

**SHORT STORY
COLLECTION**

Jazykový kvet 2023

Competition entries

By GPdC Students

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II.A

Myseľ spisovateľa

by Lea Chromiaková

Kniha sa nepíše tak ľahko, ako sa číta. Ale určite sa nájde zopár výnimiek, ktorým stačí veľmi málo k vytvoreniu niečoho literárne úžasného. No pre nás, obyčajných smrteľníkov, to nie je také nenáročné. Ale verte mi, stojí to za to. Zo smrteľníka sa stávate „bohom“, ktorý vytvára vlastný vesmír s vlastnými svetmi a ľuďmi a, samozrejme, so všetkým, čo sa v takom svete nachádza. Na určitý čas (niekedy na deň alebo na týždeň a možno aj dlhšie) sa utiahnete do seba a so založenými rukami si sadnete do kresla vo vašej hlave. Okolo vás je ničota. Biely priestor. Jednoducho na začiatku ste tam len vy a vaše myšlienky. Priletujú, bohvie, odkiaľ, na minútku sa zastavia pred vami, ukážu vám obrazy, ktoré so sebou prinášajú a potom putujú ďalej. Vy sa cítite ako v kine. Nehybne sedíte a pozorujete vlastné nápady. Niekedy sa prichytíte pri tom, ako smutne vzdycháte. To sa môže stať vtedy, keď v kresle vašej hlavy sedíte pridlho a na rameno vám poklope Beznádej. Niektorých iba pošuká, ale podaktorých nešťastlivcov objíme tak silno, až ich odradí od prvotného cieľa a premiestni späť do reality, až sa vzdajú. Naopak my, ktorých iba jemne poštekli, na určitý čas podľahneme takzvanej „kríze beznádeje“, ale potom naberieme, ako sa vraví, druhý dych, a vrátíme sa do nášho vysedeného kresla v hlave.

Pri takejto práci treba byť duševne stabilný. Pri dlhšom rozmyšľaní sa môže stať, že myslou uletíte preč a z vášho plánu nezostane nič. Keď sa prebojujete až sem, zistíte, že to začína byť väčšia zábava. Na líce vás pobozká Inšpirácia, pravdupovediac, od momentu, kedy sa uvelebíte vo vašej hlave, čakáte iba na tento sladký okamih a keď nastane, okamžite priletí tá pravá myšlienka s nápadom, ktorý vás doslova nadchne. Od radosti vyskočíte z kresla, tentokrát nielen vo vašej hlave, ale aj vo vašej obývačke. Oblečiete sa do pracovného odevu a *konečne* začnete pracovať s materiálom. Tehly, drevo, škridle, kamene, látky, farby, jednoducho všetko, čo vám napadne. Staviate

mestá, domy, lode, podľa toho v akom prostredí sa bude váš príbeh odohrávať. Ešte som zabudla spomenúť, že dôležitým krokom je rozhodnutie, či váš príbeh bude dobrodružný alebo detektívny. Treba byť uvážlivý, pretože pokiaľ rozmýšľate nad viacerými žánrami naraz, vytvoríte akurát tak jeden nepochopiteľný chuchvalec, v ktorom uviaznete.

Nastupuje krok číslo tri. Stvoriť hlavného hrdinu – vášho Adama. A tu sa momentálne nachádzam ja. Vymýšľanie témy – o čom budem písať, mi zabralo veľa času a keď som sa konečne pohla ďalej, ako naschvál som uviazla niekde na križovatke pred vyše sto tabuľami - možnosťami od výmyslu sveta. Sú to kľúčové slová k vytvoreniu charakteru môjho hlavného hrdinu. Melancholický architekt? Realistická kvetinárka? Alebo optimistický právnik? Všetko vyzerá zaujímavo a toto postávanie pred hordou slovných spojení je odrazom mojej nerozhodnosti. Stojím tam tak dlho, až napokon odpadnem od vyčerpania. S prekvapením sa preberiem na neznámej lavičke v centre ešte neznámejšieho mesta. Všade je hluk, niektorí ľudia sa náhlia, rezko prebehujú pomedzi autami na druhú stranu cesty, niektorí si vychutnávajú poobedňajšiu prechádzku. Počasie je mrzuté. Oblohu zatieňujú ozrutné sivé mračná. Za mojím chrbtom sa valí rieka, ponad ktorú sa klenie dlhý most. Podo mnou je chodník z mačacích hláv, za ním cesta a námestie.

