

NINE RABBITS
EXCERPTS FROM PART TWO
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translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

Corset

Tomorrow my husband turns forty. What can I give him when he already has everything? I'll give him myself.

I go and buy a black corset with garters, stockings and the most whorish pair of red high heels in order to erotically jumpstart our snoozing seven-year-old married life. That evening we go to another birthday party at the luxurious home of a famous poetess and critic whom the literary moguls hover around. I've put on the corset, I'm not wearing panties under my luxuriant skirts and while we discuss the problems of hermeneutics and the third phenomenological reduction to maintain erotic tension I discreetly masturbate on the armrest of a chair that the director of the Institute for Contemporary Art has nestled into.

I'm terribly tempted to strip down to my corset. Nobody realizes how close I am to acting on my fixation. These guys are obsessed with expressing themselves. I imagine how their dicks are hanging despondently in the darkness of their pants, having drained all their eroticism in the direction of tongues hopelessly entangled in perfidious analysis. Thus we get sloshed without realizing it. Especially my husband (what's gotten into him?). I can't stand it any longer and pull My Girlfriend into the bathroom to show her. I hike up my skirts and she just about runs down the drain. We giggle, whisper and drop our glasses. People try to force the door from the outside, give up and run to puke and piss in the courtyard. After midnight, having managed to pick fights with half the illustrious critics, which further inflames the intellectual lust of the evening, I leave with my husband, who has already staggered into his fortieth year. We brush our teeth together and gloat over some of the evening's details. He sloshes his way towards the bedroom, while I remain in the bathroom to freshen up and put the finishing touches on my plan. I come out in my full regalia. In this get-up, I leave our apartment, slam the door and go to the landing between floors where I had earlier hidden a huge bouquet of Bordeaux chrysanthemums. Then I go back and ring the doorbell to complete the delivery.

I stand there in my red high heels, corset, stockings, bare ass and beaver, my top half hidden behind the Bordeaux. I deeply inhale the aroma of the graveyard – that's how I see chrysanthemums. They are my teachers in the love of life. I prick up my ears to catch the sound of movement from inside the door. Nothing. I ring again. Silence. Just the moist graveyard fragrance and the stoicism of my red high heels.

How could I have slammed the door shut? I don't give up and ring again. I can't believe it – yet another stumble into the absurd! Well, at least I have good taste.

My husband slumbers away drunk and aesthetically exhausted from hours of verbal battles. I pull over my neighbor's coconut welcome mat and sit down gingerly as it prickles. Three o'clock in the morning. He's sleeping the deep hearty sleep of a man of forty and I'm sitting bare-assed on the steps in front of my own apartment.

Pounding on the door and yelling isn't an option – how could I explain it to the neighbor lady, the wife of the chief prosecutor of the Republic of Bulgaria – why am I here with my beaver hanging out with a huge bouquet trying to break and enter? The terror of humiliating myself.

Ringling the doorbell discretely at length seems stupid and exhausting.

All of a sudden I am terribly tired from this autoerotic exertion. I just want to end these theatrics and go to bed. The last thing I remember is the feeling of my bare legs under my light-blue flannel bunny pajamas.

First ending:

The prosecutor goes to play tennis in the morning and finds me asleep in this rather undesirable pose on his very own coconut doormat, covered in Bordeaux chrysanthemums.

Second ending:

I walk down the stairs, because the elevator is broken, and inevitably pass by the bodyguard of the head of parliament who lives on the second floor. The bodyguard gives me his overcoat in exchange for a blowjob and thus I arrive at my mother's, to whom I have no idea what I say.

Third ending:

I go down to the second floor, where at that very moment terrorists are kidnapping the head of parliament. I am the cherry on top of the whole story, transformed into a compromising figure. I make the front page of the newspapers in my corset.

Fourth ending:

In this naughty get-up, I ring the doorbell of my neighbor from the third floor whom I find very sexy as he takes out his trash, and cross my fingers that his lover hasn't decided to sleep over tonight.

Fifth ending:

Covered up in the bodyguard's overcoat, I go back to the home of the critic and her husband, the minister of heavy industry, since they at least have a sense for the absurd. They give me a t-shirt that reads: "Touch me and we go to bed together."

Sixth ending:

Screaming and pounding, I hurl myself at our door, waking up the entire apartment building and when the neighbors start arriving, my husband sleepily opens the door and murmurs, "oh, is it you?" and wanders back to bed...

