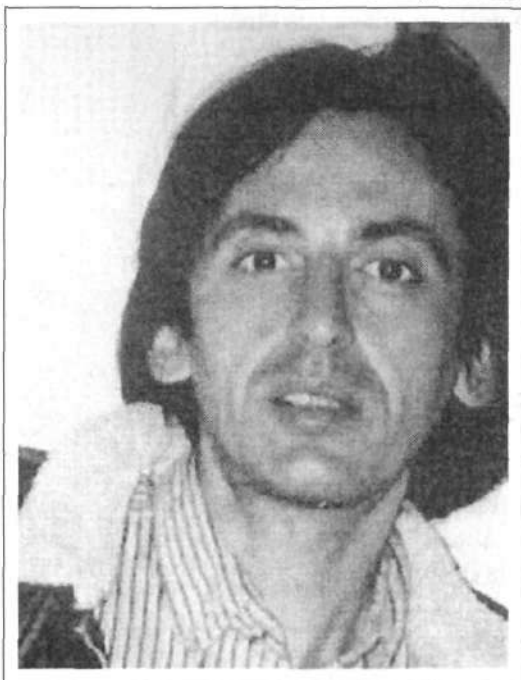


## VELIČKOVIĆ, Nenad



**Nenad Veličković**, born in 1962 in Sarajevo, is a story teller, playwright, novelist and script writer. He graduated in literature from the Faculty of Arts in Sarajevo, where he lives. He has published two novels, *Konačari* (published 1995 in Sarajevo, 1997 in Zagreb, and 1998 in Belgrade, translated into Italian, German and Slovene), and *The Father of my Daughter*, 2000, as well as a book of stories *Devil in Sarajevo*, 1996, 1998) and *Sarajevan Gastronomists*, 1999), stories about food that Sarajevans received as humanitarian aid. He also wrote *Sexicon – sexpressionism*, a book combining a dictionary and a collection of essays.

**Nenad Veličković**, pripovjedač, romanopisac, dramatik i scenarist, rođen je 1962. godine u Sarajevu, gdje je diplomirao studij književnosti na Filozofskom fakultetu. Dosad je objavio romane *Konačari*, 1995, ponovljeno izdanje 1996 – u Zagrebu, 1997, u Beogradu, 1998, te preveden na talijanski, njemački i slovenski jezik) i *Otac moje kćeri*, 2000, knjige priča *Đavo u Sarajevu* (1996 – u Splitu, 1998) i *Sarajevski gastronomisti* (priče o namirnicama koje su sarajlije primale u humanitarnoj pomoći, 1999), te *Sexicon – sexpressionizam* (knjiga sa dva lica, rječnik i zbirka eseja). Živi u Sarajevu.

NENAD VELIČKOVIĆ

# My men

*Look,  
my image in the water  
floating down the river.*

It's somewhat colder outside than in the kitchen. From time to time I burn a book or a record album and for the next half an hour I don't have to watch the steam coming out of my mouth. I get goose bumps at the thought of having to go to the bathroom. There's nothing colder than a toilet seat. I'd rather crawl under the blanket and sleep through the next few days. The baby's quiet but he drives me crazy. Wherever I turn my head, I see him. There he sits and stares at me. Or he lies before my feet and trembles like an epileptic. He's doing it on purpose. He wants me to lose my nerve and open the door.

But I won't! Not on your life! Over my dead body. I hate the rain. I hate the ice and the cold. I hate this evening. I hate all evenings. Then he lies down in front of the door, shivering, sighing and whining. I want to plug my ears with cotton-wool but there is none.

The baby's asleep. I can hear him sucking his thumb. I tear out ten pages from a book, roll them up and imagine they're a piece of oak firewood. They burn just as long as it takes me to prepare the next one. It's ten o'clock. I can't take it any more. I call the command post of his unit.

"We can't tell you where he is, lady. Everything's fine. Don't worry, if something happens to him, we'll get in touch."

Moron.

The dog, Lord, is shoving me; he wants to climb onto my lap. Sorry, I can't squat with a 25-kilogram load on my lap. At least not on a three-legged stool

whose one leg is cracked. Then he runs to the door and back to me, and again to the door and back to me. And again he runs to the door, and back to me.

I understand, damn it! You want to go out. Well, no dice. You went out two hours ago. You can't! Phooey!!

He finally gets the message. He climbs onto the bed and lies alongside the baby. He keeps whining, sighing and shivering.

Get off! To your place! You have your own easy chair. You'll wake the baby.

I'm listening. Everything's quiet. The weapons froze up as well, no doubt. I know that attacks take place at dawn. But why do they need Saša? Skinny and near-sighted. And the worst of it is that he is so proud he can't stand it. Those are the ones that get killed. He boasts that he never runs across road intersections, and that he hasn't fired a single round. Born for the sabotage unit.

I turn out the oil lamp and crawl under the blanket beside the baby. I'm thinking. Only three hours ago life was bearably terrible. In a way, even beautiful. The baby was cooing, we were drinking tea, and the dog was freezing on the balcony. Saša had just returned. False alarm. Operation called off. They'd call him if they needed him. He should keep the telephone on the hook. He was frightened when he got back. He had to go to Trebavič with the sabotage unit. He didn't know any of them. He had to go as a paramedic. Luckily, it was called off. We clinked with cups of camomile tea and then the phone rang.

The dog is whining and shoving his head under my blanket. His muzzle is cold. I get up and make him a den in his easy chair. I lie down again. The bed is already cold. Fortunately, the baby is warm like a bed-warmer. Five minutes later, the cold muzzle again. He's sighing and whining. This time from the cold. I can't get up again. I lift the blanket and let him curl up at my feet. He's warm as well. I don't want to sleep. Saša probably isn't sleeping either. Where could he be right now? In some basement, trench, barracks? I dream about a battle: missiles, explosions, roaring. Or is it just a dream? I listen in the night. Quiet. Nothing. And then I notice that the dog had pushed the baby out. Poor baby. Only half-covered by the blanket. And the mutt sprawled out over the entire bed. Off! Get out! To your place!

I chase him off. But then I show mercy again. We're all asleep again. The dog curled up at my feet and the baby sucking her thumb by my pillow. I dream that the phone is ringing. I am called to the headquarters. I walk out onto the ice-covered street. My forehead hurts from the north wind. I wake up. That stupid dog. He's stretched out in the middle of the bed. He pulled the blanket and uncovered my chest and legs. Then he turned over twice, lay down contentedly and sighed. The whole blanket was wrapped around him in one big knot. The baby and I lie completely uncovered!

This has gone too far. Get off, you miserable ungrateful mutt! Off the bed!!! To your place!

