

NIKOLOVA, Olivera



Olivera Nikolova, born in 1936 in Skopje, Macedonia, studied in Struga, Veles and Skopje, where she graduated in Yugoslav literatures from the Faculty of Arts. She used to work for the national radio and television as a dramaturg. She writes for children and adults. Her best-known children's books include *Zokey Pokey*, *The Country One Never Arrives To*, *Mark's Girls* and *The Passage is Not Illuminated*. Her works for adults are *A Day for Flying*, *The Silver Apple*, *The Narrow Door*, *Homeworks* and *Adam's Rib*.

Olivera Nikolova je rođena 1936. godine u Skoplju. Studirala je u Strugi, Velesu i Skoplju, gdje je diplomirala iz jugoslavenskih književnosti na Filozofskom fakultetu. Radila je kao dramaturg za makedonski radio i televiziju. Piše za djecu i odrasle. Njene najpoznatije knjige za djecu su *Zoki Poki* (1963), *Zemlja vo koja ne se stignuva* (*Zemlja u koju se ne stiže*, 1965), *Devojkite na Marko* (*Markove djevojke*) i *Preminot ne e osvetlen* (*Prelaz nije osvijetljen*). Njena djela za odrasle su *Den za letuvanje* (*Dan za letenje*), *Srebrenoto jabolko* (*Srebrna jabuka*), *Tesna vrata*, *Domašni zadači* (*Domaće zadaće*) i *Adamovoto rebro* (*Adamovo rebro*).

OLIVERA NIKOLOVA

Adam's Rib

(A Passage from the Novel)

That's how Gligor Potocki started off with Tinka – and that's the way of everybody who watches in fear over his or her beloved. The respect and mercy with which he surrounded her at first gradually turned into humble compliance and fear of hurting her in any way, of annoying her or – God forbid – of making her mad. She seemed not to notice it at all, and therefore she didn't even realise the petty blackmailing that she communicated to the much older Gligor Potocki, even though at first she herself abhorred it and was embarrassed by it. Because of Tinka, Gligor Potocki became wary, unhurried and reserved; he carefully weighed every word, every action. Before he married her he was constantly in a hurry: he was notorious for his speed and industry. That is why, as the year drew to a close, returning from Jerusalem with his daughter Kata, Tafir Kri-vokapets was happy to hear that the man hurried this time as well and became his son-in-law without seeking his presence and approval. "You were in a hurry to become a widower with two good-for-nothing sons," Zafir was joking. "You were in a hurry about other things as well: in politics, you hurried to join the commits*, eager to rot in jail, so now, you bloody Zafir, how should I be angry with you for hurrying to put a roof over the head of my daughter Tinka? I must give you my blessing instead of being cross with you, my dear son-in-law."

Gligor was in fact blessed with a rare graciousness, but Tinka never noticed anything except his eyes, which were there for her

alone, surely looking at her and no other woman, in a haste to win over her soul which to him was forever ambiguous and unattainable. Instead of being happy about it, she was worried; she realised that she was expected to demonstrate love sooner or later, but that she was not willing to give, and it made her rebel. As a matter of fact, Tinka wasn't hiding her soul from Gligor; it was rather open and clear; she didn't even hide her curiosity, which was unbecoming for a girl from the house of a Haji**. She was eagerly watching Gligor Potocki when he stood before her stark naked and even while she was undressing for him after having put four children to bed in the next room. Even then, Gligor Potocki, suffering and sentimental, realised that he would constantly have to rekindle her affection for him. He hadn't won this woman over once and for all; her steadiness was linked to perception and not to sheer force; and from time to time her insatiable curiosity would know periods of great hunger – dangerous times. That wasn't politics and yet at the same time it was just that. That wasn't degeneration in jail and yet at the same time it was just that. He himself, troubled and also thirsty for any vague progress in life, felt that his predicament was not only Tinka's youth but rather her education, such as very few women had attained, which challenged everything that he previously thought or knew about women in general. He tried to accept this with a tranquil mind. He consciously overlooked the chaotic times when his mother and his illiterate sisters grew up. He ignored their unnatural shyness and disgraceful subordination which, he was sure, could be of no value to the husband. He was convinced that he was right and that he acted properly. At times he didn't really understand himself, torn between his wishes and obligations, yet his benevolent nature accepted people's changeable inclinations as the necessary stops where one could catch his breath. Feelings are not eternal, that he knew. They are just as unstable, transient and frail as people. Yet he tried nonetheless – for his own and for other people's peace of mind – he tried to picture them in their permanence, for he knew that unchecked changes take their natural course with greater speed. He surely didn't have enough courage to reveal that to Tinka. Or – God forbid – to counsel her, not even in the moments of painful vulnerability when she obediently awaited his advances. He continuously kept comforting himself that surely the day would come, one that he foresaw in all its clarity: the wonderful, serene and quiet day when she would welcome his embrace, and then all the bad times would disappear and all the pain would be forgotten. However, his patience made Tinka oppose him though she didn't even notice it. Without realising it, obedient and kind as a small child dependent on his

