

Iza Świerczyńska

A CERTIFIED LETTER

“Exeo in a spasm”

Samuel Beckett “Enueg I”

To my youth

D,

Before you read it just a note to let you know what happened to me one day when I was already well ahead into this letter. There was some failure in the computer and a fairly big part of it was deleted, the rest reminding more of scrambled eggs (maybe that's what it really is, after all) than a comprehensible piece of writing.

I was struck dumb when I detected this. I didn't have any notes (apart from the prologue which I had written years ago), neither did I copy it on a floppy disk. I faced the collapse of all the words I strenuously set together to convey so much to you. I'll only add that I used to work on it frantically in the scarce moments of my free time, usually at nights. Then it suddenly became like a half ready jigsaw puzzle scattered by a careless child.

First, I literally started to pull my hair out. Then I wanted to throw the bloody machine out of the window.

And then I thought of Zorba, the Greek.

Though it may seem funny to you this piece of paper means as much to me as his mine to him. Perhaps even more - it's one of the most important things in my life. So I had to begin afresh. I had to reproduce it from the hard disk of my brain. I clenched my teeth and started to reconstruct it, to piece it together like a neurosurgeon might piece together broken nerves. All that time I was clinging to Zorba's tune. I wanted to keep it, cuddle it to me as if it were a small animal. And it grew. Into something bigger than myself. It gave me strength.

I was surprised how much I remembered by heart. This letter filled me to the finger tips. I only had to let

my hand loose. I realised also that I couldn't re-create some fragments; that, probably, they were irrevocably lost. Obviously, I mourned them but, somehow, I also felt that the whole happening suited well the general theme of things past reclaim.

So no more talking.

Come on, let's dance.

Prologue

I remember standing at a tram stop in the middle of the city. Early morning. The beginning of spring which only starts to break through the petrol fumes and the continuous hum of cars. It is as if mouthfuls of fresh air filtered through the thick network of traction cables, car bonnets and people's faces. It might be any big industrial town in the world. Mine has the advantage of being comfortably settled on a large upland, though it lacks a river.

I remember the taste and the smell of this day in my early youth. The cloudless sky and the sun hidden somewhere behind the buildings though its silent presence can be clearly felt. It permeates the whole scene from behind as if through a barrier which is only unilaterally pervious. I heard that some tissues of the organism have such properties. The sunrays are reflected by metal tracks but the air is still cool. It fills freely a big niche made of the road with two carriageways adjoining large empty grounds with several sports fields, the chimneys of the power station and high blocks of flats. The space expands without obstacles, ascends to the blue, then hides behind the concrete walls. But it exists - it even seems to be heard better than the noise of engines, the rumbling echo of an approaching tram or snatches of human words.

On such a day I'm standing at a tram stop. I am both a man and a woman. I'm going only to get to school but it appears to me that round the bend some great mystery

will be unravelled. It's the time of day when the air, lighted by the sun is both cool and warm and now it touches my hand which is holding the shoulder strap of my bag. The air finally reaches my face, encircles it with its cool-warm stream. My eyes receive it. They open, they see. I'm waiting.

The prison of the four dimensions the worst of which is time. Seconds, minutes and hours forming into days, weeks, months and years. Mornings, noons, afternoons, nights. Autumns chasing summers, prolonged winters changing into brief springs. Tons of food, hectolitres of water, cubic miles of air. Incessant transformation of matter, continual psychic and mental processes. Compulsion to look, listen, talk, touch, move. The circle of people. Engulfing me.

It's my life and strangely I am out of it.

Here I sit.

Head in hands.

Petrified.

Betrayed.