And so the night passes. Cold muzzle, nightmare, blankets being pulled. Finally, morning. It's quiet. There's no gunfire. I don't want to get up. It's so

warm. But the baby is opening her eyes. The dog is rapping on the door with his tail. Stove. Warming the milk in the oven. Squatting on the tripod with a shaky leg. Lord's whining, shaking and pacing back and forth, from the balcony to the kitchen door. The telephone rings. It's Saša's mother, asking if he's called. No he hasn't. She'd call later. OK. The telephone rings. The gentleman with the bitch, asking if Saša has returned. He has, but he left again. The gentleman is embarrassed but today is one of the three days. If I wouldn't mind he would nevertheless bring the bitch around. I do mind: The love life of my dog is the farthest thing from my mind at the moment. I have other things to worry about. Where is my husband? When will he be back? How will I fetch the water? Who will take care of the baby in the meantime? "I don't mind. You can bring her round," I tell the gentleman.

The dog is whining and scratching the door. I can't let him go out on his own. The rubbish sites are full of rat poison that looks like chocolate bars. And I can't walk him myself. I can't take the baby along. He's still whining and shaking and pacing up and down the kitchen floor and constantly trying to catch my eye. It's incredible but true: Dogs in love remind me of people in love. I'll let him out. Lovers have no appetite. He'll sniff out Nora's scent around the building and then he'll be back. Maybe he won't go as far as the trash pile. All stories that I read to the baby talk about love between a prince and an orphan girl. But in real life we're not fairy godmothers. We are evil stepmothers and greedy fathers. We are racists and petty bourgeois. But our dog has a pedigree. He has more well-known ancestors than Saša and I together. He is the prince of our neighbourhood. He must not play with the stray dogs. We can do without the echinococci and the mange. We don't need any fleas. This summer, when there wasn't enough water to wash him with a flea-repelling shampoo, we killed the fleas with our bare hands. You wait by the dog and wait in ambush. When the flea comes up for air, you pick it up with two fingers, slide it up to the thumb fingernail and squeeze it with the fingernail of the other thumb until the flea pops. The popping sound makes me think of a champagne bottle being opened in the distance.

No, I won't let him out after all! Lately he's been coming home with the smell of swill on his breath. Sour peas and rice. Some neighbours of ours don't want to throw away spoiled food so they feed it to stray dogs. These are the same neighbours who complain about dog turds around the building. Do you want to go onto the balcony?

Get back. Quiet. Or don't you. Barking. Scratching noise at the door.

Get in! What happened?

"Ars—that mutt—picked up Nora's scent."

So what? He'll relieve himself under our window, then one of the pensioners will step into it and smear it all over the stairs and I'll clean it up. Maybe they'll post the message again: *Those of you who have dogs must clean up their filth.* You can't go out. Go to your place!

I'm washing the gold-stained diapers in the bathtub. I'm washing them in icy water that makes my hands numb. Numbness is good as I no longer feel the pain in the joints. What a far cry from the boiling and ironing of diapers. Something warm is running down my leg. I can't believe my eyes!! The dog is peeing all over my stockings. He lifted his leg and peed on my stocking! This is the last straw. How can things get worse. Dirty diapers, icy water, crying baby in the cold kitchen and a dog relieving himself on my leg.

Yuck! Get lost. All right, you're going out.

I wrap the baby in the blanket and we go out. I hold her in one arm while Lord is trying to yank the other off my body together with the leash.

Don't pull! Don't pull!

We walk around the building. The air is clean. It's warmer than at home.

Don't pull, you stupid mutt!

The telephone rings. Saša's mother. She called a friend whose husband's sister is the hairdresser of the secretary of the deputy commander of security. In all probability, there will be no action for the next few days. The call calms me down somewhat.

The course of the war so far has taught me to believe hairdressers more than presidents.

And then early in the afternoon, Saša comes home! He ran away for two hours. He's stationed in the barracks. Tomorrow at dawn they are going into action. He's terribly scared. I tell him about the hairdresser. He gives a sigh of relief. The fighters as well have more faith in hairdressers. He is a paramedic in a sabotage unit. He says he doesn't know anybody in the unit. The entire day, he hadn't spoken a single word with any of them. He doesn't even know the name of his superior officer. They tell him it's the head of the field hospital but he doesn't know where to look for him. He asked for a replacement. That takes two days. But paramedics stay even longer if there is no replacement. I'm warming up yesterday's camomile tea. Euphoric, I put half of the old shoe on fire. The stove roars. Saša is signalling to me. He turned a ghostly white. He's pointing at the door. Finally I hear a knock on the door. "If they're looking for me, I haven't been here," he whispers.

I open the door.

The gentleman with the bitch. He was just walking by and saw that Saša was back. Lord is barking and pawing the kitchen door. Saša lets him out. Already on the steps Lord shoves his muzzle under Nora's tail. I'm alone. I drink camomile tea and think. He went AWOL for two hours, why? To breed the dog. The wife and the baby can wait. Minutes pass. I come out to offer them tea. I can hardly believe my eyes. One man is kneeling and hugging the bitch (firmly, so she can't free herself and escape) and the other is holding Lord by the front paws and is pulling him so that he would mount the bitch. The dogs are frightened and are resisting.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," says Saša.

"I don't know what's wrong with her. She should be ready today," says the man.

They let go of the dogs. She circles around the owner's legs. Lord's muzzle is still sniffing under her tail. When he starts to lick her she sits. Then Lord starts whining and running around. Then she gets up and moves her tail to the side.

"That's it," exclaim the two men at the same time.

Lord, all twisted, keeps licking her. She is moving her tail to the side more and more. Then Lord mounts her and hugs her around the belly with his front paws.

"Aha," say the two dog owners at the same time.

But the bitch again sits down. Lord, puzzled, looks at Saša. The gentleman is embarrassed. Perhaps Lord's front claws are too sharp and scratch the bitch. I go fetch the nail clipper.

What could have been accomplished in half an hour, turned out to be an hour and a half long failure. Saša asks me to walk Lord a bit later, because "he didn't do anything." Saša has another wish. If tomorrow he can't come, and the gentleman appears, could I be with Lord?

I'll do it. You don't refuse the last wish of a husband who is going into action with a sabotage unit.

A bit later I turn the package containing the baby over to the neighbours and walk the dog. This time he doesn't pull me. He goes from spot to spot where the bitch had sat and licks the concrete. This lasts for half an hour. Enough! Let's go home! Only then does he remember what every dog must do at least once a day. He lifts up his leg and relieves himself on the threshold of the building. The evening is the same as the previous one. He lies on the side motionless. He whines and shivers. Whenever I approach the door he leaps to his feet and watches me: "Are we going for a walk again?"

No we're not.

I'm tearing up the books and feeding the fire with them. The wick in the oil lamp is giving off soot.