Doteraz som vždy jasne rozlišovala snívanie od reality, ale priznám sa, tento raz som zmätená. Spím? Bolí ma hlava a píska mi v ušiach. Iste vyzerám komicky v teplákovej súprave so zvrasteným čelom a s pohľadom skáčucim z jedného človeka na druhého. Ako som sa sem dostala? Vstala som a vykročila vpred, keď som vzápätí vrazila do prvého protiidúceho. „Au! Prepáčte, nevidela som vás,“ povedala som mladému mužovi predo mnou. Jemná tvár, tmavé kučeravé vlasy, hypnotizujúco modré oči, atletická postava. Pomohol mi vstať a ja som hanblivo poďakovala. Usmial sa. Predsa len som sa zasnivala! A mám ťa! Našla som svojho hlavného hrdinu! Len ako sa bude volať? Adam? Alebo Otto? Hugo? Frederik! Bude sa volať Frederik.

Niekedy sa v uličkách svojej hlavy zatúlate, čiže uletíte. To však neznamená, že ste uletení. To určite nie. Tak veľmi som prenasledovala svoje myšlienky o hlavnom hrdinovi a zápletke, až to moju myseľ prestalo baviť a obrátila sa proti mne. To, že som vo svojom diele pokročila mi zdvihlo náladu i keď si predstavím, že som len na začiatku.

Sexta

Gloomy Countess

by Zoja Mlynáriková

Since she moved in less than a year ago, there hasn't been talk of anyone else. Although no one had seen her properly, and no one dared to approach her newly-built mansion on a rocky hill called Skyedge, this mysterious woman occupied the minds of every resident of the small town of Earlwreath. Although anyone knew hardly anything about her - Countess Henrietta Moore was known by one name only: the gloomy Countess.

The fog of mystery caused uncertainty among people. Who was the strange lady who almost never went out? Why, if she did go out, was it only at night? Why did she live so remotely? Was the gloomy Countess even human? What were her intentions and relationship to their beautiful and cheerful town? These questions were often discussed at meetings of the noble families of Earlwreath.

"Surely, she must be a black widow who disposed of her husband!" declared Lord Cunningham, taking a resentful sip of wine.

"I think she is a witch from the last circle of hell. Did you ever see her enter the church? And only God knows if she is not a murderer of virgins!" his wife joined. The other nobles around the table began nodding in agreement.

Only the young Lady Matilda Fernley remained silent at first. But since the terrifying stories kept her awake more and more often, she decided to speak anyway. "I do not mean to say you are wrong, but I would give the infamous Mrs Moore a chance. It would be good to talk to her. Perhaps she is just a sad and lonely woman with a tragic life. I believe she just needs company and someone to show her that one does not have to live in despair and darkness!"

"Young lady, have you gone mad?! To associate with such a hag, I tell you, is insanity. These juveniles..."

"Maybe so. But I will try to talk to her, find out the truth and change her!"

The next day Matilda decided to write a letter to the Countess. She was pleasantly surprised when she received a reply in which the lady invited her to dinner at her mansion. She believed that she, as an angel of salvation, could understand the gloomy Countess, show her the right path and tear down the intangible wall of prejudice standing between the townspeople and the hill on which the mansion stood. Surely it was all just a misunderstanding... right?

The time of the meeting was quickly approaching. Sitting in the carriage, she secretly hoped that Mrs Cunningham was quite wrong and the escalating gloomy atmosphere was just an illusion. The unpleasant feeling grew stronger as Matilda passed through the gate decorated with gargoyles. Dressed in her usual colourful robes, she stuck out like a sore thumb in the fog-shrouded Gothic garden. She walked down the stone walkway to the massive brass-decorated door, took a deep breath and knocked loudly.

Matilda remained silent for a long time. Unexpectedly, the massive door began to creak and opened with a rasp.

Behind it stood a tall figure dressed in all black. Lace of the same colour decorated the upper part of the dress and covered her hands. A veil only lightly covered her slightly wrinkled, but also conspicuously scarred face. Although at first no emotion could be detected on the woman's face, she did not seem sinister. Finally, she smiled softly.

“Welcome, Lady Fernley. Come on in.”

Both women walked silently through dark corridors decorated with not only portraits of Countess Moore herself, but also with spine-chilling weapons. Matilda's urge to take to her heels and never return was slowly but surely increasing, but she fought to believe in the goodness of the Countess.

However, when they reached the large lounge, Matilda's face lit up immediately. Tea and sweet treats from all around the world were already waiting for them. The Countess poured the hot liquid into beautiful porcelain cups and added milk and a sugar cube into hers. As soon as they took their first sip, they started conversing casually.

