



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

2016



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Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Satovi u majčinoj sobi (2014)

Clocks in my Mother's Room

Publishing House **Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva**

Biography

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović was born in Zadar in 1977 and is a graduate of the University of Banja Luka. She writes poetry, columns and literary reviews. Her poetry has been translated into several languages, and she was shortlisted for the CEE Literature Award (for poetry) in 2008. Stupar-Trifunović lives in Banja Luka and works as the Editor of *Putevi*, a literary magazine.

Synopsis

This is a story about a mother and a daughter, and about the life of women in the former Yugoslavia: the mother is a mirror through which the heroine tries to find her past and understand herself in the modern world, by returning to the very beginning, to her idyllic childhood home on the Dalmatian coast.

The heroine/narrator identifies herself as a novelist, and her alter ego, Ana, splits the main character into two, thus opening a dual expressive space, allowing for links between different interpersonal relationships, romantic experiences and periods of time. Memories are pieced together like a mosaic and the novel becomes a choir of ancestors, previously ignored and suppressed.

This story about women in peacetime and in wars that marked the region examines the ignored role of women in great historical upheavals, which can routinely assign them the role of passive observers with no right to interfere with the 'great' story of war and politics.

Against the backdrop of mothers and daughters, the novel deals with refuge, homelessness and a sense of not belonging. The narrator is stuck between two states, two lives, two loves, two unfinished books: this duality tears her apart, while she wears socially acceptable masks to heal her sudden removal from her childhood comforts. Writing and literature become her only home and sanctuary, where her partitioned self can finally become one and whole.

Satovi u majčinoj sobi

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Možda treba početi od djetinjstva. U djetinjstvu se utisci utiskuju duboko u čovjeka, kao stopalo u još nestvrdli beton. Sada već ostaju samo tragovi blata koji se lako speru. Ja sam odavno popločan trg, dovršeno šetalište uz obalu, izliven trotoar kraj ceste i sve je očvršlo u meni. Tuđi koraci više nisu duboki tragovi. Prošlost je kuća u kojoj završi neka neoprezn misao, prisjećanja pritišću kao zidovi pretrpani slikama.

Hodala sam obalom i skupljala školjke. Majka je galamila zbog previše sunca na mojim leđima. Koža je tamnila, koža je peckala, koža se zatezala. Nisam osjećala ništa. To je došlo poslije. Sada sam samo tražila. I moje oči su bile grabežljivci koji love i magneti koji privlače i molećivi prosjaci koji prizivaju. Školjke su ležale na obali među kamenjem. Dragocjenost koja je čekala da bude pronađena rukama. Kada ih okrenem bile su bijele i sedefaste (kao moj stomak), izvana tamnije (kao moja leđa). Kao život. Bijelo i sedefasto. Život koji odnekud stiže, koji počinje u glavama djevojčica, sedefast i bijel kao unutrašnjost morske školjke. U glavama djevojčica koje uplašeno i svečano očekuju.

Vjenčanje je bilo skromno. Bez bijelog. Bez sedefastog.

Školjka se nije do kraja otvorila. Previše oštar rub. Porezala sam prst. More je, slano, grizlo moju krv, peklo je (gurnula sam prst u vodu da majka ne vidi). More je posisalo dio mene kroz prst, dio mene je ušao u more. More nije bilo nepravedno, dio mora je ušao u mene (često se zaljuljam od nepoznatih obala, često se zanesem, jedva ostanem na nogama).

On, kad liže moju kožu, kaže nikada nisam spavao kraj slanje žene. Kao da se tuširaš morskom vodom.

Nešto preslano spava u mojoj koži. Neko uhvaćeno more.

Majka koja nadgleda kao galeb odozgo koju će naivnu ribu ščepati. Koji neoprezan pokret će me odati i prekinuti pustolovinu na suncu. Mahanje rukom i doziv kojim završiš u njenom kljunu, u hladovini. Na sigurnom. Ispod zelenog tamariša. Ispod smolavog bora. Ispod smokve iz čijeg nezrelog ploda curi ljepljivo i peckavo mlijeko po prstu.

Podstanarski stan je bio tijesan, memljiv i siguran. Daleko od mora. Po policama sam slagala školjke. Gušilo me je. Plašilo me je. Blizina zidova. Povjerljivost ostave koja nametljivo nudi ustajalost, prije nego što zgrabiš teglu s džemom već ti ispriča istoriju tuđe i tvoje sirotinje.