The phone rings in the morning. Saša's mother. The hairdresser asked around again. The men are relieved every two days. Tomorrow evening my husband will be back. The phone rings. The owner of the bitch. He calls me "friend" so I call him "friend" as well. Could he bring Nora around. Of course. Nothing new in the foreplay. When Lord tries to mount her she sits down. Then he tries to lift her up with his snout. She looks at the friend. "What am I supposed to do?"

It's her first time as well. Then, horror of horrors, Ars appears. He approaches slowly, his legs stiffened, his tail upright. The hairs on his back are bristling. I pick up a stone. He's not alarmed. I raise the stone. He stops and watches me. He is probably thinking: "What's up with this lady pimp?" I pick up a stick.

Get lost! Phooey!

He backs off and leaves. Then he peers from behind the corner of the building. I throw the stone and Ars gives up. The whole time Nora is watching him with interest while my poor dog is trying to lift her rear with his snout. The friend releases Nora from the collar and she bolts after Ars in an instant. Lord is on her heels and the two of us right behind. We reach them when, it seems, it's already too late. Nora is standing and Ars is on top of her already making those insolent movements. I throw the stone and the friend is swinging his dog leash. Ars takes a moment to decide whether to be afraid of us or not, but when the leash connects with his back, he gives up. Lord mounts Nora but she wriggles out of it and tries to run after Ars. The friend somehow manages to put her on a leash again. We return to the entrance of the building.

Lord is growing increasingly restless. The unfaithful girlfriend, it seems, finally understood what is expected of her.

My friend describes the stages of coupling to me: First, the two dogs sniff each other out under the tails. Then the male puts his front paws on the female's back. This is in fact a sign of domination, but in breeding-time the female agrees to be "subjugated." With his front paws, the male firmly grips the female around the flanks and tries to couple with her. He makes many short jerks before he hits the target. Only then does he achieve full erection. The semen is released very quickly, but due to the thickening of the male organ and the cramp of the female organ, the two dogs cannot separate for the next ten minutes. Sometimes not even for as long as half an hour.

The telephone rings in the afternoon: Saša's mother. The neighbour's daughter has a friend who works as a nurse for the doctor of the commanding officer's mistress. She as well confirms that there are no activities planned. Has Saša returned? He hasn't.

I'm expecting him. I stole a bit of powdered milk from the baby and made white coffee, but he doesn't show up. The night is like the ones before. Cold muzzle under the quilt.

"Please let me in."

No.

"I'll be good."

Go to your place! Get lost.

"I'm cold."

So am I.

"We'll all be warmer together."

That's true. But if he shoves the baby aside, I'll throw him out of the kitchen.

Hop!

Saša is coming tomorrow morning. He's happy. They spent the entire night in some house between two lines. Tunnels are being dug towards the enemy lines. They too belong to the security detachment. Food is excellent. "Lunch package."

He brought cake and Nescafe for his women. While the baby is feasting on the cake I start the fire and put a coffee pot in the oven. Saša describes the entrance to the barracks. The gate is wide open. The guards are keeping warm in the guard house. There's a large dog house near it. A long thick chain runs out of the dog house and at the end of it is a mutt of a German shepherd.

Lord is whining and pacing from me to Saša. He wants to go out. The fire is dying. I throw in half a shoe. The water boils right away. I pour in dissolved powdered milk. I stir the coffee on the upper plate of the stove. Mistake. The fire's too strong and the foam boils over the edge. A cloud of steam, smoke and stink. Saša opens the door. Our friend with Nora is standing there, about to knock on the door. Lord howls and bolts out. He shoves his snout under her tail right there on the stairs. Didn't this happen already?

I open the window, eavesdropping: "There she goes; she's moving her tail to the side." "If only she doesn't sit down." "No she won't; she is positioning herself." "There he goes." "Penalty kick!" "Did he score?" "No, he didn't. The steps are in the way." "Nora, come here." "I thought I saw a goal." "It's ok. They've progressed since yesterday." "Good boy, Lord, good boy. Hop! Hop!" "It's going to happen. I can feel it. She's never twisted her tail so much." "Is this her first time?" "Yes, it is. What about him?" "No, it's not." (Saša lies) "Hop." "Now, don't let her go now." "Good girl, Nora, good girl." Great. That's great." "Did it work?" "Almost! Yes, it did!! No, it didn't".

But it did work. Nora began yelping and struggling to free herself. I close the window and return to the kitchen. I'm so ashamed I won't be able to leave the flat for the next three days. I think the entire neighbourhood was at their windows to see who was being butchered.

After half an hour the men return. Saša is radiant with pride. We drink Nescafe. He says he is being relieved tonight. If it doesn't happen, he'll desert. No one asks for him anyway. I promise to call his commanding officer and ask him what happened to his replacement.

You don't refuse the wish of a husband who's going to war. Have I said this before?

Lord has calmed down somewhat. He lies on the bed, sighing and licking himself. Then he sniffs the blanket he is lying on. The baby drops the cake. In normal circumstances Lord would have caught it in mid-air. This time I was faster. But in the afternoon, the same story: whining, moaning, running back and forth from one door to the other, shivering, sniffing and barking. I opened and closed the balcony door ten times. The books on dogs don't say how long this condition would last. I lay out a pot of water, a candle and clean towels. But Saša doesn't return. I call his commanding officer. They tell me he is on an assignment. Bad feeling about this.

I dream about gunfire, shells exploding. When the telephone rings I realise, it wasn't only a dream. Saša's mother asks if he has returned. He hasn't. Have



they called from his headquarters? They haven't. Did I call them? I haven't. She doesn't mention the hairdresser and the nurse. Neither do I.

Lord is lying in front of the door, whining and shaking. Why do I keep him imprisoned? Because he is in love? Because he would rummage through the rubbish, just like me when I look for empty oil bottles? I open the door and let him out. It's raining outside, the rain turning to ice as it hits the ground. A good sign. At least his paws won't be dirty when he comes back. Everything is coated with a sheet of ice. Did Saša shiver like that when *he* fell in love with me?

I still don't know this, but at that very moment Saša is lying on frozen grass, among the boulders and the pine tree stumps. They were discovered and a few mortar shells were sent their way. They retreated. Saša lost his glasses and was left behind. He lost his way and walked into a minefield. He was crawling downhill. It was still dark. Then the gun on his back got caught in the branches. He tried to turn around and disentangle himself. And then he saw the stretched tripwire of a land mine.

Down there, in the city, I'm standing on the balcony, calling Lord. He doesn't show up. Is it possible that, because of the ice, he couldn't pick up Nora's scent. I don't believe it. A dog's sense of smell is a million times keener than a human's.