“Your mansion is truly... breathtaking. But can I ask about your unique decorating style? Is there a hidden intention behind it?”

Countess Moore smiled sympathetically. “Thank you for noticing. The decor is a mix of necessity and my unique style. I'm sorry to be so open, but I suffer from a disease called porphyria, which prohibits me from going out in the sun. My skin burns quickly and develops very painful blisters that heal as scars, as you may have noticed, so I avoid the sunlight. You must know for sure that Gothic style is the height of fashion right now. I cannot neglect the inspiration from the works of Shakespeare either.”

Stunned, Matilda searched for a moment not only for the right response, but also for the next question.

"And... don't take it as bad manners, but may I ask about your husband and children?"

"I understand your curiosity. Poor Count Alfred Moore and I loved each other very dearly. He did not only protect me, but also fully supported me in my passion, even my obsession with the Middle Ages. He gave me a free hand in coming up with the architecture of this mansion and he even helped me choose the furniture," nostalgia showed on face of the woman, but she was still smiling. "A real man. However, he became ill and died before the completion of our dream house. Our only son is a proper man like him. Despite his busy schedule, he also finds time for his mother."

Matilda looked around again in silence, wondering, how could this frail woman fall asleep in such a building in such a place without a sense of terror?

"But the gloom and darkness. Who would willingly...?" she mumbled.

The older woman began to laugh. "As I already said, miss, darkness and the colour black are not only an obligation for me, but I simply like them. The uniqueness of the mansion and its furnishing is a full expression of me, my style and what I like. You must admit that such an architectural gem cannot be built in the city, it has to stand alone on the edge of the forest to complete the mood. Now, if you'll excuse me..." the Countess slowly got up and left.

Lady remained in the lounge alone in her deep thoughts. So it wasn't a life of tragedy? She did not even look very sad, and after all she probably had company, so there is probably no danger of loneliness. It is certainly her terrible style that separates her from the rest of the town. If she decorated it a bit for her and brightened it with beige or pink, it would certainly not be so gloomy here and the others would not be afraid of her!

The sound of footsteps pulled her out of her thoughts. Matilda got up and looked around, but she froze immediately.

The gloomy Countess stood in the doorway with a sword in her hand.

The younger woman stood motionless in complete shock. Her mind stopped entirely for a moment, but as soon as it began to work, the first thought that came to her were Mrs. Cunningham's words. Henrietta Moore was a witch.

But the older woman laughed. "Good jest, wasn't it? You must have thought I was some kind of murderer, or even better, a witch!" Still laughing, she handed the sword to a servant.

Matilda, still frozen in place, laughed nervously. "Thank you for the invitation, but I'll probably go..."

The Countess watched as the young woman ran away from the property and when she was in the courtyard, she shouted after her, "You are not the first person who misunderstood me and wanted to change me, Miss. I just try to live the way I like it, without having to confess to anyone, change someone else or hurt them. Why don't you first look at yourself and see if you live by the same principles as me?"

II.B

Flying Away

by Korenélia Čačíková

“That will be seven euro,” the taxi driver says, as he drops off a peculiar lady at the airport. She hands him ten through the window and hurriedly runs inside.

She catches lots of curious eyes. Eyes of people who are standing in lines to either check-in or simply drop their larger language off. It is not like they have never seen a woman being late for her flight and running through the airport. But they have never seen a woman running through the airport in her pajama's.

But when you are running for your life, you do not care what people are thinking about you.

She reaches a desk with a lady standing behind it. For the lady working there dressed in uniform and with a nametag attached to it, claiming that her name is Sandra, this is not an everyday experience at her job. She asks for the passport and boarding pass. According to the passport, the pyjamas wearing lady's name is Anna Melky. Sandra gives her a brief look.

Anna's long wavy uncombed hair seems to be dyed into darker brunet tones. Her blue eyes are constantly moving, and her trembling lips are still trying to catch a breath. Anna is wearing snow white and ocean blue colored long-sleeved pajamas. Along with it she has only a very small bag whose size is enough for a wallet and important documents needed for the flight.

Sandra is not exactly sure what to think, so she simply hands Anna her passport and boarding pass and wishes her a safe flight.

Once Anna finally finishes her tour through the airport and goes through every control that there is, she hops on the last airport bus and relaxes for a bit. Never though escaping confused looks of some passengers. But even after the bus reaches their plane, they do not comment on anything.