Around noon he mischievously leans in close to me and quietly asks, "Uh, was I dreaming last night or did it seem to me that you were dressed in a rather unusual outfit..." "Oooh, you were dreaming," I tell him and roll over onto my other side. The corset was packed away. When I leave my husband years later, I start wearing it out to nightclubs in combination with a blue Chinese workmen's coveralls for excavation work. Pants, with men's patent-leather Pradas underneath, and the corset on top of everything with its garters hanging free of stockings.

The postmodern deconstruction of the fetish!

Two of the garters from that corset hung on one of the mirrors in my "Installation for Mirrors and People" that I put up at the Irida Gallery – the mirror had a dark red frame with black feathers and gold for added

splendor. To this very day those garters hang in Vesi Koeva's wine bar at the Military Club, while I gave a third as a gift to the host of the show "Dolce Vita," dedicated to erotica.

The fourth one disappeared.

Since there is no one to accept it hard and fast, the erotica breaks up and infects various objects with desires, which is in fact its style: from the presence of just one garter we imagine the other three.

Eroticism is in the unknown!

Fruit Geographies:

Make a dish of fruit. Peeled pears, mangoes and lichi are the most suitable, as well as strawberries, raspberries, cherries and melon.

Carefully arrange the slices on your lover's body and eat them slowly. From time to time share the taste of the fruit with your love object.

This snack is refreshing and sharpens the epidermis' sensitivity.

Paris

I'm in Paris. I'm studying French at the Alliance Française and using every second to decipher this world so new and unknown to me. Being absolutely anonymous has its advantages. I can think up whatever I want. I'm unfettered. Alone. I have to quickly become my own father and mother. I adopt myself.

I stroll around with a friend. A recent immigrant to France. He dreams of working on the Paris stock exchange. He blows glass in a workshop and studies finance. So as to bust into the matrix.

A truly hot Parisian day, when there's almost no boundary between the body's outside and inside. We drink all kinds of cold things on the café terraces, dip our feet into the lazy Seine, gape at the shop windows, exhibits and Japanese furniture stores. Good thing that the city pulls back along the river. We forget ourselves in the unbelievable space, sprawling on the stone parapets, we breathe with huge lungs and open sails, we cruise on a yacht towards the ocean ...

Paris is a monster. It sniffs out the monster in us and frenzied they rush ahead, backwards, up and around, ever hungry for new things... Thus we drag ourselves (my poor feet!) to the "Beaubourg," where there's a surrealism exhibit. I'm doubtful as to how much a revolution can be displayed in a gallery ...

I imagine how many floors we have to traipse through and plop myself down on the cobblestones a few meters from the one-legged clock in front of the Beaubourg. It's held up by a huge brass pedestal, which descends in a slight slant towards the cobblestones – a detail of significance to this story.

This is one of the liveliest places in Paris. In the morning you can play the intellectual here in one of the nearby café-libraries, where, while you "take" your coffee as the French say, you have at your disposal all the latest books, including the literary press with all its vanity and gossip. That is, if you're in the mood to play at being anything at all that early. It's enough just to close your eyes and let the scents carry you away. Mmmm, here are the chocolate-filled croissants, there are the brioche ... From the side streets wafts the smell of every delicious dish in the world, which immediately takes you back to grandma's stove. Thus transformed into a taste bud, you swoop down on the waiter who is freshening up the sidewalk in front of the restaurant with a bucket of water.

The water in Paris in the morning! It forms rivers along the sidewalks that carry away the dust and give an inimitable freshness – the day is beginning! The day in this city, which has gathered so many people and so much energy, lies ahead...

The late afternoon grants us long sun. The square in front of the Beaubourg is the place where you can always find someone to entertain you if you're bored. Fire eaters, strongmen breaking chains, mimes painted in bronze and frozen like statues, jugglers, magicians and singers. And, of course, thousands of pigeons.

We lie there with my acquaintance, absolutely given over to this Babylon. We're even too lazy to speak. In the pace of our wanderings we have already exhausted the topic of our ambitions and attempts to define what a wonder this city is ...

I watch the pigeons battling for seeds at the clock's foot and notice a bald pigeon with a rivulet of dried blood on its head. He is trying to climb up the sloping brass pedestal I mentioned earlier. His little red legs energetically gather speed and he manages to reach about halfway up, but after that he slides back down, where several of his vicious brethren peck at his injured head.

"Look, look," I nudge my friend. "Look at that! Is he crazy or what? Why doesn't he just fly?"

