



PARTIZANSKA KNJIGA

Series

*Anglopolis*

Book 1

Partizanska knjiga

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# Death

Death. Death is when you haven't seen someone for a long time. And that's it.

## Rain

I took rain dramatically in the first months after Dad's death. The heavy kind of rain which makes your hair smell nice and which enhances the fragrance of the shampoo applied two days earlier, cleansing the fumes of the city, buses, dirty handrails and powder, whose particles have quietly found their way into your hair and under your nails, where forensic pathologists would locate them if something terrible befell you. Then they would know that you had a sexual intercourse eleven hours earlier, and that your last meal was liver, there's a rather good butcher's shop near Bajloni Market, superb liver, straight out of a Warhol canvas, as if it weren't meat. This is the main argument of the likes of us who love both meat and animals – it no longer looks alive. It has never been alive, or part of something alive. Rubber, as a product of some entertainment industry, a toy, and then as you cut into it, looks like the sort of rubber you get to see next to a garbage container, and you are not sure what it is. By night you don't know whether the thing in the distance is a dog or a bag, after all. At times it resembles a punctured ball. A ball, older generations

would say – a football. Hey, boy, I've bought you a football to play football. Our fathers played such football and tore their shoes, and they had a winter and a summer pair. Thus, on rainy days, after Dad's death, I would think the ashes were going somewhere, washed away, how it hurt him, how all that water flowing carried everything away, annihilating the fact that there had ever been life, as it was all over the place now, across Belgrade, it was scattered not to return, it was much worse than what had happened. And it seemed it could get no worse. I am not strong enough to stand up and go there and I cannot do anything, since water carries everything away. I cannot stand up and set off, you keep postponing setting off and end up not going anywhere due to all that dithering. I won't stop the flow of the ashes. The rain is falling, but at one point it will peter out, bringing about agreeable freshness which will inspire me to go for a run, to set in motion the body he gave me. When I run, I feel strange, I am a heroine, my body tightens, I can feel physical strength and health, immense health, I will live forever. My liver is rubber, the springs in my body stretch out like accordions, my cartilages burst, my back tightens, but pain is life, there's something that can hurt, it isn't over as long as there's pain, and over there nothing hurts any more, people say it's good when you die, it's good because it no longer hurts. And when someone dies, there are some good sides to it, as well. It doesn't hurt, which is the most

important thing, as we down *rakia* and add dried meat, frantically, on top of tranquilizers. The house is full of people then, and on such occasions you don't even know who half of them are. And they keep saying it's important not to hurt, and I guess, on the flip side, there's pleasure, perhaps the pleasure of eating liver, with a lot of mayonnaise. Dad and I could eat a whole tube, you fry it, there's nothing difficult to it, but you have to spice it up well, and to fry it up well, so that it looks as if it had never been alive, akin to some bizarre substance, mushrooms and aubergines, matchboarding or polyurethane foam, when you turn it onto that side. Strangely enough, I haven't eaten it since that happened. Not that I would start crying doing so, but I'm not in the habit of doing that when he isn't there, I'm just not in the habit, and habits are acquired or lost. Like, come over for coffee, because it's done together. I've had so many headaches, not because I couldn't make myself coffee, but because I wanted another head to be present. And a head can hurt from pressure. If there's none whatsoever, it cannot hurt you. Those moments when it hurts, and when it is raining, heavily. And when it is washing away from the earth what has apparently never been alive, but you know it has, because it created you and your brain, which is generating that idea at this very moment. A friend of mine has told me it is strange that those who created us are gone, as all of a sudden we no longer know how we came into being, we cannot prove