Drhtala sam zureći kroz male prozore na sivu cestu. More je bilo daleko, ali plime i oseke su bile tu. Unutra. I bure na moru. I jutra sa ribama razbacanim po obali. Nešto je raslo.

Nešto će jednom isplivati iz mene.

Ti si iskliznula niz moje slane butine okupane morskom vodom i krvlju. Opet se ponovilo. Dio mene je iskliznuo u tebe, dio tebe je ušao u mene. Razmjena se dogodila. Šumile smo obje. Ljeti smo skupljale školjke. U tvojim očima je bio isti onaj sjaj onog ko traga. Za bijelim, za sedefastim odsjajem. Među kamenčićima.

Majka je bijesno gledala u mene dok sam se lijeno vukla prema kući. Naslućena neprijatnost je usporavala moje korake. Čekala me je. Istukla me je. Komšiji sam nesmotreno otkrila kućne tajne. Ono što su mi rekli da ne smijem reći nikom.

O nama.

Unutra.

U četiri zida.

Nešto naše.

Odala sam.

Pitao me je. Bila sam iskrena. Mislila sam da su svi takvi kao mi, da ništa posebno nema u tim malim, kućnim tajnama. Unutra, sve je uglavnom isto. Svi lažu jedni druge. Da ih ne povrijede.

Ništa mi nije bilo jasno.

Boljelo me je.

Treba ćutati o tome. Batine me nisu naučile pameti.

Nije vrijedilo. Vjenčanje je bilo skromno. Majka je nakrivila glavu na jednu stranu, otac na drugu.

Otac je išao na more pecati. Molila sam ga da me vodi. Majka je rekla da to nije sigurno, voditi dijete na buru, na otvoreno more, u rano jutro. Voditi tako malo dijete, na tako veliko more, i možda će biti bure. Već puše pomalo. Da li si ti lud. I ti i ona. I nemoj. I molim te, tata. I poveo me je. Bili su on i muškarci. Bili su razdragani i veseli. Bilo je hladno to jutro dok je svanjivalo, i vruće kasnije. Sunce nam je zatezalo kožu. Bila sam kao jedan od njih. Ulovili smo sipu. Crna tečnost je prljala utrobu bijelog broda. Nije mi se gadilo, nije bilo ružno, nisam se plašila da ću se uprljati, baš kao ni oni. Ni poslije, dok su ih strateški razmještali po zaraćenim stranama ukopane u crnicu, nisu se plašili da će se uprljati. Nisu pokazali strah. Ustajali su rano. Palili cigarete i odlazili kao na pecanje. Ali ja sam se počela jako plašiti.

Više nisam bila jedan od njih.

Strah je rastao.

Sipino crno mastilo je iscurilo u priču.

Stidi se, rekao je otac. Stidi se. Stidila sam se. Zbog pogrešaka. Sigurno ih je bilo puno. Kao vreća kukuruza koju su pojеле kokoške. Osim prazne vreće stida, preda mnom ne stoji ništa drugo. Stidim se. Vrijeme je pojelo pogreške, ali ja se i dalje stidim. I otac se stidi. I njemu su rekli, stidi se. Ukrao si limun, polomio si ogradu, razbio si komšijin prozor. I on se stidi na fotografiji, na zidu, gdje je njegova glava nagnuta na jednu, a majčina na drugu stranu. Na njihovom vjenčanju.

Bože, kako su velike. Prilazio je s leđa. Pokušao je da ih objumi. Možda ti treba pomoći da ih nosiš, krive ti kičmu. Izmicala sam se. Za mnom su išli ti prsti kao meduze s pipcima, lijepili su se za vazduh, za kožu i otimali kisik. Imaš li momka? Dodiruje li te? Zašto meduze prve pojure ka našim grudima, ka našim srcima da ostave svoje otrovne opekotine? Kada sam ja bio mlad bilo je drugačije. Ona ne želi da spava sa mnom. Meduze su tužne, providne i otrovne. Meduze uvijek plivaju blizu djece. Djeca ništa ne govore roditeljima jer roditelji više vjeruju meduzama.

Onaj ko je bez grijeha neka prvi uzme kamen, povikao je otac tužnim glasom i tresnuo sam sebe u glavu.