Coming with the last bus, Anna is not surprised to find the plane almost full. In the turmoil of everything she did not have time to check her seat number, so she does it now. Now looking for 11A she moves through the plane. Finally finding it, she sits down with a sigh and throws her baggie under the seat in front of her.

Finally. She is flying away. Away from him. The man that claimed that he loved her, but in reality, he just used her. The man who would beat her instead of listening to a reason. The man who almost killed her.

But right now, the plane is taking off and Anna can rest at last. She does not have to worry about a thing. She is flying to Vienna to see her friend. The friend she should have listened to from the start, when it came to her love relationship. The one and only true friend, who suggested they start living together. Same old friend, same home, but a new life, new start.

Once the plane lands and Anna manages through all of the last controls, she hears a familiar voice calling out her name: “Anna!” The smiley face and the blue eyes sparkling with joy, the blonde hair, that is longer than Anna remembers. Her.

“Mary!” Anna shouts as she runs to hug her dear friend. They stay like that for a while, and then Anna whispers a small “missed you”. To which Mary responds by her hand patting Anna’s messy hair.

“There is so much I have to ask you,” says Mary, now rubbing small circles on Anna’s back. “And the first thing I’m going to ask is...,” Mary chuckles, “why are you in your pyjamas?”.

Stalking inspiration

by Norbert Pavlíček

Two souls that were lost in the night went their separate ways. Through a dimly lit street in the middle of the night, while being hopeful about tomorrow, I went. I slowed my pace to enjoy stars that were as far as they were grandiose, poetic and mysterious. And that realization, that outward observation gave me an idea for my project that I had been neglecting. It is not too surprising that I was mesmerized by the sky. After all, I had the name Ziggy Stardust stuck in my head for months. So, after entering home that covered him from the cold and breeze he was excited by all these great ideas and possibilities but he was too tired to write them down.

After stretching and trying to remember the lost goldmine of ideas, he came to the conclusion that he wasn't at the verge of greatness after all. He spent an hour or two in bed reminiscing about that feeling of triumph of creativity. With no ambition left he slowly chewed away his lunch and sat behind the screen. Where for hours he stared at Word that was filled with nothing but white. Not one letter was pressed, not a single idea was born. When the clock was closing in on midnight, he finally gave up and launched his favorite game of the last while. When suddenly he got a message. Do you want to go to an underground metal concert? Between the matches he responded. Yeah. After that sluggish day he went to bed at 4 in the morning.

Waking up at noon. Still trying to come up with something decent. He got up and brushed his teeth and sat down to eat. In one hand a fork in the other his phone. He consumed content rather than his breakfast/lunch (one could argue about what it was). Moment turned to hour, hour turned to three. After casually checking time he dashed out from the dream made by 3 colors, his phone and in 10 minutes he was ready to hear some local underground bands.

He was led to an unassuming square. In the little corner there was an unassuming door covered in graffiti. Behind which was a world that society deems too weird and not as admissible. It was the polar opposite of what your mother would approve of. Every inch of the restroom was layered with tags and stickers. I was stunned by this universe of like-minded people, same ideals, same message. Suddenly lights stopped glowing, the noise stopped sounding, the instruments stopped being lonely and the stage stopped being empty. It is not possible to hear something comparable from the internet. I felt this liveliness that had been lost for many months. I was thinking to myself. This is it, this was what was missing, this is the inspiration I needed. Between the sets I wrote down everything from how people dressed to the way they did acoustic in the run-down cellar. I even considered how much they

sweated, how there wasn't any fresh air, how they combined jazz and metal, the way they talked, how much synergy they had.

He who was sitting in a wagon from the last century on the way back, was artistically fulfilled, he felt like he was on the top of the world. Oh, how he was wrong, how blind I was. He didn't know that tomorrow would end in vain. But with hope he went. Ecstatic about the future, so much to do, so much to create, so much to change and revolutionize.

Nothing was connecting. He was drowning in his mind. Stomping in the dark fog of yesterdays. Like he couldn't move a muscle, rotting from inside out.

Winter sun is closing on its finish line and he is seated behind his computer yet again. Cursor blinking at a steady rate. Trying to come up with something meaningful. When the sky started to change colors he decided to go out, to the nice vantage point. Lonely tree overlooking the whole city.

The sky stopped with the transitions, at least for now, cold wind smashing against his cheeks. He then climbed the tree. And started thinking. Looking at the horizon for something worthwhile. But everything was so boring, it was all discovered. So, with every other option depleted, I started to dive into myself. Every mistake, wrong decision, cringe moment. All of those weren't pleasurable but they weren't haunting. The haunting memory was the 3 words that he never said out loud. Long time ago when tigers used to smoke I fell for a girl. I thought it was obvious, I may have been wrong. I believed that everything would work out. I was led to believe that it would be easy and that she would also feel the same way. I started to believe that I didn't have to do anything. Now she is on the other side of the world with the one for her right beside her.