Saša is still lying down. Icy rain is dripping down his neck. His clothes are turning into an armour of ice. Is someone coming to rescue him? Will anyone notice he's missing? His teeth are chattering. He can't control his jaw. His finger are stiff. He doesn't feel his feet.

It would be better to just sleep it over...

The rain stopped, but the ice stayed. I leave the baby with the neighbours and go out. I whistle. I call. I walk slowly. One step at a time. Then the streets become steeper. People won't strew ashes on the icy pavement before the afternoon. I return. I leave the front door of the building open. I go out on the balcony every hour and whistle.

The neighbours are worried and they can't hide it. By chance, I learn that while I was gone looking for Lord, some soldiers called. Later I would learn that they were members of the sabotage unit. They noticed right away that the paramedic was missing, but they weren't sure if he had got out of there before them, so they called on his wife and baby. They just came to check.

At that very moment Saša realises he can not longer stay lying down. That he would freeze if he fell asleep. I remember an Australian TV series. A soldier in Vietnam is standing on a land mine. He must not move because if the pressure on the mine is released it would explode. But he can no longer keep standing because his leg has gone numb and it's buckling in the knee. Saša and I were watching that serial together. Long after the soldier had jumped and died, we talked about what we would've done in a similar situation. A helicopter hovered above the unfortunate soldier and his friends were all around him with all kinds of strange devices. There was no way to help him.

But Saša was all alone among the pine tree stumps. He made the same decision as that soldier in Vietnam. To jump down the slope.

At that moment I was sure that Saša, returning home, ran into Lord and took him for a long walk. This was like Saša. Not to call in first. But uncertainty is becoming unbearable. I take comfort in the words of that moron. If something happened they would call me. Those men who dropped by would wait for me. Saša didn't know the first thing about land mines. He had no idea at which end of the wire death was waiting. Will the mine leap into the air or will it just explode? He only knew that he must jump fast and far, like a panther. But in the armour or ice-coated clothing, he could jump neither fast nor far.

Suddenly, I get a premonition about Lord's whereabouts. He picked up Nora's scent and went looking for her. I'll call our friend. But I don't have his number. Perhaps Saša has it. I go through his pockets. I've never done this before. It would be funny now to find evidence of a mistress. I know it's incredible. But that's just why it's possible. I find the address book and our friend's telephone number. The telephone rings. Nobody answers. Our friend must have caught Lord and is bringing him over. He must have called while I was out. I'm sitting in the cold kitchen, smoking. I've finished my supply of cigarettes for the next three days. And then someone knocks at the door. Twice. Hard.

I remember so well how I felt a chill right away. I knew that no one was bringing Lord back, because I didn't hear his paws scratching the stairs. I knew it wasn't Saša, or anyone from the neighbourhood, because they wouldn't knock. I got up as if to hear myself being sentenced. I opened up.

Standing there was Saša with that stupidly happy, funny face of his. He was shivering; he was drenched from head to toe, but he was still clutching his things in his hand, grimacing. He was free. He told me what had happened to him and how he had decided to jump. He thought about us. He thought about the baby and how she would grow up without a father whom she wouldn't even remember. He thought about me as well. How hard it would be on me and how I would cry. Then he wiped away his tears, took a deep breath and jumped.

And nothing happened.

The tripwire had stuck somewhere and the mine didn't explode. Farther down the slope he ran into his sabotage unit who had come looking for him. They came up with several theories as to why the mine hadn't exploded: The person who planted the mine forgot to take out the pin; on purpose or because he did not know what he was doing; fragments of an exploding shell broke the wire at some point; the mine was faulty; the wire and the mine were covered in ice, so the tripwire released at the other end.

This last one I liked the most, even though it was the least probable.

In the afternoon we call our friend. No, Lord hasn't come around. We go out to look for him. We make increasingly wider circles around our street. We

show photos to the rare passers-by and children who play in front of the gates. They all laugh when they see a picture of three human heads and one canine head next to each other. Someone thinks he's seen him but no one is sure. No one has seen a pack of dogs running after a bitch in heat. Night is falling. We return home.

We leave all doors open. We sleep in shifts. We listen for the whining and scraping on the door. I have a nightmare. I see him run over in the street, poisoned and thrown in the trash, captured in some UNPROFOR base. I knew I would miss him, if something like that happened, but I never imagined it would be that bad. In the morning we go looking for him again, showing his photo. And finally, a lead. We walk down a narrow winding street on slippery macadam. We approach a group of children. One boy says the dog is at his place. In the shed. On a leash. We walk up. I mustn't get my hopes up. Perhaps the boy is just pulling our leg. Perhaps our dog has escaped in the meantime. *The boy opens the door. Lord is inside. Dirty and exhausted with a chain around his neck.* He's leaping all over us, leaving traces of his paws. He is whining, barking and thrashing about with his tail. He's twisting and turning around our legs. The boy is expecting a reward. Saša gives him some cake from the "lunch package." And then he scolds him for catching and chaining someone else's dog. The boy defends himself by saying that Lord had no collar. That evening we go to bed, the four of us in the same bed. The baby and I on one side of the bed and the other two on the other. Saša occasionally shoves his heel under my chin and the dog thrusts his paw in my stomach. We stoked the fire well but the cold soon came back.

Life is again bearably terrible.

*Translated by Marjan Golobič*

NENAD VELIČKOVIĆ

# Moji muškarci

*Gle,  
moj lik u vodi  
otplovi niz rijeku.*

Napolju je malo hladnije nego u kuhinji. Povremeno zapalim neku knjigu ili ploču i onda narednih pola sata ne gledam paru koja izlazi iz usta. Ježim se od pomisli da ću uskoro morati u kupatilo. Ništa nije hladnije od daske na klozetskoj šolji. Najradije bih se zavukla pod čebad i prespavala narednih nekoliko dana. Beba je mirna, ali on me izluđuje. Na koju god stranu okrenem glavu, vidim njega. Sjedi i zuri u mene. Ili leži ispred mojih nogu i trese se kao padavičar. Namjerno to radi. Hoće da izgubim živce i otvorim vrata.

Neću! Ni u ludilu! Ni mrtva. Ne volim kišu, ne volim led, ne volim mraz. Ne volim ovo veče. Ne volim ni jedno veče.

On onda legne ispred vrata, drhti, uzdiše i cvili. Staviću vatu u uši. Nemam vatu.

Beba spava. Čujem je kako siše prst. Kidam po deset listova iz knjige, savijam ih i zamišljam da su bukove cjepanice. Gore tačno onoliko koliko mi je potrebno da pripremim sljedeće. Deset je sati. Ne mogu više da izdržim. Zovem štab njegove jedinice.

“Gospodo, ne možemo vam reći gdje je. Sve je u redu. Ne brinite, ako mu se nešto desi, javićemo vam.”

