

LETTER TO OGYGIA

by Yanitsa Radeva

translated from the Bulgarian by Christopher Buxton

Ten minutes. Sometimes five. That's how long his rapture lasts. From the beginning in the Prologue, his look is somehow solemn, joyful, his glances over there, where he expects her to appear, register things as he wants them: the street, its mood suffused by a recent shower, which will set the scene of hands sinking into each other, intimately. The reflection of buildings on her photochromatic lenses and later – their paling in the shade of the room where her eyes will appear, black as cherries, enough to lose a man in their blackness, sweet, melting. The clock steadily counts the seconds of the first minute like cherry stones and spits them on the pavement. At the third, mostly at the fifth, doubts begin, he reminds himself of the place, the agreed time, compares the facts – and somewhere in the middle of the sixth, his toes mark the first nervous taps. The seventh brings the first reproach for the no show. The curtain rises on the next act. Gradually, the black eyes lighten, already they are not so dark, become brown, matt brown, impassable, alien. And they become like all other eyes, sending out glances in the street. This is happening, while she is trying to hold for the green traffic light a hundred metres further down. His fingers tap out the number of her mobile phone to give her one last chance to restore his image of the cherry blackness of her eyes. And just as she hears the insistent ring tone of the man with a special place in her phone book, the light changes to green. She hurries to catch up the lost minutes. When she arrives at the end of the tenth, Reproach has appeared on the stage. He is cloaked in an impenetrable sulk and if at all possible doesn't look into her eyes which peep from behind her photochromatic lenses. Yep, I say, his rapture lasts ten minutes.

"What are you drinking?" he asks in the café a little later, his voice still coated in hurt, disappointment with me while I am wondering where to put my jacket, my bag, my very self. However, while I am wondering where to put myself, somehow I don't feel guilty. While I meekly stir the sugar into the black tea, still there comes no feeling of guilt. I mean, don't women wait and wait, I begin to ponder. Every woman has her Penelope element. And why don't men wait sometimes or will that emasculate them?

And since man's love lasts just so long, I ask myself, without him can't one write at least one novel.