We sit there in amazement for a while. The pigeon stubbornly insists on walking up. Failing, he gets pecked back down at the bottom. And while we're wondering why he doesn't use his wings, I notice three Indians passing by the clock: two men and a beautiful woman. She is nearest to the clock. As they pass by the base, the woman gracefully bends down in her orange sari, scoops up the pigeon with two fingers, helps him climb up the pedestal and calmly continues on her way.

We watch.

Empty towards that which has taken place before our eyes.

Existence teaches us its lessons. I ask:

"Does being different mean getting pecked to death?"

"If you follow your path, you'll find helpers," my ambitious acquaintance reassures me.

"One thing is certain," I point out. "If you have wings and don't use them, they'll kick you down at the bottom."

We get up. Inside the Beaubourg a taxidermied surrealistic rebellion awaits us.

Premenstrual Syndrome

I've plunged deep into premenstrual syndrome. I've got heartburn. I eat chicken drumsticks. I watch the Hallmark channel. I'm bawling and find it hard to swallow the fact that I'm eating alone, watching dramas and bawling. I hate myself. And when I'm filled with hate I get uglier and look at least 30 years older. There's not a single tiny place on me or in the world around me that I like. PMS!!!

Six days loom in front of me on the calendar, marked in red – the days before it comes. I now note them as a public service announcement. On these days I eat a lot. Red soups, meat, chocolate. A deathly chill seizes me, I'm tired and I don't feel like giving anything to anyone. I just have a huge need for attention. I watch my loved ones with paranoia. Especially if they don't play their roles – loving me, cuddling me and being sweet. Oh, how I hate them if they have their own work to do. I want to torture them for years for it, to take away their most precious things, to poison them in small doses and watch them turning green. On these days the princess is a scabby vicious frog. There's no prince around who would love her when she's that green. And green. No one's love is that deep. All of sudden – and perhaps all the time? – the prince at hand is selfish, scared. I, too, get scared looking at myself – such a spiteful shadow, embittered, abandoned, needy and offering nothing except her cruel suffering... No one can keep you company during this suspense. It can only be imagined on the roof of some icy runaway train, a fugitive between Russia and America, diverted to a dead-end line.

What I'm trying to say is: I'm now leaving for Dominica and when I get back your stuff better be gone. I even curse him – I hope everything goes well for you, that you thrive, so that you get on with your own life and I don't see you anymore... During these times I am so easily wounded that I constantly chase him away. I know it. The next month I've already forgotten and by the time I realize it I've already chased him away again. But I don't take tranquilizers. I don't take drugs. I don't relax. I don't anesthetize myself. I sense life, accept its ugliness straight up. Especially during those six days of the month.

Otherwise there are some rose-colored glasses of serotonin, some mess of chemicals that slightly disguises the taste of hell. But stringing myself out my whole life just because of these six days a month? Uh-uh. Something in my throat is choking me. I go to unclog myself at the mineral baths.

Today, Monday, it's just me, an elderly lady and a few perky Roma women.

I hate Sundays, so I've come up with not working on Mondays – like the tail end of Sunday, like an expansion, a wriggling out of the pressure of EVERYTHINGSTARTSTOMORROW... What starts! Everyone pushes and shoves on that day, mutually canceling each other out. So Monday turns out to be like a second Sunday, while Tuesday comes like a double-crossed Monday. That's why you can't expect anything to happen then.

On just such a missing Monday I enter the mineral bath in Pancherevo. Generous tits, asses wander through the steam. The water gurgles. I will remember how to live freely. I will learn. Without pangs of conscience. Do I really deserve it? Shouldn't I be dragging the burden along with everyone else?

Outside the lake has frozen solid. Some fishermen, kids and puppies are pattering around. Bruegel... Inside the clean pools are steaming.

The water is good...

I sit by a basin in the corner. I'm using a scraper. Cleaning. Bits of old skin fall to the floor with a clatter. I look around to check if anyone can see through the steam. But who cares? At the baths everyone sinks into herself. That's why we're here. At some point the smiling elderly woman crops up next to me and says:

"If you're alone, why don't we scrub each other's backs... if you want to."

How could I not want to? I've only got one spot left in back, surely the dirtiest place of all. I look at her thankfully and soon I am squeezing fat red spots on her back. I can't leave them like that. I squeeze and squeeze. I force out whole horns. The woman is relieved and not in the least embarrassed. I scrub. After a while she scrapes me. And even adds afterwards: "Your back is nice and red – just like after a good massage." It's something like an apology for this bathhouse intimacy. We've become strangers again.