Kreten.

Pas me gura, hoće da se uvuče u moje krilo. Žalim, ne mogu čučati sa 25 kilograma u krilu. Ne na tronošcu kojem je jedna noga napukla.

On onda otrči do vrata. Pa dotrči do mene. Pa otrči do vrata. Pa dotrči do mene. Pa otrči do vrata. Pa dotrči do mene.

Razumijem, konju! Hoćeš vani! Ne može! Bio si prije dva sata. Ne može! Fuj!!

Najzad je razumio. Penje se na krevet i legne kraj bebe. Ne prestaje da ječi, uzdiše i drhti.

Marš dole! Mjesto! Imaš svoju fotelju. Prebudićeš bebu.

Osluškujem. Mirno je. Sigurno se i oružje zaledilo. Znam da napadi počinju u zoru. Ali šta će im Saša. Mršav i kratkovid, i što je najgore ponosan više nego što može da podnese. Takvi stradaju. Hvali se da nikad ne trči na raskrscima. I da još ni jedan metak nije ispalio. Rođen za diverzanta.

Gasim žižak u uljanici i zavlačim pod ćebad, pored bebe. Razmišljam. Još prije tri sata život je bio podnošljivo grozan. Na neki način čak i lijep. Beba je gugutala, mi smo pili čaj, pas se smrzavao na balkonu. Saša se upravo vratio. Lažna uzbuna. Odgođena akcija. Zvaće ga ako bude potreban. Neka drži telefon uključen. Vratio se isprepadan. Trebalo je da ide na Trebević, sa diverzantima. Nikoga od njih nije poznao. Trebalo je da ide kao bolničar. Na sreću, odgođeno je. Kucnuli smo se čašama kamilice, a onda je zazvonio telefon.

Pas cvili i zavlači glavu pod moju ćebad. Njuška mu je hladna. Ustajem i pravim mu brlog na njegovoj fotelji. Ponovo legnem. Krevet se već izhladio. Srećom, beba grije kao termofor. Pet minuta kasnije, opet hladna njuška. Uzdiše i cvili. Ovaj put od hladnoće. Ne mogu ponovo da ustajem. Podižem ćebad i puštam ga da se savije kod mojih stopala. I on grije. Ne želim da spavam. Vjerovatno ni Saša ne spava. Gdje li je sad? U podrumu, rovu, kasarni? Sanjam bitku: rakete, eksplozije, tresak. Ili to nije san? Osluškujem u mraku. Tišina. Ništa. I onda vidim da je pas izgurao bebu. Jadnica, do pola viri iz ćebadi. A konj se protegao preko čitavog kreveta. Marš! Van! Mjesto.

Istjeram ga. Ali se poslije opet smilujem. Opet svi spavamo. Pas sklupčan oko mojih stopala, beba sa prstom u ustima pored mog jastuka. Sanjam da zvoni telefon. Zovu me u štab. Izlazim na poledicu. Boli me čelo od sjeverca. Probudim se. Glupi pas uspravio se na sredini kreveta, povukao svu ćebad i otkrio mi prsa i noge. Zatim se dva puta okrenuo oko sebe, legao i zadovoljno uzdahnuo. Sva ćebad smotala se oko njega u jednu veliku gutu. Beba i ja ležimo potpuno otkrivene!

Što je puno, previše je. Marš, stoko nezahvalna! Marš! Dole!! Mjesto!

I tako prolazi noć. Hladna njuška, košmar, natezanje s ćebadima. Najzad, jutro. Mirno je. Ne čuje se pucnjava. Ne želim da ustanem. Tako je toplo. Ali, beba otvara oči. Pas udara repom u vrata. Peć. Grijanje mlijeka u pećnici, čučanje na tronošcu sa klimavom nogom. Lordov cvilež,

drhtanje i trčkanje od balkonskih do kuhinjskih vrata. Zvoni telefon. Sašina majka, pita dali se javio.

Nije. Zvaće kasnije. Dobro. Zvoni telefon. Gospodin sa ženkom, pita da li se Saša vratio. Jeste, ali je opet otišao. Gospodinu je neugodno, ali danas je jedan od tri dana. Ako meni ne smeta, on bi ipak doveo ženu. Smeta mi, ljubavni život mog psa trenutno mi je najmanje važna stvar. Imam važnijih. Gdje mi je muž? Kad će se vratiti? Kako ću donijeti vodu. Kome ću ostaviti bebu? Ne smeta mi, dovedite je, kažem gospodinu.

Pas cvili i grebe po vratima. Ne mogu ga pustiti samog. Smetljišta su puna otrova za miševе koji liči na čokoladne bombone. Ne mogu izaći sa njim, ne mogu spremiti bebu i ponijeti je sa sobom. On cvili, tresе se, trči s kraja na kraj kuhinje i neprestano vrebа moj pogled. Nevjerovatno je ali istinito: zaljubljeni psi podsjećaju na zaljubljene ljude. Pustiću ga samog. Zaljubljenima nije do jela. Njuškaće Norine tragove oko zgrade i vratiće se. Možda neće ići na smjetljišta. Sve priče koje čitam bebi govore o ljubavi između prinčeva i sirotih djevojaka. Ali, u životu mi nismo dobre vile. Mi smo zle maćehe i pohlepni očevi. Mi smo rasisti i malograđani. Naš pas ima pedigree, ima više poznatih predaka nego Saša i ja zajedno, on je kraljević našeg susjedstva. Ne smije se igrati sa uličnim psima. Ne trebaju nam ehinokokusi i šuge. Ne trebaju nam ni buhe. Ljetos, kad nije bilo dovoljno vode da ga okupamo šamponom-otrovom, ubijali smo ih rukama. Čeka se i vrebа pored psa. Kad izroni da udahne zrak, zgrabi se s dva prsta, dovalja do nokta palca i noktom drugog palca pritišće dok ne pukne. Taj zvuk podsjeća na zvuk otvaranja šampanjca u daljini.

Ne. Ipak ga neću pustiti. Posljednjih dana vraća se sa zadahom pomija iz gubice. Ukiseljeni grah i riža. Ima komšija kojima je žao baciti pokvarenu hranu, pa hrane lutalice njome. To su oni isti koji nama prigovaraju zbog psećeg izmeta oko kuće. Hoćeš li na balkon?

Najzad, malo mira. Ali ne. Lavež. Grebanje po vratima.

Ulazi! Šta je bilo?

“Ars njuška Norine tragove.”

Pa šta? Olakšaće se pod naš prozor, onda će neko od penzionera ugaziti u to i razmazati po stubištu, i ja ću očistiti. Možda ću ponovo dobiti poruku: *Vi koji imate psetonje, čistite njihovu pogan.* Ne možeš napolje. Mjesto!