I nemoj nikad više da odaješ šta se priča u kući, rekla je majka. Nikad.

Šta se priča? Šta se priča? Šumilo je more u meni.

Znaš li šta se priča o tebi? Rekla je moja kćer (rekla si ti) i pogledala me direktno u oči.

Znam, rekla sam. I počela da se smijem. Tebi se nije dopao moj smijeh. Ta vrsta smijeha se nikom ne dopada. Ali on je bio bolniji i brži od mene.

Fotograf je stajao nakrivo. Tako to tumačim, pa smo i nas dvoje kao iskošeni na fotografiji. Na našem vjenčanju. On stoji uspravno. Ako hoćete znati šta je pravi ugao, pogledajte ramena. Pogledajte glavu ovog čovjeka. On uvijek stoji pravo. Ali ja sam nagnula glavu na jednu stranu, suprotnu od njega i fotograf je nagnuo ruku. I sve je malo iskošeno.

U mom stomaku – moru pliva riba koja još ne zna da je tu.

U majčinom stomaku – moru nervozno sam se koprcala ja koja nisam znala da sam tu. I da sam ih ulovila.

Vjenčanje je bilo skromno, bez bijelog, bez sedefastog. Podstanarska soba u prizemlju je čekala umorna tijela koja su omamljena memlom zaboravila da su mlada.

Matičar je bila žena. Imala je oko pedeset godina. Njene oči su bile bezizražajna ogledala koja su odražavala da i da i da i da i da (iza kojih su vrištali ne i ne i ne i ne i ne).

Riba je već bila uhvaćena. Motor čamca je veselo brujaio. Muškarci su bili jednako razdragani i veseli. Pili su i smijali se. Idemo nazad. Sve je dobro prošlo. Žene se uvijek plaše bezrazložno. I gundaju bezveze. Bila sam ljuta na majku što ne poznaje ništa od ove muške radosti na otvorenom moru. Riba je bila tu, u kantama. I ja sam lovila. Bila sam ponosna. Sipin crni trag mi je odvrćao pažnju, bilo je nešto ljepljivo i meko u njenom tijelu, u njenom tragu, u njenom načinu da nas ima, sve nas na brodu. Sve nas vesele muškarce u kojima se neoprezno rasanila i probudila jedna žena.

Rekao sam ti da nikom ne pričaš o tome. Ti si moja tajna.

Neću nikom govoriti o tom.

Ti si moja.

Ti si moj.

Nikom.

Ulovljeni smo u fotografiji. (Malo smo svi nakrivo.) Rekla sam ti da nikom ne pričaš o tom, rekla je majka. Nisam se mogla sjetiti o čemu. O čemu sam to pobogu pričala. I taj podli komšija što je lukavo ispitivao djecu. Kao kakav voajer što se naslađuje tuđim porodičnim tajnama. Zar naša porodica ima neke tajne? Mi smo jedna dosadna porodica. Divna, dosadna porodica. Divna, dosadna, nakrivo uslikana porodica. Tu, unutra si ti, a u njoj sam ja. Kao luk u svakoj od nas novi sloj. Da, ta poređenja, ta obična poređenja od kojih plačeš dok ih ljuštiš.

Plači, rekla sam sama sebi i plakala. Sve dok nije sipino mastilo izašlo iz mene.

Ali prije toga, prije nego što je krenulo, prije nego što se bjeličasta sipina kost zablistala na dlanu, i brat i ja srećni otrčali da je prinesemo kao žrtvu kljunu našeg zlatnog kanarinca, prije velikog ulova i prije nego što se naš svijet rasuo ka onim pravcima i obalama o kojima nismo znali ništa, prije nego što se mogućnost plakanja i pričanja podatno ponudila kao utješna sloboda koja razrješava muka ta silna učutkivana usta, srca, međunožja, prije težine i prije lakoće, prije nego što su satovi u majčinoj sobi utihnuli i prašina pala po svemu, prije svega postojalo je jedno nježno sada u kojem smo se svi dodirnuli i čiji odbljesak, s vremena na vrijeme, neočekivano iskrsava u našim životima.