Dear D,

You had a strange phone call one night in March, didn't you? From a University colleague you haven't seen for ages and probably don't really remember. Maybe you'll already have forgotten about it by the time you get this letter so let me refresh your memory. You heard then some odd sentences with not much sense to them. I was trying hard to communicate something to you but I didn't know how. It's not a nice thing to say but I enjoyed the uneasy surprise and consternation in your voice. Then, there was a commotion in your flat, you had people coming in and, on the top of that, your spouse was around. Well, I had to stop. I won't be marginalised. Not any more. I must have your full attention. To be totally frank I also called you six years ago but you were not at home and I heard a baby crying. I hoped this would finally deter me. How wrong I was.

Anyway, I couldn't possibly say it all on the phone. Writing is the best 'genre' for introverts. Now I will force you to read it. I'm going to send it as a certified letter with advice of delivery. You are indignant. Maybe not interested. I don't care. It's my 33rd birthday today and I'm going to be totally sincere at last. But, actually, I'm so scared I've finally broken the silence that I can't even bring myself to write in my native tongue. Moreover, English makes me feel somehow closer to you as if it was something special we both share. I am sorry for typing this letter but hitting the keyboard seems to me at this moment more natural than some

copperplate writing I would probably end up employing. Forgive me also for any mistakes and my chaotic style but, for God's sake, it's not a bloody exercise in paragraph writing but the vivisection of my soul. Oh no, don't think it's easy. It's been so many years. Years piling up silently like rings inside a tree trunk..

Now I've got enough. I have to confront my demons. Don't be afraid. I do assure you I'm not a dangerous raving lunatic writing to you from a hospital for the mentally deranged. I'm not in for anything desperate. I have too many precious things to lose. I'm just miserable and frustrated. Otherwise, if it may be so, I am quite successful. I've got an interesting job. I love books and music. I paint. I travel a lot. It's only you, your face that haunts me, returns to me... Ha, ha, ha - another sloppy soap-opera, isn't it? Ladies and Gentlemen sit comfortably in your armchairs and prepare a box of Kleenex! Now, I DON'T CARE! Call it what you want. My name for it is 'chronicles of absurd' and I'm going to spew it all on you whether you like it or no. Relax baby, I'm well aware that it's too late. Irrevocably, absolutely too late. I didn't succeed then when there was hope.

What am I expecting now? You must understand. I'm not hoping against hope. There is no hope whatsoever, no more. Maybe there never was. You have your own life, a family. I have mine. You are unattainable, more distant than the dead. Yet, I can't get over you. I can't help the fact that you are imprinted in my consciousness. You are the leitmotif behind my reality.

The focus through which I perceive the world. You just keep emerging on the surface however hard I try to erase the memory of you. Yet, to exist normally or rather semi-normally - here and today - I have to get you out of my life. Though, I suppose, in some deeper sense you will always be there.

All I know now is that I must have it done for because there's no other way out. I've got to tear you off with roots from this life into which you've become implanted. You keep blocking my way to happiness. It's not you who is by my side so why do I have to put up with your oppressive ghostly presence? And the notorious, abstract thought - how would it have been with you? Believe me, sometimes it gets unbearable. Because of you I'm not entirely sincere in my present relationship. I can't fully commit myself to my partner. And, God, how I wish I could. I feel I'm betraying my family, my marriage, my child by just writing to you. Also being a Catholic you can probably imagine the sense of guilt that is tormenting me. Yet it's the only conceivable way of ending this absurd infatuation. To bring it into the light, to face it openly. To strip it of its treacherous beauty and attraction. I'm going to perform an operation. I will remove this obsession from my soul like a cancerous growth. I will undergo a chemotherapy and irradiation of real, not imagined, love.

I tended to think of my life in terms of things not done. Heaps of words not uttered, loads of sensations not tasted. Now the safety vent is torn open. And don't try to hush me! In your mind, don't tell me to calm

down 'cause I don't intend to. This is all my passion and all my rage displayed for you to see. Now that I'm shedding bitter tears over my wasted past, glued in the cul-de-sac of the present, I want to disturb the self-complacent peacefulness of your universe. I want you to acknowledge my existence, to share this experience in your impossible way.

You must let me have this last and only privilege.