Winter moon finished its marathon as the sky started changing colors yet again. And a wall of text in my screen. A ballad written about my blindness and ignorance, cowardness and passivity. And one last thing kids, you shouldn't let beautiful films with beautiful endings lie to you.

III.A

The Story Does Not End at The End by Stella Krivičková

If we accepted that we are not alone in the universe, we would be one step closer to discovering new worlds. Worlds like Novus.

People on this planet did not yet know modern technology or electricity, but they had something much better. These people focused on nature and universe. And one day he gave them the power of light. They could grow plants faster or heal injuries. But there was a catch, their power weakened with each sunset, and some even disappeared for a certain time, but with the first rays of the morning sun, magic flowed through their veins again. This is so that people never forget that there is a higher power than theirs, that is still watching them and has control over them. It maintained an impression of respect and mild fear in the people. Enough so that they don't dare to get into conflicts. The planet has been at peace for several millennia, without disease and famine. Everyone was happy.

Who wouldn't be? And what if there was someone for whom it would not be enough to only have partial power, for whom this "perfect world" was an indescribable suffering and prison.

Such a person, or rather a young lady, was in a small village near the forest. A few wooden houses, stone-paved streets, a square with a fountain. Shops with window displays at which passers-by looked curiously from the street. The sun was warming the sky and the birds were singing happily in the treetops. Their singing was suddenly interrupted by the short but distinctive sound of the bell, which announced the end of school. Immediately behind it was the crash of the door being thrown open and the stomping of feet rushing from school. When the whole herd had already dispersed into the alleys, a girl came out of the school with a professor next to her.

"Excellent work again, Miss Razilee. You make your family very happy," the professor praised her. "Thank you, Professor, but you are too kind to me. And please call me Nedra," answered the girl, and she too went home.

Nedra Razilee, a girl with a slim figure, pale skin, strawberry red lips and brown wavy hair down to her knees, wore a light blue dress and a backpack with textbooks. Everyone in the village knew her, she was the model of perfection that other mothers happily use when saying "Why can't you be more like her..." Little did they know that it was just a pretence, a show. After all, who would enjoy smiling all day as if nothing happened. But in reality, nothing really happened anyway. Every day was like cut out of a postcard. Here and there, children broke a shop window with a ball or someone fell off bicycle and broke their arm. But nothing more, and it was killing her. If it weren't for her parents, she would have disappeared somewhere long ago, and she didn't care where. This whole show was just for them to be proud of what a perfect daughter they have. After all, she was raised to be obedient, patient and modest. This was exactly the character that Nedra had been playing for the villagers for years. She knew that her parents would not take it mentally if they found out that their upbringing had almost literally the opposite effect. Deep down she hated having to wait for something or being denied

something. It may seem that Nedra was spoiled, but she rather called herself ambitious and goal-oriented.

After arriving home, she immediately went to her room, lay down on the bed, and a small ball of bright light appeared in her hands. Nedra was changing her shape and glow, trying to understand how her power could become even stronger. Time passed, and with the setting sun, the ball in Nedra's hands began to lose its brightness and slowly shrink and flicker. She tried with all her might to keep it shine. She couldn't do it and the ball disappeared from her hands. She knew she had powerful magic within her, but she was overcome with a sense of helplessness every time the sun went down and she couldn't create even one small ray of light. When neither exercises nor other commonly known advice for maintaining magic helped, Nedra resorted to searching for wisdom in old books she borrowed from the ancient section of local library. But she found no advice in them, only ancient history and fables about the first people to whom the universe gave magic. It was written there that these people were in harmony with nature and some herbs helped them partially control magic.

"Maybe if I found the plants I would gain more control. I have nothing to lose anyway," thought Nedra, and since she was busy with the theatre during the day, she decided not to delay it and set out for the forest right away. She took a book with pictures of plants in her hand and tied a dagger to her belt, the fact that she had no abilities did not mean that she had to be completely defenceless. She sneaked out through the window and lit a candle to see the road.