Clocks in my Mother's Room

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Translated from the Bosnian by Amira Sadikovic

Childhood is perhaps a good place to start. In childhood, impressions are deep and indelible, like a footprint in soft concrete. Now, it's just traces of mud, easy to wash off. I have long become a paved square, a completed playground by the shore, a fixed-up pavement by the road; everything inside me has become solid. The steps of others are not imprints any more. The past is a house where a reckless thought ends up, memories press like walls stuffed with paintings.

I was walking along the shore, collecting seashells. Mother yelled because of too much sun on my back. My skin was going dark, tingling, tightening. I felt nothing. That came later. Now I was just searching. And my eyes were predators hunting and magnets attracting and beggars imploring. The seashells were there, scattered over the pebbles along the shore. Precious items waiting to be picked out. As I turned them, they were white and shimmery (like my belly), and dark on the outside (like my back). Like life. White and shimmery. Life coming from somewhere, starting in girls' heads, shimmery and white, like the inside of a seashell. In the heads of girls frightened and solemn in their anticipation.

The wedding was modest. Nothing white. Nothing shimmery.

The seashell never opened all the way. The edge was too sharp. I cut my finger. The salt of the sea bit my blood, it stung (I pushed my finger under the water, so that Mother couldn't see it). Through that finger the sea sucked out a part of me, a

part of me went into the sea. The sea was not unjust, part of it came inside me (unknown shores often make me sway, I am often carried away, barely standing). When he licks my skin, he says he's never slept with a saltier woman. Like a shower with seawater.

Something salty is sleeping in my skin. A sea captured.

Mother watches over me like a seagull following its naïve prey. A careless gesture will give me away and stop this adventure under the sun. A wave and a call that takes me towards her beak, in the shade. In safety. Under the green tamarix. Under the sappy pine. Under the fig whose unripe fruit drips sticky and stingy juice over my finger.

The rented flat was tin, musky and safe. Far away from the sea. I laid my seashells on shelves. It suffocated me. It frightened me. The closeness of the walls. The reliability of the storeroom offering discretely its stale air: by the time you grab a jar of jam, it has told you the entire history of poverty, your own and someone else's.

I shivered as I looked out to the grey road through the tiny windows. The sea was far away, but the tides were close. Inside. And the storms. And the mornings with fish scattered along the shore. Something was growing.

Some day, something will swim out of me.

You slipped down my salty thighs, soaked in seawater and blood. It happened again. A part of me slipped into you, a part of you entered me. The exchange happened. We both murmured. In the summer, we collected seashells. Your eyes had the same glow of those who are on a quest. For the white, shimmery glow. Under the pebbles.

Mother looked at me furiously as I strolled towards the house lazily. A premonition of unpleasantness slowed down my steps. She was waiting for me. She gave me a spanking. I had recklessly revealed family secrets to a neighbour. Things they had said I shouldn't tell anyone.

About us.

Inside.

Within four walls.

Something ours.

I gave away.

He asked. I was honest. I thought that everyone was like us, that there was nothing special in those little family secrets. Inside, everything looks more or less the same. Everyone lies to everyone else. To avoid hurting them.

I couldn't understand any of it.

It hurt.

You should be silent about things like that. The spanking taught me nothing.

It wasn't worth it. The wedding was modest. Mother tilted her head on one side, Father on the other.

Father went out to sea to fish. I begged him to take me with him. Mother said it wasn't safe, taking a child out to stormy sea so early in the morning. Taking such a small child to such a great sea, and there could be a northern wind, there was a bit already. Are you insane? Both of you. And don't. And please, Daddy. And he took me. He and the men were there. They were cheerful and loud. It was a cold morning and a hot day. The sun made our skin tight. As if I was one of them. We caught a cuttlefish. The black liquid stained the inside of the

white boat. It didn't make me feel sick, it wasn't ugly, I wasn't afraid of getting dirty, just like they didn't. Even later, as they were strategically distributed along different frontlines, dug into deep, fertile soil, they were not afraid of getting dirty. They never showed any fear. They got up early. They lit their cigarettes and left, as if they were going fishing. But I became very, very frightened.

I was no longer one of them.

Fear grew.

The cuttlefish ink seeped into a story.

Shame on you, said Father. Shame on you. I was ashamed. Of all the mistakes. There must have been many. Like the bag of corn that the chicken ate by accident. There was nothing in front of me, except for that empty sack of shame. Time has eaten away the mistakes, but I am still ashamed. And Father is ashamed too. Shame on you, they told him too. You stole a lemon, you cut the fence, you broke the neighbour's window. And he is ashamed on the photo, on the wall, with his head tilted on one side, and Mother's on the other. At their wedding.

