

A close-up portrait of an elderly woman with short, wavy, grey hair. She has a gentle expression and is looking slightly to the right of the camera. She is wearing a dark blue or grey jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

Maruša Krese
Authors Catalogue



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The poet, writer, journalist, world traveller and humanitarian aid worker Maruša Krese was born in 1947 in Ljubljana. She studied art history, comparative literature and psychotherapy in Slovenia, the USA, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Between 1990 and 2012, she lived and worked in Berlin and Graz as a free-lance journalist and writer. In 2012 she moved to Ljubljana. She wrote several radio plays and radio features, mostly for the German and Austrian national radios. Her articles were published in magazines and newspapers, such as *Die Zeit*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *NZZ*, *TAZ*, *Lettre International*, *Manuskripte* and others. She received several awards, including the Slovenian literary award Fabula for her collection of short stories *Vsi moji božici / All My Christmases* (2008) and Milena Jesenská Fellowship for Journalists (2008). Her play *Der Wind geht gen Mittag und kommt herum zur Mitternacht / The Wind Blows to the Midday and Turns to the Midnight* was selected the best radio play of the year (1993).

When she lived in Germany and the war was raging in former Yugoslavia, she organized several initiatives to support independent media and peace movements in the region. In 1996, her humanitarian and cultural commitment and the establishment of ties between Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina won her the German Federal Cross of Merit, while in 2007 the female authors of the European project “Women with a Vision” listed her among 100 most influential women in Europe.



Following a grave illness, Maruša Krese passed away on 7 January 2013 in Ljubljana, soon after the publication of her first novel *Me? Scared?*

Her literature is characterized by autobiographical fragments from her daily life, shock and indignation at violence and destruction sparked by the war, high ethical standards and sensitivity, yearning, disillusionment and resignation, cosmopolitanism, displacement, and exile. She is an exceptionally direct and fierce portrayer of women's destiny and reality marked by pain, sacrifice for others, compassion, indignation, fury at the ruthless world, ageing and loneliness. Her emotional impulse is clearly expressed in her free verse and her characteristic melodic prose.

POETRY

2009 *Heute nicht / Danes ne / Not Today*

2003 *Yorkshire Tasche / Yorkshire torba
/ Yorkshire Bag*

2001 *Selbst das Testament ging verloren
/ Even the Testament Got Lost*

1994 *Beseda / Word*

Sarajevo, ljubavi moja / Sarajevo, My Love

1992 *Postaje / Stations*

1989 *Danes / Today*

Heute nicht / Danes ne / Not Today

in Slovenian and German (translated by Fabjan Hafner),
Drava, Klagenfurt, Austria 2009

The most suggestive motif is a ruined and abandoned city symbolizing not only great loneliness but also a shelter for someone who can find more peace in ruins than in beautiful, yet fake cities that know no suffering. Walking along “the boundary between heaven and hell”, the poet remembers painful things from her past and ruminates about wandering souls, thus expressing her diverse experiences in a unique manner.

Yorkshire Tasche / Yorkshire torba / Yorkshire Bag

in Slovenian and German (translated by Brigitte Struzyk),
Wieser, Klagenfurt, Austria 2003

Whoever has lived for more than several decades carries their baggage around with them. The Yorkshire bag is a bag for one’s life journey – it carries not only one’s favourite items but also a number of things that surprise the bag’s owner when she rummages through it. Letters, perfumes, stockings, certificates and dictionaries may bring to the surface pain or pleasure; and it is only in the Yorkshire bag that *Chinese ointment* lies next to *hope*.



Selbst das Testament ging verloren / Even the Testament Got Lost

in German (translated by Klaus Detlef Olof),
Edition Korrespondenzen, Vienna, Austria 2001

To put it mildly, the poems evoke images of the monstrous. They are poetic shorthand notes on a deeply moving life, which even if suffused with pain and despair still gently sparkles with capacity for happiness, for which the Slovenian poet had to struggle bravely. In this collection of poems, she says goodbye to a land that used to be great. Once upon a time in the Balkans ...

Beseda / Word

Drava, Klagenfurt, Austria 1994

The collection is characterized by three topics related to the author’s humanitarian engagement in wartime Sarajevo. The poet writes about her experience of Sarajevo where people are very open and their relations genuine. The city gave her new female friends with whom she shared a special affinity. Their friendship is contrasted with the developed and unoccupied Western world where people are reserved, do not show their feelings and often say one thing and mean another. The reflection on this duality gives birth to motifs of loneliness and displacement.



