this story about Mojca, the loud, bosomy, giggling woman behind the counter. No doubt I also went to that deli to buy sandwiches, who wouldn't?, it was the only deli on the way to school and probably the only one in the centre of that sleepy little village. The place was called Mojca's Deli. Later they changed the name a bit, into something like Mojca's Bistro. Mojca's Gourmet Bistro. That's it! Now I remember! But something else, almost the whole story that my friend was telling me now seems suddenly more and more familiar. Young Peter, young Mojca, the time after World War II, actually at the beginning of the '60s, everything dwelt in me like a memory that I didn't remember personally but that I remember having been told about. There are stories and images that we haven't experienced but that we nevertheless remember as if we had experienced them. We've been told about them and we've relived them. We've aligned ourselves with those events, observing them, participating in them, though truth be told we weren't even born at the time. When Mojca was serving in that butcher shop or deli she was maybe eighteen, that is, the year was nineteen hundred and fifty-eight. And when Peter came every morning to stand in front of her counter to observe her placing two big slices of salami and a thin slice of cheese, he was in truth observing her lovely, round, inviting breasts leaning over the display case, and he was also eighteen years old at the time.

"Actually," says the friend, correcting me, "he was a little older. I don't know by how much, a few months."

When they met it was, I think, nineteen hundred fifty-eight, maybe fifty-nine. I seem to recall being there. Knowing them. But back then I was barely born. "Is it possible that Mojca was still working there a decade later?" I ask him. "That is, still in sixty-eight, when I was ten years old?"

The friend thinks, slurps from his glass, and says, "Definitely. She was still working in the place into the seventies and even later. I think the two of them, Mojca and Peter, after they got married, bought it or somehow came into it, I don't know. I think later on it was theirs. Mojca's dad worked for the secret police," says the friend, leaning confidentially over the table to me, as if it was, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, still dangerous

to talk about certain things from the past. "He was an UDBA guy," he whispers and opens his eyes wide to somehow underline, I assume, the horror and secrecy of what he's just said. "Before, he'd been a partisan," he whispers, "a big partisan and communist hotshot, Moscow-trained, by Stalin, and after that he was an even bigger hotshot in the communist secret police."

I'm no longer listening. The friend has the habit of hastily slotting people from the past, especially former partisans and those sympathetic to them, among evil and bloodthirsty communists and members of the secret service. For the present story, however, the important thing is mainly that Mojca and Peter met in the butcher, the deli, fell in love and got married. She kept right on working there, and that's important because there's a real possibility that I too knew her when I was ten years old and going to buy a snack on my way to school. I seem to recall Mojca more and more vividly, the tall female comrade behind the counter who was always in a good mood, always smiling, and always had something funny to say when she leaned over the counter to me, the ten-year-old boy, and handed me a sandwich wrapped in white waxed paper. I too liked to go to that deli primarily because of her. Suddenly I'm entirely sure of the fact. I can see her before me. A little chunkier, but still beautiful, dark, with great big shining eyes, always smiling... Suddenly it seems like I can hear her voice. Yes, I remember that long-ago story is also a memory of mine.

"Are you going to write it?" he asks me once again.

"I will."

"Write it the way only you know how," he says, flatteringly, "so that the whole truth will out. All that torment. That torture. That humiliation. That unjust and senseless death. And, in the end, forgiveness, reconciliation..."

I shake my head.

The friend looks in wonder at me.

"I will write a story about life."

"But this is an intrinsically political story!" he says, barely able to spit out the word *intrinsically*.

I shake my head. "Every story is just a story about life. It's only later that we hang politics over stories."

The friend smiles bitterly. He thinks I did not understand the story he's told me, that I didn't understand that emphasis that he finds interesting. But I understood. I understood, albeit, in a way different from what he wanted. I said, "That's a cheerful story." He looked even more wondrously at me and shook his head. He was so disappointed at my lack of understanding that he let go of the umbrella shaft and poured himself another glass. Right then the wind rushed with all its might under the big canvas roof and lifted it into the air, tearing the umbrella out of my hand, turning it over and dashing it into the corner amongst the flowerpots, metal barbecue and plastic chairs, like it was the torn sail of an old boat. The terrace above the old part of town, under which the green Ljubljanica had been peacefully winding for centuries turned in an instant into a mutilated battlefield. Each of us rushed to salvage what was still salvageable.

