

**RIVERBANK**  
by Krassimir Damianov

translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

The sun was setting behind their backs, and the shadows were creeping ahead, when with slack oars the child and the man in the boat silently followed the movement of the banks, and the river spread wide and smooth before them, torn only by the dark-green wedges of the islands. At dusk, shortly before nightfall, when the first moths were circling above the water and the bank grew white with their wings, the child asked: “What are those?”

“Dayflies,” he recalled.

“Why are they called that?”

“Because they only live for one day.”

“Only one day?” The child said in disbelief. “Where are they flying to?”

“They’re rushing to get back to the shore,” the man explained, “and then they drop and afterwards the river comes and floods the shallows.”

“Why are they in pairs?” he asked, pointing. “What do they do before going back to the bank, dad?”

“There’s a game like that,” the man smiled. “You go around and around in a circle, then you pick someone and spin around with them. Do you know it?”

“Yeah, I know it. What happens after that?”

“Nothing,” the man said. “There’s the bay. Turn towards the bank carefully!”

The man steered the boat towards the willows and the oars creaked in his hands.

“I don’t want to go to the bank!” the child said and curled up in the boat.

“Listen, we need to get out and light a campfire... We’ll get some sleep and then continue on tomorrow...”

“Can’t we sleep in the boat?”

“It gets cold at night,” the man said. “What are you afraid of?”

“Nothing. But if they don’t go back there, what happens to them?”

“Look me in the eye.” The man touched the child’s bare shoulder and hugged him. “You feel sorry for them – am I right?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re scared over nothing. When you grow up, you’ll understand,” the man said. “They

live only a very short time. One day. But that is enough for them, believe me... Because unlike us, they don't know that there is yet another and another and another day!

“It doesn't matter, I don't want to go back to the bank! Just one more day!”

“Fine,” the man sighed. “One *night*. Make sure you're wrapped up tight.”

Then he let go of the oars, the boat parted the willows and the river once again carried it away on its current...