U kadi perem pozlaćene pelene. Perem ih u ledenoj vodi od koje trnu ruke. Utrnulost je dobra, jer ne osjećam bol u otečenim zglobovima. Koliko je ovo daleko od otkuhavanja i peglanja pelena. Nešto toplo curi mi niz nogu. Ne mogu da vjerujem!! Piški mi na čarapu. Podigao je nogu i piški mi na čarapu! Ovo je dno. Dublje od ovoga ne može se propasti. Ustrane pelene, ledena voda, beba koja plače u hladnoj kuhinji i pas koji se piša na moju nogu.

Fuj! Marš. U redu, ideš napolje.

Umotavam bebu u čebad i izlazimo. Držim je u jednoj ruci, Drugu Lord pokušava da mi otkine zajedno s povocem.

Ne vuci! Ne vuci!

Šetamo oko zgrade. Vazduh je čist. Toplije je nego u kući.

Ne vuci, majmune!

Zvoni telefon. Sašina mama. Zvala je prijateljicu čiji muž ima sestru koja je frizerka sekretarice pomoćnika komandanta za bezbjednost. Potpuno je sigurno da u narednih nekoliko dana neće biti nikakvih akcija. Ovaj poziv me malo smiruje. Dosadašnji tok rata naučio me da se više može vjerovati frizerkama nego predsjednicima.

A onda, rano popodne, pojavljuje se Saša! Pobjegao je, na dva sata. U kasarni je. Sutra, u zoru, kreću u akciju. Grozno je uplašen. Kažem mu za frizerku. Lakše mu je. I borci više vjeruju frizerkama. On je bolničar. Među diverzantima. Kaže da tamo nikoga ne poznaje. Čitav dan ni sa kim nije riječ progovorio. Ne zna ko mu je pretpostavljeni. Kažu da je načelnik saniteta, ali njega ne zna gdje da traži. Pitao je za smjene. Traju dva dana. Ali bolničari nekad ostanu duže, ako im ne dođe zamjena. Podgrijavam sinočnju kamilicu. U euforiji ložim polovinu stare cipele. Peć tutnji. Saša mi daje nekakve znake. Blijed je kao krpa. Pokazuje na vrata. Najzad čujem da neko kuca. "Ako mene traže, nisam dolazio" – šapuće.

Otvaram.

Gospodin sa ženkom, šetao je okolo i vidio da se Saša vratio. Lord laje i udara šapama u kuhinjska vrata. Saša ga pušta. Već na stepeništu zabija nos pod Norin rep. Ostajem sama. Pijem kamilicu i razmišljam. Pobjegao je, iz kasarne, na dva sata, zašto? Da bi pario psa. Žena i dijete mogu čekati. Prolaze minuti. Izlazim da ih poslužim čajem. Ne razumijem ono što vidim. Jedan čovjek kleči i grli ženku (čvrsto, da se ne otima i ne pobjegne), a drugi drži Lorda za prednje šape i navlači ga na kaju. Psi su uplašeni i opiru se.

"Ne mogu vjerovati da ovo radim", kaže Saša.

"Ne znam šta joj je. Danas bi morala", kaže čovjek.

Puštaju pse. Ona kruži oko vlasnikovih nogu. Lordova njuška zabijena pod njen rep. Kad počne da je liže, ona sjedne. On onda cvili i trčkara okolo. Onda ona ustane i pomakne rep u stranu.

"Aha, evo ga", kažu Saša i čovjek uglas.

Lord, sav izokrenut, ne prestaje da je liže. Ona sve više sklanja rep. Onda Lord skoči na nju i obgrli je prednjim šapama oko trbuha.

"Aha!" opet uglas kažu vlasnici.

Ali ženka onda sjedne. Lord zbunjeno gleda u Sašu. Čovjeku je neugodno. Možda su Lordovi nokti na prednjim šapama preoštri, pa je grebu. Idem po grickalicu za nokte.

Ono što se trebalo sa uspjehom završiti za pola sata, neuspješno je trajalo sat i po. Saša me moli da malo kasnije izvedem Lorda, jer "nije ništa uradio". Saša ima još jednu molbu. Ako sutra ne bude mogao doći, a pojavi se gospodin, hoću li ja moći biti sa Lordom...?

Hoću! Mužu koji odlazi u akciju sa diverzantima ne odbija se posljednja molba.

Malo kasnije, predajem paketić sa bebom komšijama i izlazim sa psom. Sad me ne vuče. Ide od mjesta do mjesta na kojima je ženka sjedila i liže beton. To traje pola sata. Dosta! Kući! Tek tada sjeti se šta svaki pas mora barem jednom dnevno učiniti. Digne nogu i mokri na dovratka ulaza u stubište. Veče kao i prethodno. On leži, na boku, kao mrtav. Cvili i drhti. Kad se približim vratima, skoči i gleda u mene: "Hoćemo li to opet u šetnju?"

Nećemo.

Cijepam i ložim knjige. Fitiļ u uljanici čadi.

Ujutru zvoni telefon. Sašina mama: frizerka se ponovo raspitala. Smjene traju dva dana. Eto mi muža sutra naveče. Zvoni telefon. Vlasnik ženke. Zove me "prijō". I ja onda njega zovem "prijateljū". Može li dovesti Noru. Izvolite. U ljubavnoj predigrī ništa novo. Kad pokuša da je zaskoči, ona sjedne. On onda pokušava da je podigne njuškom. Ona gleda u prijatelja: "Šta treba da uradim?"

Ovo je i njoj prvi put. Tada se, na moj užas, pojavljuje Ars. Prilazi polako, ukrućenih nogu i uspravljenog repa. Dlaka na leđima je nakostriješena. Uzimam kamen. To ga ne uzbuđuje. Zamahnem. Stane i gleda u mene. Sigurno misli "šta je ovoj svodnici?" Uzimam prut.

Marš! Fuj!

Povlači se. Odlazi. Onda viri iza ugla zgrade. Bacam kamen. Odustaje. Za sve to vrijeme Nora ga sa zanimanjem posmatra, a moj nesretnik pokušava da joj njuškom podigne stražnjicu. Prijatelj ispušta Norinu ogrlicu i ona istog trena odjuri za Arsom. Lord za njom. Mi za njima. Stižemo ih kada je, čini se, već kasno. Nora stoji, Ars je na njoj i već pravi one bezobrazne pokrete. Ja bacam kamen, Prijatelj vitla povodcem. Ars neko vrijeme razmišlja da li da nas se uplašī, ali kad ga povodac ošine po leđima, uzmakne. Lord se penje na Noru, ona se otima i pokušava da otrči za Arsom. Prijatelj je, ipak, na vrijeme vezuje. Vraćamo se pred naš ulaz.