Translations:

Pjesme iz Sarajeva / Poems from Sarajevo

in Bosnian (translated by Josip Osti),
Zid, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1994

Sarajevo, ljubavi moja / Sarajevo, My Love

in Bosnian (enlarged edition of the collection
Poems from Sarajevo, translated by Josip Osti),
Vodnikova domačija, Kulturni vikend djece iz BiH,
biblioteka "egzil-abc", Ljubljana 1994



Danes / Today

Drava, Klagenfurt, Austria 1989

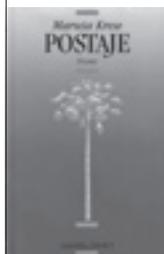
Dealing with existential questions, the poet's first book of poetry interweaves thoughts on intimate relationships, parenthood, intergenerational relationships, unprotectedness, fear and ageing, living together, commitment to others, and displacement. The main emphasis is placed on the woman who finds herself in different situations and relations.

The collection features incredibly diverse poems, with the use of many rhetorical questions and answers bringing to the fore its dialogic nature.

Translation:

Gestern, Heute, Morgen / Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

in German (translated by Fabjan Hafner),
Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, Germany 1992



Postaje / Stations

Drava, Klagenfurt, Austria 1992

In Maruša Krese's poems, the station is a multi-faceted metaphor, a junction where roads leading in and out of town meet, a meeting and exchange place of people belonging to different cultures and traditions. The station can be understood as a point of connection between foreign places from which different people come from. It is also a starting point for departures to places all over the world, and therefore a place for taking decision in which direction one should go.

PROSE

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- 2012 *Da me je strah? / Me? Scared?*, novel
-
- 2009 *Vse moje vojne / All My Wars, short stories*
-
- 2007 *Gegenwelten – Rassismus, Kapitalismus & soziale Ausgrenzung*
/ Counterworlds – Racism, Capitalism and Social Exclusion, essays
-
- 2006 *Vsi moji božiči*
/ All My Christmases, short stories
-
- 1998 *Von der Bora verweht / Gone with the Bora*
-
- 1993 *Briefe von Frauen über Krieg und Nationalismus / Female Letters on War and Nationalism*, letters
-

Da me je strah? / Me? Scared?

novel, GOGA, Novo mesto 2012

A family story that begins in 1941 in a country sucked in the maelstrom of war and lasts more than half a century. This partly autobiographical narrative interweaves three anonymous first-person voices, starting with the voices of a partisan couple and continuing with that of their daughter. This intimate reflection of the war and postwar years opens the questions that still divide the Slovenian nation (e.g. fratricidal slaughter), with the daughter's narrative painting a portrait of the generation that experienced student protests, the Vietnam War and the hippie movement. The key role in the novel is given to women who have to fight for their position in society and rights whose exercise is entirely self-evident to men, many times at the expense of their own womanliness.

Vse moje vojne / All My Wars

short stories, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 2009

Maruša Krese was born soon after the end of WWII, in a time marked by renovation and optimistic belief that war atrocities could not ever happen again. Her youth was full of victorious images of partisans at war. Yet as early as in the 1960s, in her student years, the Vietnam War left an indelible mark on her lifestyle,



as well as the student movement and its ideology. The 20th century turned out to be a century of wars. Bosnia, Cambodia, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, Angola, Sudan, Rwanda, Israel, Palestine ... “Our century, the bestial century,” claims Maruša Krese who experienced several wars through TV or her friends, and some of them first-hand, being a journalist and humanitarian worker linking Bosnia and Germans.

Translation:

Alle meine Kriege oder Happiness is a Warm Gun

(translated by Daniela Kocmut and Katja Lenič),

Laykam, Graz, Austria

Gegenwelten – Rassismus, Kapitalismus & soziale Ausgrenzung ***/ Counterworlds – Racism, Capitalism and Social Exclusion***

(co-authors: Robert Reithofer, Maruša Krese, Leo Kühberger),

essays, Leykam, Graz, Austria 2007



An anthology dealing with social inequality, racism, sexism and poverty from objective and at the same time extremely personal points of view. Personal experiences of more than sixty male and female authors shed light on mechanisms of exclusion and their impact on individual people's lives.

Vsi moji božiči / All My Christmases

short stories, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 2006

Maruša Krese's Christmases are neither feast days brimming with posh commodities wrapped in glittering paper nor meetings of shiny happy people. When recalling them, the female narrator questions the role of a woman who organizes a satisfactory family celebration, deconstructs the picture of Christmas propagated by the media, travels to war zones in the Balkans where the dreams of peace intertwine with war atrocities and, last but not least, talks to her husband who on Christmas Eve tells her that he is arriving with his male lover on the following day. In the last few years, she and her children spend Christmas Eve on the road, driving from Berlin to Ljubljana. Thus they avoid "superfluous grudges, last-minute Christmas presents, bought mainly on account of their pretty wrapping". The stories are narrated by a woman who does not accept the position prescribed to her by patriarchy.