Most of those plants grew near water. The river was only few meters from the beginning of the forest. When she came to the river, she put the candle on the stone, opened the book to the page where were the pictures of herbs and started looking for them. Every now and then she plucked a flower or a leaf and compared it with the picture, and when it matched she put it in her pocket. Suddenly there was a rustle in the distance. Nedra grabbed the candle and spun around "Who's there? Show yourself!" But no one answered. She thought she was going crazy, but as soon as she put the candle back on the stone there was another rustle, this time louder, it was getting closer. Nedra decided that the herbs she collected would be enough. She quickly grabbed the candle, put the book under her arm and took the dagger in her other hand. She turned to go back, but in doing so she noticed something glistening in the candlelight. Two shiny balls were approaching and suddenly they rose from the ground. Only then did Nedra realize that they were eyes, bear eyes.

A bear's roar echoes through the forest. Without thinking, Nedra started to run. She ran fast and far, but she felt something huge rushing behind her. How she wished she had her powers back. She knew that she would not run away from the bear. So, she started screaming at the top of her lungs "Help! Someone helps me!" Even though she doubted that anyone would be out at this hour of the night. And then someone grabbed her hand, a man, there was a faint flash of light, but apparently strong enough to deter the bear from further pursuit.

"Are you OK?" Leo asked. "Yes. Thank you, I don't know what I would have done if you showed up a minute later" she replied gratefully. Leo was one of the few from whom the sunset did not take away their power, it only weakened them. "What were you even doing here," he asked curiously. "And what were you doing here?" They exchanged looks that clearly said "I won't say anything when you won't say anything". After this exciting experience, Nedra wanted to return home as quickly as possible, and Leo insisted that he had to accompany her in case the bear returns.

When they saw the light from the windows of Nedra's house, Nedra thanked him once more and said that she can handle it from here. Nedra knew that when she enters, they would immediately ask her where she was and what happened to her, because she looked as if she had run marathon, which was not far from truth. Aware of the risks, she opened the main door and stepped inside.

At the second, her mother jumped in front of her with surprised, horrified expression. "Where have you been? What happened to you? How do you look?" she bombarded her with questions. "I'm fine mom. Just a little accident in the woods. But Leo was there and he helped me and walked me home. It's really nothing you need to know," Nedra said with a fake smile. "But..." "If you allow me, I would like to go to bed," Nedra interrupted her and immediately went to her room. There she took out the herbs she collected and carefully hid them. She spent the following weekend alone in her room studying them. Her parents went to town so she had some time to herself. She only went out on Sunday for lunch with her parents.

"Nedra, we'd like to talk to you about something," her mother suggested. Nedra knew it couldn't mean anything good. "We were going to thank Leo's parents personally for saving you. Leo didn't say anything to them either. And in between the tea, the topic came up that you are a beautiful young lady and that Leo is also a handsome young man and that," she was interrupted by the sound of Nedra's spoon that had just fallen on floor, "that you would make a good couple. Both his parents and Leo would agree to the wedding, and we... we agreed too."

And that was the breaking point. Nedra could no longer pretend her good upbringing hearing the last words. "You've gone completely crazy! I'm supposed to marry Leo! I barely know him and I don't even like him! Only over my dead body!" With her last words, she stood up, ran to front door and closed it sharply behind her. She started running, she didn't even know where. She was so angry that she didn't pay attention to road. And so, after walking for a while, she bumped into a random passer-by.

He remained standing but she fell to ground. "Hey, watch where you're going!" Nedra said angry. He didn't say anything, he just went on. "Hey, you..." Nedra was ready to start cursing at him, but she noticed that there was some book lying in front of her, "you must have dropped the book," she stood to hand it to him, but when she turned, no one was there. Weird.

As she stood there with a book in her hand, the wind started to blow so violently that it began to turn the pages of the book. It stopped on the page on which was written in decorative black letters the Power of the Night. With a sparkle in her eyes, she read on, it said that this ritual will help people with daytime power use power that would only work at night, with their daytime power remaining.

She was so intoxicated by the idea of power, she was not thinking. "Vis noctis tenebrarum te accerso. Fieri pars mei," she began to read and a circle of dark shadows surrounded her, but she could no longer stop, her lips moved on their own, "Reple animam meam. Sitque mihi pars universi." Her hair turned black, her eyes were filled with darkness, and an incredible noise was heard, which turned into silence. The whole world flashed before her eyes, but she saw nothing. "Where am I. What's going on," she felt as if hot lava was flowing through her veins. A deep voice spoke "You are nowhere and yet everywhere. You have combined the power of light with the power of night, such great power is not possible in the ordinary world."

"Wait, so I'm dead!" Nedra declared horrified.

"You're not. You just advanced to the next level. Enormous power is within you. Before, you had the power of light, you were just a small part of the universe, but now the universe is a part of you. Like me. Now we are the universe."