Lord je sve nestrpļiviji. Nevjerna vjerenica je, izgleda, najzad shvatila šta se očekuje od nje.

Prijatelj mi opisuje etape parenja: Prvo se psi njuše uzajamno, ispod repova. Zatim mužjak stavi svoje prednje šape na ženkinu leđa. To je inače znak dominacije, ali u parenju ženka pristaje da bude "potčinjena". Mužjak prednjim šapama čvrsto obgrli ženku oko slabina i pokušava da



se spoji sa njom. Pravi mnogo kratkih trzaja prije nego što ubode cilj. Tek tada doživljava punu erekciju. Sjeme prosipa vrlo brzo, ali zbog zadebljanja na svom udu i grča kod ženke, ne mogu se razdvojiti narednih desetak minuta. Nekada čak ni narednih pola sata.

Poslijepodne telefon: Sašina mama. Kćerka njene komšinice ima prijateljicu medicinsku sestru kod doktorice koja liječi ljubavnicu komandanta. I ona tvrdi da nikakve akcije nisu planirane. Da li je Saša došao? Nije.

Očekujem ga. Ukrala sam od djeteta malo mlijeka u prahu i pripremila sve za bijelu kafu. Ali, on se ne pojavljuje. Noć kao prethodne. Hladna njuška po jorganom.

"Mogu li kod vas?"

Ne.

"Biću dobar."

Mjesto! Marš.

"Hladno mi je."

I meni.

"Biće nam toplije zajedno."

To je tačno. Ako ponovo izgura bebu, izbaciću ga iz kuhinje.

Hop!

Saša dolazi ujutro. Veseo je. Čitavu noć proveli su u nekoj kući između dvije linije. Kopaju se rovovi prema neprijatelju, i oni su obezbjeđenje. Hrana je odlična. Lanč-paketi. Donio je svojim ženama kolač i nes-kafu. Dok beba mljacka kolač, palim vatru i stavljam u pećnicu džezvu sa vodom. Saša opisuje ulaz u kasarnu. Kapija je širom otvorena. Stražari se griju u portirnici. Pored nje je velika pseća kućara. Iz kućice izlazi dugačak i jak lanac. Na kraju lanca sjedi štene njemačkog ovčara.

Lord cvili i trči od mene do Saše i nazad. Hoće vani. Vatra je slaba. Ubacujem polovinu cipele. Voda odmah provri. Sipam u nju razmućen mliječni prašak. Miješam na gornjoj plati sanduklije. Greška. Vatra je prejaka i pjena kipi preko rubova džezve. Oblak pare, dima i smrada. Saša otvara vrata. Pred njima Prijatelj sa Norom, u kretnji da pokuca. Lord zavija i istrčava. Još na stepeništu zabija njušku pod njen rep. Da li se to već dogodilo?

Otvaram prozor. Slušam: "Evo je, sklanja rep." "Ako ne sjedne." "Neće, sama se namješta." "Evo ga." "Penal!" "Je li zakuc'o?" "Nije. Smetaju mu stepenice." "Nora, dođi ovamo." "Već sam vidio zgoditak." "Dobro je, napredovali su od juče." "Dobar Lord. Hop! Hop!" "Biće nešto, osjećam. Nikad nije ovako rep savijala." "Ovo joj je prvi put?" "Jeste. A njemu?" "Nije." (Saša laže.) "Hop." "Sad je ne puštaj." "Dobra Nora, dobra. Bravo. Bravo." "Je li?" "Zamalo! Jest!! Nije!"

Ipak jest. Nora je počela da skiči i da se otima. Zatvaram prozor i vraćam se u kuhinju. Naredna tri dana od stida neću izlaziti. Mislím da je sav komšiluk izvirió na prozore da vidi koga to kolju.

Nakon pola sata muškarci se vraćaju. Saša sija od ponosa. Pijemo nes-kafu. On kaže da će mu smjena doći večeras. Ako ne dođe, pobjeći će. Ionako niko ne pita za njega. Obećavam da ću zvati njegovog komandira i pitati šta je sa smjenom.

Ne odbijaju se molbe muža koji odlazi u rat. Jesam li ovo već jednom rekla?

Lord se malo smirio. Leži na krevetu, uzdiše i liže se. Zatim njuši ćebad na kojima leži. Bebi ispada kolač. U normalnim okolnostima on bi ga uhvatio u letu. Sada sam ja bila brža. Popodne, međutim, opet isto. Cvilež, hunjkanje, trčkaranje od jednih vrata do drugih, drhtanje, njuškanje, lajanje. Deset puta otvorila sam i zatvorila balkonska vrata. U knjigama ne piše koliko ova mora da traje. Spremila sam lonac sa vodom, svijeću, čiste peškire.

Ali Saša ne dolazi. Zovem njegovog komandira. Kažu mi da je na zadatku. Loš predosjećaj.

Sanjam puškaranje, eksploziju nekoliko granata. Kad zazvoni telefon, znam da to nije bio samo san. Sašina mama pita da li se vratio. Nije. Da li su zvali iz njegovog štaba? Nisu. Da li sam ja zvala njih? Nisam. Ne spominje frizerke i medicinske sestre. Ni ja.

Lord leži ispred vrata, cvili i trese se. Zašto ga držim u zatvoru? Zato što je zaljubljen? Zato što će rovati po smeću, kao i ja, kad tražim prazne boce ulja? Otvaram vrata i puštam ga. Napolju pada kiša i leđi se na tlu. Dobar znak, neće se vratiti prljavih šapa. Sve je presvučeno ledenom skramom. Da li se i Saša onako tresao, kad se zaljubio u mene?

Tada to još ne znam, ali upravo u tom trenutku Saša leži na smrznutoj travi, među stijenama i patrljicima borova. Otkrili su ih i poslali nekoliko granata. Povukli su se. Saša je ostao bez naočara i zaostao. Skrenuo je s puta i upao u minsko polje. Puzao je nizbrdo. Još je bio mrak. Onda mu se puška na leđima zaplela u granje. Pokušao je da se okrene i ispetlja se. I ugledao zategnutu žicu potezne bombe.

Dole, u gradu, ja stojim na balkonu i dozivam Lorda. Nema ga. Da li je moguće da od leđa nije mogao namirisati Norine tragove. Ne vjerujem. Psi imaju milion puta osjetljiviji miris od ljudi.

Saša još uvijek leži. Ledena kiša pada mu za vrat. Odjeća mu se pretvara u ledeni oklop. Hoće li neko doći po njega? Hoće li iko primjetiti da ga nema? Zubi mu cvokoću. Ne može da ukroti vilicu. Prsti su mu ukočeni. Ne osjeća stopala. Najbolje bi bilo prespavati sve to...