I took that to be a sign.

I must write the story.

THE PHOTOGRAPH IN FRONT OF THE INN

The name of the village is "Dolina." It seems completely daft and devoid of fantasy for them to name the village "Dolina," *down* there. Especially if the village really is in a valley. In a valley that you can barely see the end of.

The old stories say that there used to be a huge lake here, *an enormous lake as big as the sea*. The people who lived on its banks and fished in it were very peculiar. They were tremendously selfish and hated each another, wishing neither luck nor success to even their nearest. This reached the ear of God almighty, who therefore sent gnomes down to the people in order to determine their human goodness, solidarity, humanity, love for neighbours and others and such things. The gnomes came among the people right when they'd had an abundant fish haul. *You have plenty of fish, they said, could you spare a little for us?* But the people hid away their fish-filled baskets, *I wouldn't have fish to spare even for a neighbour, even for a son... Why should I have some for you? Foreign monsters! Take a hike! Find your own lake! Don't come creeping around my fireplace!* God was disappointed. But not angry. There weren't that many people living around the lake. Still, thought God, they had to be punished for their wrath, anger, envy, for their egotism and selfishness. And he ordered the gnomes to build a tunnel through the Grmada hill, named thus because the

people burned each other up there, and the lake ran out through the hole in Grmada. A valley was formed. The astonished people descended to the bottom of the lake and built abodes. Because they were daft and devoid of fantasy, they called the village *Dolina* – valley. That's what really happened, they say.

Dolina, where this story takes place, is, if we exclude those legends and tales of yore, was first mentioned at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The Babenbergs and the Habsburgs held sway over Dolina. There was a court of justice in the village. There was also a well-known fair. Twice the Turks burned Dolina to the ground. During the Reformation, Dolina was an important centre of Protestantism. The fields and lands around Dolina were rich and fertile. It was surrounded by thick forests of spruce. A stream flowed through Dolina, and the people just called it *Potok* – stream. And it wasn't far at all to the next town of any size. Dolina also had a train station and good traffic connections. Travelling through Dolina took you to the north of the country, to the capital, and to south, and from there you could continue on to the southern parts of Europe and beyond, even to Asia. It wasn't until the second half of the twentieth century that Dolina was granted city rights, though it had regardless always been a rich and important agricultural centre.

Even today the road through Dolina is also its main street. The road is lined on each side with one-storey houses. There are also a few two-storey houses. They were built at the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, so Dolina doesn't look all that different from other villages in the former empire. Behind the houses on one side of the street, lush fields extend, while on the other side the countryside rises to the wooden hills. Since time out of mind people in this village have busied themselves with woodworking and farming. There were also large hunting grounds nearby, where noblemen from the empire came for hunting hikes. The forests belonged to three great German noble families, who later were also in the wood industry. There was a big sawmill in Dolina, and later, between the two wars a furniture factory was set up. The owners of the land and the forests were for the most part Germans. Above Dolina there was a building that the locals called a castle. In truth, it was just a fairly large manor house, the large family home of an old German family that owned most of the land around Dolina. Stretching out in front of the house was a park full of old chestnut trees. This villa was built back in the eighteenth century, right where the

old fortress church is said to have stood. The owners of this so-called mansion went by the name of Eichhein. *Von Eichhein*.

In Dolina there was also an inn, which was owned by the Novaks. Newcomers. New people. Even naming the person who came to Dolina from elsewhere *nov* or new, hence Novak, says much about the simple inhabitants of the area. They named the valley Dolina (valley), the stream Potok (stream), and the new people Novaks (Newcomers).