In Japan, where they don't even touch for "hello," in the evening first fathers and sons soak together, then mothers and daughters (in the same water?) in wooden tubs. They scrub each other, touch each other and chat naked. What've you got to hide when you're naked?

Travelers during the seventeenth century describe how in these parts women would spend whole days at mineral baths with carpets, food and servants. Ladies would choose wives for their sons there. Naked like that, rumors were really rumors... Well, small talk makes the world go round... And now they're going to make a ceremonial hall and museum out of the Sofia mineral baths. Good thing I gave a final little performance in the pool – five men on five women, so they made me out to be a proponent of group sex. Idiots! Whatever. Monday.

I soap myself up with rose soap. I scrub myself with a silk brush. I smear myself with two drops of patchouli in baby oil. While I'm wet. Rituals! I come up with a special massage – with my knees I rub my eyes and forehead, my whole face. I must look like a cat washing itself. The steam has thickly enveloped me. My sky is smooth, perfectly tailored, beautiful to the touch. Every place on me speaks to me...I'm ostensibly with others, yet I am separate. My favorite thing. Like in the library. We're all reading together, but different books.

Things brighten up a bit. I wonder if I couldn't arrange to spend a few hours at this bath next month when PMS seizes me, because I fall into a stupor and can't even leave the house. The time should be used somehow. To satiate the maw. I'm conscious. Awake in a way. I'm ready to fight this extreme lack of I don't even know what substances.

I'll invite my nieces over and we'll fatten ourselves up. To remember the joy before someone shit on me. Before womanhood weighed on me.

I could also clear up those days and sink into meditation: not looking anyone in the eye, not speaking for six days. Just following how the breath goes in and out of me.

Or else I could go and blow them on sex.

But in this condition I'm not much for being around people. Otherwise I really am in the mood for sex. In fact, when they reject me because I've started to prickle, then I really fall heavy into PMS. Sex!!! Once again we arrive at the question of the other. This is more difficult to arrange. He has to be willing, too. To spend six days in bed on command? OK, maybe not exactly six. In general, once it depends on the Other, everything gets messed up. Because he exists, he supposedly here, but he's not.

Maybe I could get by with regular masturbation in combination with the other elements of the program. The organization would be easier. But in the presence of the object of desire, especially in the face of lack of attention on his part, it immediately starts to look like abandonment and I again plunge headlong into depression. Fuck!

The problem is somehow connected to the love object. To my feeling of extraneousness. Not you. Not you. NO! My mother must have threatened me when I was a fetus with thoughts of abortion. And as I create my latest egg I sink into mourning as if curetting myself. Every month I hate that body that bloats up eggs and... then tosses them out. I don't want to let go, to part with, to force things out of me... During these days I hate with the hate of one forced to give birth... God damn it, that's the way I feel every time I

get pregnant. There hasn't been a single time when I've been happy about it. Only horror. At some invasion inside me. Pregnancy – always unwanted by the "father," too! How many years will I relive my mother's horror at being pregnant? My rebellion against femininity?

No, this has to end. I will take it on myself!

I watch them, the happy elderly women entering the bath, chattering about something and I envy them for their freedom. From the future which might contain their bodies. But is it any reason to be quite that happy?

On my way home I stop by Mr. Bricolage.* I buy light bulbs to replace the burned out ones. Rings for the curtain-rods. I realize the futility of this building up in the face of... destruction. Garlic and a cross against the dark power. A halogen bulb and a long one-legged lamp for the kitchen to shine in the direction of the dark gaping door... So here I am: I'm wondering whether to buy a bucket-shaped vase or a barrel-shaped flower pot, I try out a chaise longue. But I don't give two shits, you see, whether there's a chaise longue on my balcony at the moment or a light bulb above my fucking sink. I'm so sick of scribbling out lists and knowing that when I fix something, something else will immediately break. That's exactly what happens when I get home – I change the light bulb above the sink and the one above the vent burns out. I go to leave and start to give a chicken drumstick to the dog in the yard and the burned out light bulb slides out of the trash bag and smashes right in his snout. This kills his appetite and he takes off. I had already broken a dish that morning.

I want to let everything go

To finally let this egg go on its way

For the destruction to gush out of me. That's it

There are those days

The eggs break off, leave me, it's sad

Then when the blood flows I'm born again

My skin shines again, life is beautiful

Now what

I relax, breathe

The emptiness settles in. I don't struggle

I watch how I'm not dying

*Mr. Bricolage - A home improvement store chain.