God, they're so big. He came from behind. He tried to grab them. Maybe you need help carrying them, they will bend your back. I wiggled away. Those fingers followed me like jellyfish, with tentacles sticking to the air on the skin, stealing oxygen. Do you have a boyfriend? Does he touch you? Why do jellyfish always go for our breasts, for our hearts, to leave behind their toxic burns? It was different when I was young. She doesn't want to sleep with me. The jellyfish are sad, transparent and toxic. The jellyfish always swim close to the children. The children don't say anything to their parents, because the parents prefer to believe the jellyfish.

Let him who is without sin cast the first stone, shouted Father in a sad voice and hit his own head.

And don't you ever, ever tell anyone about things we talk about at home, said Mother. Never.

We talk about what? What? The sea inside me murmured.

You know what they say about you? Said my daughter (you said) and looked me right in the eye.

I know, I said. And I started laughing. You didn't like my laugh. It's the kind of laugh no one ever likes. But it was more painful and faster than me.

The photographer stood on the side. That's how I interpreted it, and that's why the two of us are tilted on the photo. At our wedding. He is standing up straight. If you want to know what a right angle looks like, look at the shoulders. Look at this man's head. He always stands up straight. But I tilted my head to one side, away from him, and the photographer tilted his hand. And everything is a bit tilted.

In my belly-sea, a fish is swimming, not knowing it's there.

In Mother's belly-sea, I wiggled nervously, not knowing I was there. And that I caught them.

The wedding was modest, nothing white, nothing shimmering. The rented room on the ground floor waited for the exhausted bodies which, intoxicated by the damp smell, forgot that they were young.

The registry clerk was a woman. She was about 50. Her eyes were bleak mirrors reflecting yes and yes and yes and yes and yes (screaming no and no and no and no and no and no behind them).

The fish had been caught. The engine hummed cheerfully. The men were just as happy and noisy. They drank and laughed. We're going back. It all went really well. Women are always afraid for no reason. And they nag for no reason. I was angry at Mother for not knowing anything about this manly joy out on the open sea. The fish were there, in the buckets. I fished too. I was so proud. The black line left behind by the cuttlefish ink distracted me; there was something sticky and soft about its body, about its trace, about its way of getting us all, all of us on that boat. All of us cheerful men accidentally awakened to a woman inside them.

I told you not to tell anyone about it. You are my secret.

I won't tell anyone about it.

You are mine.

And you are mine.

No one.

We were caught in the photo. (We are all a bit tilted.) I told you not to tell anyone about it, said Mother. I couldn't remember what it was. What on earth have I talked about? And this mean neighbour who grilled children in such clever ways. Like a voyeur enjoying other people's family secrets. Our family had secrets? We're just a boring family. A wonderful, boring family. A wonderful, boring family in a tilted photograph. You're here, inside, and I'm inside her. Like an onion, each one of us has a new layer. Yes, that kind of comparison, the ordinary comparison that makes you cry as you peel the layers off.

Cry, I said to myself, and I cried. Until all the cuttlefish ink has seeped out of me.

But before that, before something moved, before the white cuttlefish bone gleamed on my hand, my brother and I ran happily to offer it as a sacrifice to the beak of our golden canary, before the big prey and before our world has dispersed towards places and shores we knew nothing about, before the possibility of crying and talking has presented itself generously as the comforting freedom that delivers from hardship all those silenced mouths, hearts and groins, before the hardship and before the lightness, before the clocks in my mother's room have gone silent and before dust has covered everything, before everything, there was a tender and gentle now, where we all touched, and whose reflection occasionally and unexpectedly flashes in our lives.



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211 pp, 2014

Translations: The book has not been translated yet.

(Last Update – March 2016)

Publishing House **Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva**

Obiličev venac br. 5 – 11000 Belgrade – Serbia

Tel. +381 011 3051 999

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Contact: Publishing House – zavod.izvodi@gmail.com

ISBN: 978-99955-1-167-8

EUPL / FEP-FEE – Rue Montoyer, 31 – B-1000 Brussels – T. +32 (0)2 770.11.10

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