The inn in Dolina was very old. Many important people, according to the locals, had slept there as they travelled through these parts. Even Napoleon slept there. And it is from those times that the name "France" asserted itself in the Dolina, since the French soldiers in the valley left many little Frenchmen behind. Even today the locals brag that Metternich and Emperor Joseph spent a night at Novak's inn. After World War II, they say, even Marshal Tito spent a night there when he was returning from Ljubljana after delivering that celebrated speech from the balcony of the University, *A greeting to liberated Slovenians*. Because of the wild drunkenness in the liberated capital, Josip Broz's entourage was so tired that they had to rest somewhere on the way back to Belgrade, and they chose precisely Novak's inn to do so.

The Novaks weren't only innkeepers, rather, for decades they, along with the rich German noble families, ran the town and the valley. The inn thus gradually became a sort of city hall. *A Rathaus*. The other inhabitants of the region were, for the most part, poor and impoverished farmers who worked all day at the sawmill or later in the furniture factory; their wives grew vegetables and kept chickens around their little wooden houses. Between the wars, though the social relations in the town changed, the valley's wealth remained in the hands of the foreign families. The newly-established kingdom was inclined to rich old landowners. In Dolina you could still hear people speaking in German before speaking in Slovenian. Two families held social power in the town: the German, actually, Bavarian, Eichhein clan, with its sanguine Otto, who had settled in these parts permanently, and the clan of the innkeeper, the Novaks, who were Slovenian. The village pillars conversed in German, although Otto von Eichhein spoke also Slovenian. He was a passionate hunter, a lover of schnapps and farm girls, which is why he had learned the mangled Slovenian which would make it easier, he figured, to spread the legs of the young day labourer girls. Between the wars Otto von Eichhein organized many a grand hunting party. Otto owned several hunting lodges on the forested slopes near Dolina, shooting places, as he called them,

where he and his guests would organize wild, licentious, drunken orgies. His foresters took care of his hunting lodges, and they also furnished him with young farm girls; these girls participated, for money, in his hunting parties, some of them secretly hoping to become Otto's permanent lovers or even hoping to leave Dolina for more northern realms with one of his friends. But the noble Otto von Eichhein stuck to entertaining himself only. He was happily married and had two children. A son, Erich, and a younger daughter, Maria. For our story especially Maria Eichhein matters. In the year nineteen thirty she was twenty years old and met Mihael Novak, the eldest son of the Novak innkeepers. He was twenty-seven years old. They had known each other previously, for also Mihael went to the German school. He, however, found the spoiled Eichhein girl to be a pain, until one day he established that she was a very pretty girl indeed. They soon married. Otto Eichhein used the wedding as an opportunity to organize a truly great hunting party. The wedding lasted a whole week. Guests were invited from all branches of the family, even distant relatives from northern Germany came. They'd done up the whole village. In the archives in a nearby town there are still a few photographs from that time. The main street in Dolina was decorated with wreaths made from all kinds of flowers and a great mass of people gathered before Novak's inn. All over the place you could read: *Braut und Bräutigam ... Willkommen! ...* The people are dressed in typical German garb that resemble uniforms. In the middle of the crowd in front of Novak's inn stands a young couple. Maria is dressed in a bright dress, but it's not a wedding dress, so the photo was obviously taken some day before the wedding, and the groom Mihael is dressed in a hunting suit and wearing one of those Bavarian hats on his head. They both look a little bashful as the people around are smiling. Otto von Eichhein, the bride's father, has even raised his hands and in no way gives the impression of a nobleman. Given that photography was a very demanding craft back then, since a group had to remain quite still while the photo was being taken, the vehemence of Otto von Eichhein is all the more interesting. He had to hold his arms high in the air for quite some time if he wanted to remain thus immortalized. This undoubtedly bespeaks his swaggering, even haughty character, since even in the photograph, where the *young couple* are the important ones, he wanted to be the centre of attention.