IV.D

Late Night Gods

by Sára Kollárová

It takes me one look at the scarlet blood running down my thigh to calm me down. To some it might seem strange, upsetting even, but all I can feel is relief and satisfaction. I know it is not a healthy way to cope. However, it makes me relax a bit. Okay, a lot. I am bewitched by that look. You, my dear reader, are probably asking how I ended up in a situation like this. Let me tell you a story. You see, I have always been an average girl. By any means. I look ordinary, I didn't stand out in school which made me think that I was a ghost. Like I was not real and anything I would do would be of no consequence. If only I knew back then how wrong I was. The thing is that I made a deal with Shadow. You would like to know who Shadow is, wouldn't you? It's a creation made of despair. Frustration. Fear. And it likes to play with dumb human beings or with people who have no other option than to sell their soul. It appears differently to everyone. To me it was a boy. He seemed younger than me, but there was something off about him. Maybe it was the dark aura surrounding him. Or maybe it was the stillness of that night. It doesn't matter now. The moonlight was shining with owls and bats flying over my head. It was one of those nights when my mind wouldn't shut up and the only way to silence it was to walk to my favorite place - the nearby forest. When I got there, I sat down and looked at the moon. Exhaustion was falling over me. My eyes were closing. But then, suddenly, I saw him. A little boy with black hair falling into his face. His bright blue eyes were hypnotizing. Everything around me disappeared. It was just the two of us. I got a weird feeling about this. Boys his age should be sound asleep in their beds and not be wandering through a forest around this late hour. "Did you get lost?" I asked the boy. He cocked his head to the side but didn't answer. It was like he was studying me. "Ugh, hello?" I tried again. A hint of a smile. Shiver went down my spine. There was something wrong. Perhaps if I stood up and ran I could have prevented all those bad things from happening. But I didn't. I stayed. And it was the greatest mistake I had ever made. I didn't realize it but when I stood up, I found myself in close distance with the dark-haired boy. "Hey buddy. Are you

okay?" Concern was visible on my face. For a while everything went quiet. Then he shot me a wicked grin. "Why wouldn't I be?" Okay, he obviously could speak. That was great news. "Well, I don't know. You looked like you needed help," I stated. He ignored me and went past me. No, not past. Through me. I got sick. I could hear blood rushing through my veins. My body went weak and I fell on my knees. "Who - what are you?" my voice trembled. Its laughter filled my ears. It shot me a vicious look. "Aren't you an interesting thing?" Those bright blue eyes were cold and cruel. "I have many names. I'm old as Time is, some call me devil, some call me their savior, even god!" Its laughter gave me creeps. And that was the moment I knew I had messed up. Maybe Shadow saw the realization on my face because he said: "Huh, so you've recognized me, haven't you?" Shadow was part of a myth in my town. My grandma used to tell me stories about Shadow. She told me about this creature living in our forest which could take any form to lure us in and make deals with it. She said that Shadow could make any of your wishes come true but the cost you would have to pay... with something, many times even with someone, closest to your heart. And if you somehow managed to avoid this part of the deal, it would come for you. It wouldn't kill you. It would make you go mad. Slowly. Painfully. You would hurt yourself. Badly. But you wouldn't die. It really doesn't want its victim dead. It's just... It wants to push you over the edge. So you lose yourself. And that's how it still lives. It is a living Chaos. My grandmother was a really clever woman. She knew everything about him. I always wondered how. But I never got an answer. "You are Chaos... but my family calls you Shadow." I managed to say. An inhuman smile sent my way. Oh God... "You are probably thinking why I am here tonight." I sat there, completely frozen. Seemingly clueless. However, deep down I knew. I made a deal with Chaos. If I weren't already damned, I would curse myself. But... how? It was like Shadow was able to read my mind because it went on: "Oh, my dear Victoria, you forgot that easily?" I was not surprised it knew my name. "Let me help you with that." The blue-eyed demon came closer to me, bent a little and kissed my forehead. My head began to spin. All my suppressed memories came back rushing to me. Not that long ago I was a kid. A pretty lonely kid. I didn't have any friends. My only company was my mother and grandma. My mom was really ill which meant that I spent most of my childhood with grandmother. Her stories remained my/kept me company even after she passed away. But I always liked to romanticize things. All her warnings were meant to keep me from making deals with Chaos. How dumb of me for not listening to her. One year it was/got truly hard. My mom was getting worse. It looked like she wouldn't make it. I remember running to the woods, calling out Shadow believing it would help me. I knew tears were streaming down my cheeks. I was a kid whose