mother, he was depriving her of what he offered her in the beginning: the joy of life together, the recognition of their equality, the thing that her youthful freshness started filling with experience. She felt cheated, lacking passion in love – which of course she was conscious of – and so the tiny misunderstandings were increasingly evocative of massive deceptions. Instead of getting gradually used to Gligor Potocki and the habit that grown-ups put so much weight upon as to see it almost as love and to let it regulate their quiet everyday lives, Tinka resorted to watching her husband with cool reserve, cruelly analysing him. Recognising his weak points, mostly those connected with his feelings for her, increasingly and automatically made her indifferent to Gligor's body. However, Tinka fought this trend of thought, spurred in effect by her guilty conscience that she took with her when she left home, and which now continued to raise its ugly head and blame her. This conflict which made her mind suffer the most, encouraged the rebellious unconsciousness to strive for innocent celebrations of life, in fact preserving the cheerfulness of her spirit. If her father asked her what she really wanted and what made her unhappy she might even not know what answer to give him. Her unhappiness resulted from her restless soul and not from everyday occurrences. Tinka had no intention of getting pregnant again and of settling down after further childbirths, the way some women she knew cleverly did. She kept wondering without knowing what she wanted, neither happy nor unhappy, a reflection of her own shadow, expecting God knows what. She didn't realise that if the thing she waited for finally materialised itself she would receive it with the primal female fear of changes and start running from them head over heels.

Two years after having become Gligor's wife, Tinka stopped reading: no more books, newspapers, no more women's magazines which Kata regularly provided, as she was subscribed to them. She stopped reading as if all her troubles resulted from it, and continued doing what was expected of her: she was minding the house, doing the laundry, mending clothes, knitting, weaving linen with the weaving loom at home, cooking. On days of festivities she killed hens and turkeys, kneaded cakes and pies, buns and rolls which she stuffed into the schoolbags of Gligor's children. She melted fat, fried cracklings and gut pies, stuffed sausages, chopped wood, unloaded provisions in the front yard, carrying them to the larder herself. Once a year she even distilled spirits for Gligor and the guests. In all these jobs as well as in those connected with town business, which other women proudly protested their husbands helped them with, Tinka indulged Gligor, deliberately destroying herself by hard work, yet still feeling a sort of anxious, vague anticipation.

As for Gligor, she found his work in the apple orchard most appealing. Gligor loved it and devoted himself to it almost as much as to his wife, bringing her along once or twice a year. The orchard was rather out of the way, closer to the village of Romanovci, so Tinka couldn't always take time away from her housework. However, whenever she could get away, a strange thing happened to her. While she looked over the deserted poppy fields owned by the Kri-vokapets family, cheered up every time by strolling among apple saplings, she found that Gligor had a new personality. He was breathlessly hurrying along, interesting, clever and kind, having just the kind of personality she always expected in her partner, or so she believed. One day, when Gligor proudly showed her how he tackled the vermin that attacked unripe fruit and she could see for herself how some white and black lice fought among the leaves, she was so happy that she threw herself at him, hugging him. With fervour until then unknown even to herself she lied to him with passionate sincerity that she loved him, oh how much she loved him. Sadly enough, surprises on Gligor's part were very rare, and even then they were somewhat gauche and inadvertent.

The women that Tinka frequented smiled benevolently at her sentimental outbursts, and their envy regarding her youthful unbalance of mind was rarely shown while gossiping about Tinka's other character traits. Anyway, Tinka was pleasant to talk to, she knew how to describe interesting things in the books she'd read, and being a good housewife who never shrank from dirty work she made it impossible for them to disapprove of her on account of her higher education. More often did they snub her than loudly blame her; they loved her rather than respected her. In women's meetings at various houses and in the back yards that Tinka regularly attended, bringing along her knitting, meetings complete with chicory coffee, sesame sweets or roasted chestnuts, they all showed deep dissatisfaction without being aware of it. Here, being in the company of women, they let it well up from deep down inside them as if it was an evil spirit. They danced wildly on tables, splashed themselves with wine, unhooked their brassières, they let down their hair and raised their petticoats in order to cool off their inflamed sex as if they were going to rekindle fire in the hearth. They soothed their dry and aching throats with spirits as if putting cold compresses on their gashing wounds.

"Hey, sister," Tinka once exclaimed to her sister. "To your mind, what will women at the turn of the century be like? Will they be like us at all? I'd love to have seen them, but of course I won't be there any more."

"They will definitely have vanquished their shyness, but as for the rest, I gather it will be just as it is now," spurted out the Haji*** woman with utter conviction. "As long as there are men and women, their rivalry is sure to continue: conquests, retributions, servitude. Men and women will alternately take the upper hand. To see them both stand on the same stone, both on a par – hey, I don't believe that. A stone is unstable, one is sure to fall off. And when one of them climbs back – do you remember the childhood game? – and returns to the top, the other one is sure to push the rival away. Or something to that effect." All of a sudden, Kata carefully examined Tinka's hair. "Look, look at that," she exclaimed. "Do you realise you have a grey hair? Wait, let me pull it out."

"No," Tinka opposed her. "I want people to start taking me seriously."

"They'll see you the way you feel inside," Kata answered. "It's the law. And there is no other, believe me."

* Freedom fighters against the Turkish oppressors

** Belonging to a pilgrim to Jerusalem

*** Honorable title for a female pilgrim to Jerusalem

Translated by Dušanka Zabukovec