The photo is really quite unusual. Faded. Yellowish brown. No one in the town archives gave it much heed. On the back there's a sticker containing basic information: *Date: spring 1931. In front of the Novak Inn. Probably a local holiday.* There is no other

information. If, however, we compare the faces of the two main figures, Maria and Michael, with their later photographs from the forties, we can say with certitude that these are the future spouses. Their image, as well as the image of all the others who are squished in front of the inn, is not important for historical events. The photograph remained in the local archives of a town that is twenty kilometres away, a mere ethnological, photographic record of some atmosphere at some time. Merely: *Probably a local holiday*. The individuals in it are not important. Every man recedes into time and becomes a measly *atmosphere*. An image of ethnological pulses of life from the thirties.

You can neither see nor intuit from the photograph that Maria is pregnant. Her dress, it's true, hangs down a little loose, but that's how dresses were back then. A few months later, in the middle of summer, Mihael Novak's first child was born. And a second one a year later. Two sons. One after the other. And a few years later, in nineteen forty, a third. Three boys. The difference in age between the first two, who were born one after the other in the heat of love, and the last son is ten years. They called him Peter. He was the one who, in nineteen fifty-eight, stood in the butcher's/deli before the lovely, also eighteen-year-old Mojca and gawked at her ample breasts as she leaned to him over the glass display case and wrapped a sandwich with two pieces of salami and a thin slice of cheese into waxed paper.

A FISTFUL OF CHANGE TOO MUCH

The amateur theatre performance on the stage of the fire hall was dismal. The hall was completely full, people were laughing, even cackling when the mayor *booted in the arse* the young servant who hopped about like a circus clown each time he got kicked, all the while howling: *Do it again, sir, do it again! Again!* The comic aspect derived from the fact that the young servant had stuffed a pillow down his pants because he had been expecting the mayor to kick him. Hence the sweet howls: *Again! Again! Again!* And when he said, *That doesn't even hurt*, the mayor replied, *All this kicking's gonna make my leg fall off, but you can't feel a thing*, the hall burst into frenetic laughter that didn't want to subside. Some people literally fell off their seats. They twisted about in spasms of laughter, clinging to their knees, before picking themselves up only to fall down again. Those less given to laughter laughed at those who had fallen and also at those on the stage and then once again at their

neighbour who had fallen to the floor... And so every gag up on stage became even more ridiculous and triggered endless laughter.

At the back, by the door where a bunch of locals who hadn't got a seat was huddled, stood also Mirko Bregar. He was twenty years old. He worked at Eichhein's sawmill and he was wearing the Lenin-style cap of the Soviet worker and revolutionary. While the hall was bursting with laughter he and his comrades, who were standing right next to him, did not laugh. They deemed the comedy stupid and the people who were laughing at the lord booting the servant seemed ignorant of class relations. Mirko Bregar heartily hoped that soon new and different times would come, just like in Russia, where there would no longer be masters and servants but only servants who would be masters. From the pit of his soul he despised all the local bigwigs sitting up there in the front row, especially Otto Eichhein, the owner of all the surrounding forests, of the sawmill, and of the furniture factory. His father and grandfather had been in the service of the Eichhein clan and both had died. Grandfather was crushed by a spruce trunk on the sawmill runway, and Father was taken by schnapps when Mirko was fifteen years old. Father was a miner and mined on the other side of the Grmada hill, in the valley along the river where the mines were. When the Kingdom of Yugoslavia came into being, Father set out for the Bosnian shafts in search of better miner's bread. He stayed there for two years, returning after a landslide damaged his back. In Bosnia he'd fathered a child, so Mirko Bregar had a younger half-brother, though he'd never met him. After the death of his father, the half-brothers started up a correspondence. They wrote each other letters and promised that they would meet in person one day. To the day of her death, mom never forgave his father for his fruitful infidelity. She took care of him, cooked for him, kept him clean, but never again slept with him in the same bed. By then Father was working for Eichhein at the sawmill, where his own father had slaved and slaved away. Every evening he'd come home completely exhausted; tired, he'd down half a bottle of schnapps and fall asleep, drunk. Every single day. *It's the only way, he'd say, that I can fight off the pain in my back.* Mirko remembers his father always being tired. Tired he'd head to the sawmill and tired he'd return. In the end he was a dead man. A worn-out corpse with tombstone eyes at thirty-three. Mirko loved his father. And he missed him greatly. Half a year after Father died, Mother died too. She simply decided to. *You're grown up now, she said to her son, you don't need me anymore. I going to join Dad,* she said and soon she really did die. He blamed Otto Eichhein for his grandfather's, his father's, his mother's and also for

his own misfortune, him and of course the world order was such that some people had everything and the others only tiredness.