Wedding

*Yesterday I packed away your flowered dress,
so as to forget you
Oh, Venice!*

*Katya and Flavio Zebonski
invite you to their wedding on July 15 in the village of Bozhentsi.*

Two days before their wedding I get divorced. A pure formality. I've been separated from my husband for four years already. The day before going to court, all my strength suddenly leaves me – true, it is 40 °C – I lie on the couch, listen to the water from my CD of natural sounds and sob. I sweat, sob, doze off, drink water, sob again and doze off again. Thus the evening finds me in a kind of daze.

The next day I put on a white shirt as if facing the firing squad, go and murmur a few things in front of a judge and we go our separate ways.

I walk along Patriarch Blvd and glance around to see what freedom looks like. There are no external signs. I go into Accessoire and buy a necklace of light blue stones, which seems to me the most appropriate color for freedom. On top of it I add a straw hat with the blue's gray nuances, a Queen of England style hat with a rose in front, and set off for the statue of the Patriarch with my head held high.

These emblems of freedom are marvelous accessories for the dress made especially for the Zebonski's wedding. It's already ready. How else to muddle through the pre-divorce crisis? Together with my seamstress, Tsenka, we create it from white linen, woven by hand from rough threads, sleeveless, straight to mid-calf length, with a plunging neckline down to my ass in back, while in front the bustline is in the shape of a heart with an unfinished hem. We simply let the threads hang here and there, leaving the cloth as it is. So the dress can be worn even without shoes.

I met Katya in Genoa. She was studying cultural studies at the Sorbonne and living with a famous Italian photographer who shoots for *Vogue*. One day she called up and chirped, "Mandichka, we're getting married!!!"

The evening before the wedding they turn up at my place. Katya is sick, out-of-sorts over the impending event, and he is silent. I chatter all sorts of nonsense at them, feed them. It's not like I have anything to say. I myself have just been banished from the institution of marriage, yet I sense they need me to take care of them. Especially Katya. I lay her down on the bed and massage her head, sing some lullabies, slather her with oil behind the ears and she drifts off.

The next day a caravan of cars sets off for Bozhentsi. When we arrive, Tsveta, a classmate of Katya's, assigns us to various houses. Her revenge on me (?!) is putting me in the farthest away house with a Jewish translator from Genoa in his suit with fraying sleeves and her former lover with his terribly disobedient Wolf. That's the dog's name – Wolf. The owner of the house is attempting to breed ostriches. They stroll around slowly and muddily behind a fence, reminiscent of Marquez' angel who fell into the henhouse and was stoned to death by the astonished villagers. It's warm. In the afternoon it rains profusely and it's like we're in freshly pee-soaked diapers.

We all eat dinner at the local pub: a couple of Serbo-Croatian conceptual artists, two love-struck actors from Argentina, one terribly selfish tenor with his fidgety wife, Flavio's sister, who shares his Circassian looks – short and bowlegged from raising horses – with her twenty-year-old daughter who drags around with her everywhere a two-year-old toddler whom her mother had given birth to before the father left them. They call the baby "Sex Bomb." There's Alessandro the Handsome, Paolo and his brother – sons of

the owner of the Inter football club – and some other people, but I don't remember anymore. There are also a lot of cats, whose numbers radically decline after Wolf's appearance.

We go back to our houses. I try to read, but the power goes out. The electricity in the air begins to flicker as if we're at a nightclub. Hot humidity swells up from everywhere. Tomorrow people are getting married, getting together, but I'm being attacked by fears, my teeth are chattering and I'm shaking all over: something irrevocable is happening. A kind of fatefulness hangs in the air. I'm stuck at the end of the world. Wolf is howling like the dead, the ostriches are bleating in their pen, while my two neighbors are shaking the house apart with their snoring. I have déjà vu. Collapsing houses above coastal precipices ...

That night I am the most ostracized person in the world in that room with lattice facing the river. The sound of the water doesn't soothe me. An ominous peal of thunder splits the sky and rain comes pouring down. Not drops, but torrents rush over the house. The river beneath it roars frighteningly. I hear choking from the next room. Someone is desperately struggling for a gulp of air. There's no sleep for me. I'm being punished.

Because I'm alone and because I'm not married.

Pam is at a casting call in Rome. Absences.