mom was dying. All I could feel was desperation, I needed help and I needed it fast. My grandma used to say: "Never pray to gods that answer after dark. Even when things seem unbearable, don't do it!" I hoped she would understand my situation. If there were any chance to save my mother, I would take it. And I did. "Shadow, please, come out! Please!" I cried out. Nothing happened. "Please, Shadow!" "You need to give Chaos your willing blood," said a voice. I turned around but saw nothing. It seemed stupid and I still don't understand why I listened, but I did as I was told. I drew a little knife out of my pocket. If you are asking why a kid keeps a knife you should visit these woods. Then you wouldn't be surprised. I put the blade to my palm and cut it. I hissed. What should I do now, I thought. "Let a few drops of your blood fall on the grass," the voice appeared again. I did. Everything around me went still. A boy's voice came from behind me: "What do you want?" He sounded annoyed. I turned to face him. His eyes were bright blue and his hair was the darkest shade of black. "What do I have here?" he asked. "My name is Victoria and I'm looking for Shadow." "The name's Chaos but Shadow can work too." I was so shocked. My mind wasn't able to comprehend that. "B - but you're just a kid! Like me!" I screamed. He sent a dangerous smile my way. "And you're just a frightened little girl trying to find yourself in a world full of monsters." I didn't understand him. Monsters are real? "What is the reason you came here to me?" he asked, seemingly bored. "I want to save my mother from dying!" I said with all my courage. Which wasn't a lot. "And what can you give to me in return?" "Take me instead of her," came out of me. I'm not sure if I meant it. Shadow clearly didn't believe me. "Such a heroic act! I'm not really interested in those kinds of things." "Then what do you want from me?" He put a finger to his mouth, as if deeply in thought. "In exchange... You will have to pick another person that dies." He told me with a victorious smile. As a kid I didn't give that much credit to what he said. I just wanted to save my mom. So I took his hand in mine and shook it. "Deal." "Good. Now Victoria, remember I'll come back for my payment." And after that, everything was fine for a few years. My mom got better but she changed. She became distant. Our relationship weakened. I thought it was because of me growing up. As time passed by, I suppressed all my memories from that one night. But then Shadow brought them back to me. And all I felt was horror. What the hell have I done? Chaos brought me back to reality by stroking my cheek. "My, my. Why are you crying now?" it asked without any empathy. I highly doubted Shadow was capable of that. "Why do you want someone to die?" An arrogant grimace changed its face. "We made a deal. I saved your mother for you, which means that now you're in debt. And all I ask for is something of the same value. Another life." "But that will make me a murderer. I'll become a monster just for your sake?!" I shouted.

Shadow laughed viciously. “No, not for my sake. But your own,” the boy shook his head at me. “Don’t tell me Adeline/your grandmother didn’t warn you against praying to me. She wouldn’t let anyone repeat her mistake. By the way, she called it a mistake. I called it a convenient business.” An apple appeared in the demon’s outstretched hand. It took a bite and then spat it out. “The hell!” Chaos looked at me and shot me another deadly smile. “What do you mean by my grandma’s mistake?” My voice shook. “Oh, she didn’t tell you? What a shame! You know, she used to be young too. And she really was vibrant with life. Until one of her sisters fell into a river and drowned. She was devastated. And only desperate people, or really dumb ones, ask for my help.” “She wished she would never witness another death in her family. But she didn’t mention bringing them different types of illnesses.” The devil’s blue eyes shone with inner fire. “You should be lucky. All you have to do is pick another person. And then you can live happily until you die.” I fought the demons in my head. I wanted to live. I wanted to see everything that this world had for me. I was no hero. I have never been one. I saved my mother’s life because I didn’t want to be left alone in this world. But why should someone else die because of me? I don’t think I will be able to live with that. I got lost in my head. “What do I have to do?” I finally asked. Chaos shot me a smile but this time not vicious but pleased. “All you have to do is cut yourself, but this time the wound needs to be bigger. Cut your thigh and say this phrase.” Then the so-called-god leaned in and whispered... And that’s the reason I’m here, sitting on the cold ground of the bathroom with a razor in my hand. The warm blood running down my thigh has some kind of a magical effect on me. I watch it bleed silently. But I am not alone. You are there with me sitting in front of me with a void in your eyes. Then I’ll say a few words that you’ll repeat after me and your soul will be given to Shadow. The future of your soul is uncertain. But it doesn’t matter. I open my mouth and say: “Never pray to gods that answer after dark.”