it, even though we do have photos and, indeed, videos of them laughing and talking and gesticulating. But you do not know how to explain where you came from, as you have lost your source, you are young as long as you have parents, this is also what people say, and people love to make a wise saying out of everything to end with, and to sip coffee afterwards. Or Sarajevo coffee from a demitasse. Where I come from, it's also stated in the birth certificate, and it's letters, true, but it's also nostalgia, rubber stamp marks made at the very moment you took your first breath, and the Spanish call childbirth *dar la luz* – to give light, to give life, how poetic. There's also the name and the date, and the testimony as to who your parents are, there's the evidence, even though that man is no longer with us, nor is his grave anywhere to be found. The ashes were scattered the other day when it was snowing, and then kept on vanishing with each rainfall, where could they be now? When that happens, you are a parentless dog, you roam this world like a bastard, happy to have had what you had but no longer have, with fury and pride and some weird film over your eyes. You recruit likes of you at parties, engage in informal conversations in front of toilets with someone whose Dad or Mum has died, which is how I came upon her, she was gorgeous, wearing clothes similar to Mum's from the early nineties, some Versace costume pizzazz, now it's worn with ironic detachment, hipster-style, and we touched on her earrings quite unintentionally, how

they were great, she said her mum had bought them on a summer holiday in Budva in the early nineties, in the Old Town, at Master Krsto's Inn, sea fish caught before your eyes, I know it, we also used to go there, how strange, Poets' Square, Theatre City, in the Old Town, that's where Dad bought them for Mum, the girl tells me, he dealt in export then and had some partners there, and she utters the words *he was* five times, striking a chord with me – my dad has also died, and then she said her dad died in 1992, and that she had two more friends whose dads had died, but in the battlefield, unlike hers, who had died of an illness, adding she was little and she could hardly remember him. I imagine a burly businessman with a luscious wife, all dressed up, a mysterious kind of beauty, but he died, in his mid-forties, and she says it was much better that it happened then, as she cannot remember him, so she probably didn't suffer as much as I do, but she did suffer, an arm-squeeze, and a teddy bear, and a photo in which he is holding her, dads are strong in photos, but then they die in a rather odd way, all of a sudden those hulks of men, those strong arms and muscles, are no longer there, we say how at first you get really angry because that arm-squeeze is gone, and he let it happen, *Dad's not going to die*, if for no other reason, then because of you, his little girl, Dad always fulfilled each and every promise, including Lego building blocks, and Dad takes you out for cakes, and drives you to a birthday party, Dad doesn't

sleep at night, driving instead all night long on a summer holiday, and you sleep. He gets up early, somehow he does everything and suddenly he fails to do so, and then you don't see him for a long time, at times only for a second, in your mind or in the mirror, and at a party you get flabbergasted when you catch a glimpse of him in your mirror, his eyes and his expression, more than any other facial expressions, his grimace. You get scared, it's strange, and it's even stranger for the girl at the party, she hasn't seen her dad since she was little. Is it easier for me because I remember him, and I remember many of our days, including the one when he told me how great the film about Paganini was, and when we watched a film together for the last time, the one about Cole Porter? One is better off living longer, even if it hurts a bit. One is better off dying as soon as it starts to hurt. Mantras and adages. He died early, so she cannot remember him. Better so. She doesn't know what it is like to have a dad. It's better that you remember him and still have a memory. People find everything better, and, then again, nothing. Everything is better, depending on your point of view. When you are at a cemetery, walking across it, there's no place more alive, because if people hadn't lived, they wouldn't have died. When you find yourself at an old archaeological site, or in a cave, it's nothing, as the people who lived then and died at that very spot, died long ago, so it doesn't matter. They would have died long ago anyway, even if they had lived

long. Someone might have died suddenly, and that person went on a summer holiday the very same year. I look at her on a tombstone. Even dead, she is a better-looking bird than me, just as my dad can find his way around Belgrade and knows its streets and turns better than me, even in death. Cemeteries are a multitude of various tastes; they all had their own favourite part of the day, and their own favourite ice-cream flavour, each one of them lived their own particular life. You are a sum of ideas and tastes, I will put chocolate sprinkles on top, half the cemetery loved French toast. When we went to school, we drew most beautiful pictures in chalk, each class their own. And a few hours later, we had a gallery, rectangles of most beautiful drawings, we could hardly part from them and go home. And then we would enjoy our meals or a pleasant afternoon in front of the television and forget about our chalk drawings, but then there would be thunder and a summer rain, Mum would rush out to take the laundry off the line – a shower – and we would remember the chalk drawings in the school yard. I would cry a lot, and a torrent of colourful water would gush forth from the Zvezdara Municipality down the street, into the city.