In the morning the sun is shining. As if nothing had happened during the night. Nature's innocence after the night's havoc is astonishing. The light comes and forgives everything. Everything. I wasn't the only one who had a nightmarish night. We chalk it up to the storm.

We drink coffee, eat marshmallow cream and scatter to see what is left of the village after the flood. Everything is still there: the church, the little store, the lovely courtyards, the pub and the irresistible freshness.

A collection of gigantic knives gleams in the noonday sun. Tsveta's jilted lover rushes to buy them, but the Jew somehow manages to distract him and they disappear into the pub.

In the afternoon we all head to Gabrovo for the wedding ceremony in the church. In front of the altar Katya is dazzling, at least two heads taller than Flavio, slender with flashing black eyes, in a skintight white lace gown with flowers and a long train in the back. Flavio already has five o'clock shadow. The priest takes two exquisite crowns but mixes them up, so hers slides down to her nose while his hardly stays on, but they don't move and don't breathe.

The ceremony reaches its peak. All of us made an effort to look good for the wedding. Later when we look at the pictures, we girls are like the queen's ladies-in-waiting: hats, gloves, jewelry. Alessandro, Flavio's handsome friend, has on a red uniform with epaulettes, white in the front with gold buttons and jeans on underneath. Slightly Johnny Walker, except for the indefatigable Italian smile. Paolo's brother, who along with his fifteen-year-old son moved to the Balkan Mountains near Troyan to live with the Gypsies, had gone to a flea market and outfitted them both with purple suits, yellow shirts and white shoes with pointy toes. Behind me the Jew is whining that he's nervous. He's the only one who admits it. Why we stress out so much over this wedding I don't know. I later read in a ranking that following divorce a wedding is the most stressful event. I shush him and pinch him, but he insists – if only we'd had a drink somewhere. Weren't you drinking all morning? Yes, but it wasn't enough for such an event, he complains. Katya and Flavio say "I do" and leave the church in a shower of coins and wheat. The bridal bouquet goes flying!

I don't fight for it. Thanks.

The wedding night begins slowly, with a heavy dinner served in the courtyard under the sturdy sycamores. Everyone has arrived, including a Lada full of my hard-partying friends who will be the DJs, while Paolo's gift to the newlyweds is a band of dark purple Gypsies. Lamb, wine, toasts to the parents and... light showers. People eat, have fun, the music is fantastic, we dance, the band is cooking. It gradually starts

raining harder. No one is surprised. Katya's parents are standing under two separate umbrellas. From a distance they could be mistaken for a pair of concrete deer. The evening rolls on. The rain is now pelting down. People ditch the food. The only way to get through this wedding reception is with dancing, so we give it all we've got. I decide to get rid of the white, far too innocent for this hour, and come back barefoot, wearing only a black slip and the blue symbol of freedom around my neck. They've put up a tent above the Gypsies so that their instruments won't get wet!

"Kyuchek* yourself!" yells the DJ.

The rain drowns the lamb in the plates.

Flavio's sister radiates unearthly sex. The tenor raises his voice, always placed above his wife, accusing her of flirting with Alessandro - and how could she not? The Croatians rediscover belly dancing under their European sediment, led, *figurez vous***, by Paolo's brother and his son, who haven't wasted their time in the Gypsy camp.

During the set breaks my DJs start in with "Sex Bomb." At two o'clock in the morning the baby Sex Bomb has no intention of sleeping through his uncle's wedding. Barefoot, in muddy diapers, he shakes his big head among the dancers and sings along with Tom Jones, "Sex bomb, sex bomb, baby sex bomb..." Flavio is leading an intense *horo**** off somewhere. His whole body is shaking. For the first time I see that legendary mix between Arabic, Georgian, Corsican, Greek and Bulgarian crouching and shouting. Nomads, herds and wolves breathe in his body.

Wolf also howls at the ostriches' pen, tied up and envious of the party. And his owner has gotten so drunk from love that he pukes on the sycamores in sharp spasms and falls under the tables to sleep. Tsveta also flirts with Alessandro. The warm rain pelts down. Mud. My hair flies around, free of any style. Warmth creeps up from my toes. We dance in anticipation of the Great Flood. This is how you should greet the flood, not with any arks.

The Argentineans call us one by one to dry land in the restaurant and ask us questions in front of a camera about our feelings on marriage, the newlyweds and love. We are serious. All of a sudden we must speak. When they drag me over, drenched with my slip sticking to me, covered in mud since I had fallen a few times, I tell them what I think about all those questions in the most non-existent language, but with absolutely meaningful intonation.