Kiša je prestala, ali led je ostao. Ostavljam bebu komšijama i izlazim. Zviždim. Dozivam. Hodam sporo. Stopu po stopu. Onda ulice postaju strme. Tek poslije podne ljudi će posuti pepeo po zaleđenoj kaldrmi. Vraćam se. Ostavljam vrata stubišta otvorena. Svaki čas izlazim na balkon i zviždim.

Komšije su zabrinute i ne mogu to da sakriju. Sasvim slučajno, saznajem da su, dok sam tražila Lorda, dolazili neki vojnici. Poslije ću saznati da su to bili diverzanti. Odmah su primijetili da nema bolničara, ali nisu bili sigurni da li se izvukao prije njih i otišao ženi i djetetu. Zato su došli da provjere.

Upravo tada Saša shvata da ne može više ležati. Da će se smrznuti ako zaspi. Sjećam se jedne australijske serije, u kojoj vojnik, u Vijetnamu, stoji na nagaznoj mini. Ne smije da se pomjeri, jer ako se smanji pritisak na minu, eksplodiraće. A ne može više ni da stoji, jer mu je noga utrnula i lomi se u koljenu. Saša i ja gledali smo tu seriju zajedno. Dugo nakon što je vojnik skočio i poginuo raspravljali smo šta bismo učinili u sličnoj situaciji. Iznad vojnika u Vijetnamu lebdio je helikopter, oko njega bili su njegovi prijatelji sa svim mogućim čudnim spravama. I nije bilo načina da mu pomognu. Saša je, među patrljcima borova, bio sam. I odlučio je da učini isto što i vojnik u Vijetnamu. Da skoči nizbrdo. U tom trenutku ja sam odjednom sigurna da je Saša na povratku kući sreo Lorda i da su obojica krenuli u jednu dugu šetnju. To bi ličilo na Sašu. Da se ne javi. Neizvjesnost postaje neizdržljiva. Tješim se riječima onog kretena. Da se nešto desilo, javili bi mi. Sačekali bi me, oni koji su dolazili. Saša nije znao ništa o minama. Nije znao na kojem kraju žice se nalazi smrt, hoće li odskočiti ili samo eksplodirati. Znao je da mora skočiti brzo i daleko, poput pantera. Ali, u oklopu od zaleđene odjeće to nije mogao učiniti ni brzo, ni daleko. Odjednom, čini mi se da znam gdje je Lord. Namirisao je Norine tragove i otišao za njom. Nazvaću prijatelja. Ali nemam njegov broj. Možda ima Saša. Prevrćem po njegovim džepovima. To nikada ranije nisam radila. Bilo bi smiješno da sada nađem trag njegove preljube. Znam da je nevjerovatno. Ali baš zato je moguće. Nalazim notes i u notesu prijateljev broj. Zvoni telefon. Niko se ne javlja. Prijatelj je vjerovatno uhvatio Lorda i sada ga dovodi ovamo. Vjerovatno je zvao dok nisam bila u kući. Sjedim u hladnoj kuhinji i pušim. Popušila sam zalihu za tri dana unaprijed. A onda je neko pokucao. Dva puta. Jako.

Dobro se sjećam da sam odjednom osjetila jezu. Znala sam da niko ne dovodi Lorda, jer nisam čula struganje njegovih kandži po stepeništu. Znala sam da nije Saša, niti iko od komšija, jer oni ne kucaju. Ustala sam kao da treba da saslušam presudu. I otvorila.

Pred vratima je, sa onim svojim gluposretnonasmiješenim licem stajao Saša. Drhtao je, bio mokar od glave do pete, ali je držao svoje stvari u ruci i kreveljio se. Bio je slobodan. Ispričao mi je šta mu se desilo i kako je odlučio da skoči. Mislio je na nas. Mislio je na bebu, i na to kako će odrastati bez oca koga se neće ni sjećati. Mislio je i na mene. Kako će mi biti teško i kako ću plakati. Onda je obrisao suze, udahnuo i skočio.

I ništa se nije desilo.

Žica se negdje prekinula, i mina nije eksplodirala. Malo niže naišao je na diverzante koji su dolazili po njega. Imali su nekoliko teorija o tome zašto mina nije eksplodirala: da onaj ko je postavljao minu nije izvukao osigurač; namjerno; nenamjerno, zato što nije znao da to treba da učini; geleri su negdje prekinuli žicu; mina je bila neispravna; žicu i minu pokrio je led, i popustio je drugi kraj.

Ova posljednja najviše mi se dopala. Iako je najmanje vjerovatna.

Poslijepodne zovemo prijatelja. Ne, Lord nije dolazio.

Izlazimo u potragu za njim. Pravimo sve šire krugove oko naše ulice. Pokazujemo fotografiju rijetkim prolaznicima i djeci koja se igraju ispred otvorenih kapija. Svima je smiješno kad vide tri ljudske glave i jednu pseću, obraz uz obraz. Nekome se čini da ga je vidio, niko nije siguran. Niko nije vidio čopor pasa, kojeg predvodi neka kuja u tjeranju. Pada noć.

Vraćamo se.

Ostavljamo sva vrata otvorena. Spavamo na smjenu. Oslušujemo, hoćemo li čuti cvilež i grebanje po vratima. Imam košmare. Vidim ga pregaženog na ulici, otrovanog i bačenog na smetlište, ukradenog u nekoj bazi unprofora. Znala sam da će mi nedostajati, jednom, kad se nešto ovako desi. Ali nisam ni slutila da će biti ovako teško. Ujutro ponovo tražimo i pokazujemo sliku. I najzad. Trag. Penjemo se uz usku krivudavu ulicu i klizav makadam. Prilazimo grupi djece. Jedan dječak kaže da je pas kod njega. U šupi. Zavezan. Idemo gore. Ne smijem da se radujem unaprijed. Možda dječak hoće da se našali s nama. Možda je pas u međuvremenu pobjegao. Dječak otvara vrata šupe. Unutra je Lord. Prljav i izmučen lancem oko vrata. Skače na nas i ostavlja pečate svojih šapa. Cvili. Laje. Udara repom oko sebe. Uvija se i valja oko naših nogu. Dječak očekuje nagradu. Saša mu daje kolač iz lanč-paketa. A onda ga naruži što je hvatao i vezivao tuđeg psa. Dječak se pravda da Lord nije imao ogrlicu. To veče svi četvoro spavamo u istom krevetu. Beba i ja na jednoj strani, njih dvojica na drugoj. Saša mi ponekad gurne petu pod bradu, pas šapu u stomak. Bili smo dobro naložili, ali se brzo izhladilo.

Život je opet podnošljivo grozan.