Although he hadn't had to come to the theatre performance – it would have been better to go with the comrades to the town twenty kilometres away for a Social Democratic Party gathering – he had nevertheless made his way to the fire hall. He was there because of Maria. Otto von Eichhein's young daughter. She sat in the first row and was wearing a dress with great big red roses printed on it. If he stood on his toes and peered among the heads of those standing in front of him, he could see her round and smooth shoulders shuddering slightly with each kick the servant on the stage got. She too was laughing, though not like the rest of those in the hall, who were cackling, cawing, hiccupping, catching their breath, coughing, suffocating in waves of laughter; Maria was just smiling and her shoulders were slightly trembling.

Mirko and Maria were the same age. Although she went to German school, and he went to the Slovenian school that had class only three times a week, they had met. And in summer, just a few months ago, they'd travelled together by train back from a nearby town. They'd gotten out, as she'd suggested, one stop before Dolina and walked over the hill and through the woods. That was also her suggestion. On the mossy slope under the road, they'd lain down and she'd let him pet her breasts. He petted and petted and petted. When she felt like he'd been petting her too long – which is also the feeling he had, though he didn't dare pet elsewhere, learning and custom had taught him that the master was the one to tell him what to do with foreign property – she guided his hand over her tummy and then, after she spread her legs, opened them slowly, the way the door to a secret place opens, he pressed his hand right between them. She was wet. That surprised him. She wasn't wearing any panties. That surprised him even more. For a young Marxist he was rather naïve. *Had she forgotten to put them on?* he thought. *Well, it is quite hot out,* he considered, but by then she had yanked his hand and shoved it right inside, inside her, and he could feel her moistness running down to his wrist and even beyond.

After that they met right up until fall. Nobody knew about this. He hadn't told anyone. Not even his comrades, who would have looked a little strangely at him if he'd admitted that a few times a week he had been meeting up with the daughter of the biggest exploiter far and wide; that in the forest they would lean against the spruce; he behind her, her face leaning against the rough, resinous spruce trunk, or in front of him, and with raised

legs clenched around his hips, leaning against a similarly resinous spruce trunk, and putting one into another in every possible way, and even the hayrack in the middle of the woods that had been set up by the hunters and were intended for the winter feeding of deer were not safe from their passion. His comrades would have found it strange to hear someone who could speak so diligently and with such class hatred about the father of a girl he was fucking, while he himself – and this seemed strange and inappropriate to him, too – had spent every night since that first shagging on the moss in the clearing dreaming about her being the woman he could spend his whole life with. She also, probably for similar reasons, never told anyone about their union. Even later, after many, many years, she never mentioned their union, which remained buried forever, like a great class secret, existing only as memories of that summer.

When she was already married to Mihael Novak and already had two sons and she was already *Mrs. Mayor*, her eyes would, every time she drove by car – Mayor Mihael was the first in Dolina to have a black Mercedes – to the nearby town to shop, her eyes would scan over the hill and through the woods, slip among the spruces and deep into the dark forest. Her eyes watered and a slight smile which she didn't try to hide froze on her lips. When Mihael asked, *What's up with you? What's with the strange smile?* she replied, *Ah, I just remembered something.* After he plied her with questions about why she kept staring so oddly and mysteriously off into that spot in the distance, she said: *Well, since you're so pushy, I'll tell you! Dad and I used to come hunting here. And I found a little rabbit.* And she spread her hands to show how big the little rabbit was. *That's not all that little,* thought her husband Mihael. And she stroked the invisible fur and said, *That was the finest rabbit of my life.*

Translated by Alenka and Jason Blake