

Almost Intimately

novel

Part one

David

-1-

„...there are inevitable things in life or at least we consider them inevitable which is indeed the same thing...”

Christian Bobin, “La Folle Allure”

In the dust of the spacious garret words are blending into a buzz. Words are thronging and brimming from all sides; they are filling the space, they are dancing together, Bulgarian and English words are making pirouettes in the air. They are rising and falling, they are fading, only to fly again, with even more spirit.

She is catching some of them, while she is moving through the small groups of people, she is holding the word for a second in her consciousness and she is letting it go. The editor-in-chief of the first Sofia English newspaper is celebrating his 30th Birthday. Her presence there is accidental. She had written a few articles for the newspaper, and the editor had happened to invite her. And now she is squeezing past the talkative journalists, she is crossing the periphery of their attention, going out to the balcony.

The buzz is also here, it is floating in the night. She is leaning on the balcony, passing her eyes over the roofs of the houses, resting her elbows, separated from the others by the invisible screen of her silence. Two big palms are hiding her horizon, right in front her eyes, but without touching her. She is turning slowly and she is seeing him. She had not noticed him until then, he must have just come in; otherwise she would have certainly noticed him. The man is hardly smiling, yet his eyes are smiling more, playfully, boyishly.

- Beautiful but lonely? - he is starting a conversation in English.
- Pardon?
- Why is such a pretty girl all alone? – too trivial a phrase for an introduction.
- I don't know anyone well .
- That makes two of us. I don't know anyone at all. I arrived in Sofia two days ago.
- On a trip?
- No, I am going to work here.
- Journalist?
- Gold-digger.
- You are kidding me! – her smile briefly flashes , before disappearing, leaving only a pale shine behind.
- Not at all. And you are a journalist?
- A beginner. I am still a student.

They are falling silent. Her look is going back to the dark roof tops, while his is on her face.

- For now I like Bulgaria.

-Bulgaria is a prison, which I want to escape from.

Her words sound cruel, but indeed they are uttered with a captivating sincerity and naivety, as her green eyes look straight at him. A slight wind is moving her red curls.

- You are an angel.

- No, I am not. And thank God since no-one loves angels.

- David, let me introduce you to the host and his wife – a young woman is approaching them.

- Please excuse me. – David is saying and he is walking away, while she is staying alone again, resting her elbows in the balcony, as if the previous moment has never existed.

She is listening to the conversation of two young English-speaking men. They are talking about Prague. This is attracting her attention, of a Czech philology student before graduation, and she is joining them. That is how she finds out that one of them, an American, comes from Prague, where he had lived and worked, to join the newspaper team.

The other one, an Englishman, already works in it. She is starting a conversation with the first one. About Prague. Czechs were narrow-minded people, according to him, and Prague was not the best place to live. Bureaucracy, sulky saleswomen and waitresses, and things like this. She is recalling Prague the way she has seen it in her three visits which totaled 20 hours. Once in winter, numb with cold and twice in summer, but in each case romantic, artistic and crowded with tourists.

David is interrupting her thoughts for a second time tonight. He is joining them and his smiling eyes continue to study her face.

- I have to go – she says.
- I will accompany you – David is suggesting.

They are traveling in his jeep to the Students' town in silence. She lives there like most of the students from the country. When they reach her block, he asks her for her phone number. Having already bypassed the triviality of their introduction, she has nothing more left than to give it to him.

A figure is moving in the darkness of her room.

- What's the time? – a sleepy male voice is asking.
- Eleven thirty.
- How did you get home?
- By taxi.

She is slipping off her long red dress and she is snuggling into the warm bed.

-2-

“The perfect woman relates to literature as if it were a small sin – timidly, by the way, looking around to see whether someone has noticed her and that someone has noticed her...”

Friedrich Nietzsche “The Gods Sunset”

Even when I was little I used to think of myself in the third person singular. I have been doing it ever since. One part of me participates in the action, another one – ascertains, registers, analyses, experiments, makes it more visual...I am the object

and the subject, the one who lives through and the one who co-lives through. The main character in the performance of my life and my eternal and always present spectator. It is not me but her who is going in the streets, touching, painting, dancing, kissing. I only modestly add adjectives, verbs, adverbs...She could do everything that I could not. Or she could not. And this is the moment when I should make a decision whether to continue this naturally flowing story, describing her or expressing myself. To follow the narration in a “pale imitation of Marguerite Duras” or to start analysing and iconifying the images of the characters, imitating Kundera, or just to start flirting with the reader (which I already do), influenced by Michal Viewegh, whose “Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia” I have recently read.

Or maybe I could go back to my old ambition to become the Bulgarian Erica Jong – feminist, bold, exhibitionist? It would be best, of course (is it of course?!) to be myself, constructing my own, unrepeatable and unique style, but how could I know whether “my own, unrepeatable and unique style” is not a mixture of the above-mentioned plus some others, since the contemporary literature has turned to a huge and powerful exchange in which topics, styles, images and quotations are merging absolutely naturally...

If I talk about “her” would “she” be less “me”? And if I move towards “I” would this “I” be an equivalent of “me” or a compilation of “I” and many other “shes”?

So now this is the almost impossible moment, when – with one gracious leap (as we have seen in different romantic comedies about the separation of the soul from the body and its temporary squeezing into another body) I am finding myself

in her, my main character, so that we become one and I lend her my thoughts, feelings, words and gestures.

-3-

“And it was silent!

Silent!

Silent it was!”

Hristo Photev, “Balade for Romeo and Juliette”

I did not sleep well that night. I was turning restlessly and the tall man from the party was passing through my dreams like from one room to another. David. However, when in the morning I opened my eyes with effort I saw by my side the sleeping and so painfully known face of Vintchentso. Vinchentso. My Romanian sweetheart who has shared with me his days, nights, bed and for almost two years, his room. It is as if he has felt my astonished look, Vintchentso also opened his eyes and stared in mine – coolly, like a stranger.

- How was the party?
- Very formal.
- Did the men hit on you? – the jealous touch in his voice shows that he is not joking.
- No more than usual.

This puts an end to our conversation. Lately our communication has been laconic and content-less. The verbal one. The nonverbal one has been long lost no one knows where; perhaps hidden in a dusty corner of the hostel. We do not touch

each other, we do not make love, and our kiss is dry with short lip contact. When I am alone, I cry.

That day however I would not cry. I would go into my room and I would think about Dave (how I already call him in my mind), and the alarm, indicating that someone is calling me on the hostel phone, would not disappoint me.

- Hey, where have you been? – his voice sounds fresh.
- Four floors above – I am laughing.
- Would you like to meet up?

Yes, I would love to. But at 3 p.m. The Balkan blood of Vintchentso is boiling and I am too unsure and burdened with a preliminary guilt to confront him. Let's keep the peace!