Around five o'clock in the morning the party has reached its climax when one of the concrete deer under the umbrellas moves, Katya's father comes over to me and with tears in his eyes begs me to rest for a bit so I won't be sick. I answer him with some cliché and he sits on a stump near the dance floor, his eyes fixed on me.

Before we disperse, a ferocious hunger seizes us, we eat the lamb out of the dishes, fish out the floating vegetables and stumble over Tsveta's jilted lover who has been stewing in his own sauce, a copy of Marquez's angel in the henhouse. We carry him off before the astonished villagers kill him.

At noon I'm awakened by beastly squealing, barking and cackling. I run out on the balcony and see that Wolf has finally broken into the pen and is devouring the ostriches.

The landlord, who clearly made an attempt to protect them, lies brutally bitten and screaming.

Buck naked, Tsveta's jilted lover flashes past me and jumps over the fence. There the Marquez-esque scene reaches new heights, as now there are two muddied angels, the chewed-up ostriches in the form of a classical chorus and Wolf in the role of the astonished villagers, which doesn't prevent him from lunging both at the chorus and the landlord.

I dash down and open the gate to the pen so the Jilted Lover can carry out the wounded. All that wedding angst had to come out somewhere.

Ambulances are called. The landlord's mother throws our luggage out of the house. My suitcase clobbers the Jew, who is pissing in the flowers, on the head. He staggers a bit, sits down on the steps and asks me

longingly if I happen to have a beer. The Jilted Lover locks Wolf in his Jeep, pays for the damage to the birds and we quickly leave the ostrich ghetto and its astonished inhabitants.

In the café, one by one the personages from the Zebonski's wedding appear, as if on stage.

The bow-legged sister has cleaned up the Sex Bomb and he is shining like nature after the rain. The Croatians are excitedly describing their new conceptual project – traveling around China in their own bus, and they invite us all to leave with them right now. Paolo shares intimate details about Azis's**** tour to Italy – he's crazy about our folk stars and has even built a Turkish bath in his house in Milan. The pair of deer sans umbrellas looks a bit livelier than yesterday.

The newlyweds themselves appear amidst applause. Towels full of ice, coffee, beer, sweets, pastries and sheep's milk are tossed around. Something has happened. We're slightly embarrassed after our unexpected intimacy at the celebration. We don't have a language to speak on the day after the wedding. We have large dark glasses.

Despite my terrible hangover, as I drag myself to the café, I notice French signs everywhere and coquettish boxes of purple and red geraniums in the windowsills, which, by God, weren't there yesterday. I am just wondering whether after so much emotional intensity these last few days I haven't suffered heavy depersonalization***** or a personality split, fallen into a dissociative fugue*****, when I hear Katya ask:

"Can I just ask where we are... or am I going crazy?" We look at each other over our dark glasses.

"Where are we supposed to be?" The Jew didn't quite catch this.

The Argentineans, experienced in Latin American magical realism, give a faint smile: "No, those weren't people, those weren't sideways Latino steps, perhaps we even reached..."

"Bullshit," my DJ friends laugh, "as of this morning a Swiss film crew is shooting a movie in Bozhentsi."

"Eh, that's what I call changing your film," snaps the Jilted Lover.

Tsveta is sitting quietly next to me and projecting some third film into space. Organizing a wedding is no small feat.

The international delegation scatters in all directions. Final good wishes to the newlyweds and we're off.

On the way back I gather sunflowers.

Free.

*kyuchek - (Turkish) belly dance

** figurez vous – (French) imagine

***Bulgarian folk dance performed in a line holding hands; dancers move in rhythmic steps to the side.

****Azis – a scandalous transsexual Bulgarian pop-folk singer

***** changes in the perception of the external world.

***** experience of real events of which the individual has no recollection.

At 46

She has a well-kept body, with a slightly poofy little stomach. Unlike before, she likes it a lot. She loves holding her small feet in her hands. Sometimes she gets so wrapped up in staring at her hands as they firmly grasp the steering wheel that she almost crashes at a stoplight. All this ecstasy isn't just to cover up the fear that her son is going away to study in London and that her boyfriend has film jobs outside Bulgaria more and more often. They are where they are, and they swoop down on her from time to time. That's how it is.

At 46, when loved ones leave, she can concentrate on herself or what's left of her. Because caring for others drives her life, when they take off she looks inside and sees a big gaping emptiness at home, the garden is overgrown with weeds, her role as mother has shielded her, torn her away from her responsibility to relate to herself. And to herself. And when those people jump on their horses and gallop off in all directions – one to study, the other to chase fame, yet a third to the beyond, and the front towards an Old Friend, Death, is suddenly laid bare then so much freedom pours down – freedom from her former roles and adrenaline that she'll gather speed, gather speed and take flight!

She no longer cares who ate what, when, where he is, what he's doing, if they're OK, did she give him all the right coping strategies, did she give enough, whether I made a mistake and so on. She's flying away into the unbearable lightness of being.

She wants to have everything that was put off all at once – she wants to ride horses. She struggles with the horse over the soft hills, hangs out in pubs for hours just as she is, in breeches and riding boots covered with hay and nobody calls to tell her to buy Coca Cola or chocolate on the way home anymore!

A meeting with acquaintances from twenty years ago, straight out of Madame Tussauds museum.

She travels. Mends her faith in life.

She tries all sorts of methods for wellness and healthy eating, drags herself to massages, starts going to an Ayurveda cooking class, draws, dances, writes.

She'll start singing. It's not that she doesn't get drunk on Corsican choirs and cries sweetly now and again... That's how her body feels the sorrow – sweetly, as her car moves through the soft hills outside the city like a May bumblebee. With the horses. For her, hugging them is the equivalent of hugging ten of her favorite creatures – such warmth and calm exude from their powerful necks. She isn't disgusted by the smell, or the blood when she splits her lip on the saddle, or the danger of subduing such a huge animal beneath her. Strength and calm afterwards on the way back.

Such is the progression of the sharp decline of various functions, before others appear. The fear of emptiness and of that which appears as it appears is terrible. When she is afraid, her face in the mirror is old and dark. She doesn't like it and avoids looking at herself. She thinks of herself as ugly all day, except for when she accidentally catches sight of herself and realizes that it's not true.

Who is afraid? – the yoga teacher asks and laughs – *who is the mother who is worried, who is worried?*
Ha ha ha!

Very funny!

Her body does not want to eat like before. She thinks up new breakfasts. Here are two of them:

Buckwheat breakfast:

Boil a handful of buckwheat. Add olive oil, lemon and salt to taste. Finely chopped hot pepper, tomato. Improvise according to the season – avocado, spinach leaves, bok choy, grated green apple, or a spoonful of cream. This breakfast is toning, filling and easy to digest.

Oatmeal breakfast:

Mix a handful of finely ground oatmeal with a little water and half a carton of yoghurt. Add raw sunflower seeds, almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts and cashews. Add a spoonful of ground linseeds and a spoonful of ground sesame seeds. Add sliced fruit to taste and several dried plums and raisins. This is an energy bomb that guarantees long-lasting carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and omega three fatty amino acids – important for building cells.

Her body also spits out her favorite clothes. She hosts a farewell party for her wardrobe – for two days she tries on all her clothes, remembering their straps, necklines and bows, all that she experienced while wearing them, and carefully packs them into paper bags. She writes her girlfriends' names on them. She looks at herself naked in the mirror – this shape needs different shapes. She buys champagne and fruit. She invites her girlfriends over – all young girls with amazing figures. They try on the clothes, strutting around in her feathers and romantic gowns. She watches them with envy. And joy, because her clothes will continue to cause thrills. Within a week new shapes and colors appear.

Shapes...

At 46 she knows that the ego is separate from the pulse of existence.

She knows what feeds the ego:

Judgment

Attachment

Comparison

"MORE"

Negativism

Pretension

Refusal to accept that which is

Battles

Thinking

Fears

She writes her fears on scraps of paper and sticks them up all over the house, so as to sanctify them regularly.

I am afraid:

That I am useless.

That they don't notice me anymore.

That if I'm not anyone's love interest and if I'm no longer of childbearing age that I'm not important anymore.

That my lips will get pleated up like my mother's.

That everyone will leave me.

That there is nothing left. Only silence and loneliness.

That which makes her life meaningful is:

Being in the here and now

Her calling

Being responsible towards that which she creates
Passing it on
Observing
Being conscious
Listening closely to the soul, to that buzzing within because,

**Inside of you it's always 6:30 in the morning
When the day is blushing, and your skin
Promises inhalation
The blood moves in leaps
Through your watered-down innards
Always distracted and behind schedule
Your ears already pick up
The whisper of scaly wings and
The tapping of a gigantic manicure on the sidewalk
But it's so noisy in the city**

It's noisy like that