Translation:

Alle meine Weihnachten

(translated by Fabjan Hafner),
Drava, Klagenfurt, Austria 2006



Von der Bora verweht / Gone with the Bora

in German (translated by Barbara Antkowiak),
Drava, Klagenfurt, Austria 1998

By taking into consideration the accounts of three women from Ljubljana, Belgrade and Sarajevo, the author reveals how hopes aroused during the German occupation are suffocated by political intrigues and the omnipresent heroic myth. Written in a literary style, this documentary text focuses on personal experiences and reflections on war.

Briefe von Frauen über Krieg und Nationalismus */ Female Letters on War and Nationalism*

(co-authors: Rada Iveković, Biljana Jovanović,
Maruša Krese, Radmila Lazić), letter,
in German (translated by Barbara Antkowiak, Angela Richter,
Mechthild Schäfe),
Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, Germany 1999

Letters travelling between Ljubljana, Berlin, Beograd and Paris from June 1991 to November 1992. Despite obstacles, the four female writers managed to write one another sincere and lyrical letters on nationalism and war. Initially, the texts composed a radio play entitled *Der Wind geht gen Mittag und kommt herum zur Mitternacht* / *The Wind Blows to the Midday and Turns to the Midnight*, which in 1993 an independent jury selected the play of the month of July in the German speaking area.

**LITERARY AND
PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECTS**

2011 *Nenadoma se je stemnilo*
/ *Plötzlich Wurde es Dunkel*
/ *Suddenly It Was Dark*, travel poems

Wir Sind Da / We Are Here

2010 *Neue Heimat / New Homelands*, essays

2008 *Obne Angst Verschieden Sein*
/ *Being Different without Fear*, essays

Naenkrat se je znočilo
/ *Suddenly It Was Night*, exhibition

Nenadoma se je stemnilo / Plötzlich Wurde es Dunkel / Suddenly It Was Dark

(Maruša and Meta Krese), travel poems,
in Slovenian and German (translated by Daniela Kocmut),
Pavelhaus, Graz, Austria, 2011

By using each their own *tools*, the poet and the photographer describe life situations in countries and cities where there is no room for romantic yearning. On the contrary, the poems point out social injustice and traumas caused by war, poverty and loss, with emotionally intense black and white photographs strengthening their effects.

Naenkrat se je znočilo / Suddenly It Was Night

Cankar Cultural and Congress Centre, Ljubljana, Small Gallery,
photographic exhibition, 16. 01.-17. 02. 2008

Wir Sind Da / We Are Here

(co-authors: Maruša Krese, Meta Krese, Robert Reithofer),
Project ISOP, Clio, Graz, Austria, 2011

Part 3 of the series of photographic projects by Maruša and Meta Krese. Thematically related to the previous two, this edition calls for new social solidarity acknowledging no state borders.



Neue Heimaten / New Homelands

(co-authors: Maruša Krese, Meta Krese, Robert Reithofer),
historical, social and political essays, Clio, Graz, Austria, 2010

The photographic project by Maruša and Meta Krese is a document of invisible life stories of Turkish migrants in Austria.

Obne Angst Verschieden Sein / Being Different without Fear

(co-authors: Maruša Krese, Meta Krese, Robert Reithofer),
essays, Slovenian-German translation by Daniela Kocmut,
German-Turkish translation by Metin Okyay, Project ISOP,
Leykam, Graz, Austria, 2008



For several weeks, Maruša and Meta Krese paid visits to Turkish and Kurdish families living in Feldbach (Austria) and got in touch with their relatives in Turkey in order to visit them, too. The photographs and texts reveal the stories of real people. Far away, yet so close ...

**RADIO PLAYS AND
RADIO FEATURES**

Von der Bora verweht / Gone with the Bora

radio play (translated by Barbara Antkowiak),
Drava, Klagenfurt, Austria 1998

Radio war immer dabei / Radio Was Always There

radio feature (on protests in Oaxaca, Mexico),
RBB, WDR, Radio Bremen, 2010

Alle meine Kriege oder Happiness Is A Warm Gun

radio play, RBB, DLR, 2005

***Es ist nicht alles Gold, was glänzt
/ All That Glitters Is Not Gold***

radio feature, Slovenia prior to the accession to the EU,
RBB, SWR 2004

***Frauenbrücke – Frauen in Wien
/ Female Bridges – Women in Vienna***

radio play, SFB/ORB/DLR/ORF (Glass Kubus/Valie Export) 2002

***Titos diplomatische Seiltänze – Wer bietet mehr?
Ost oder West?
/ Tito's Diplomatic Balancing Acts – Who's Got
More to Offer? The East or the West?***

radio feature, SFB/ORB/WDR 2002

Alle meine Weihnachten / All My Christmases

radio play, SFB/ORB/ORF/SWR/NDR/BR,
Swiss, Swedish and Norwegian National Radios, 2001

Mrs. Oscar Wilde

radio play SFB/ORB/SWR/DLF/ORF/NDR/Radio Prag, 2000

Vom Winde verweht / Gone with the Bora

(drei Frauen: Ljubljana/Belgrade/Sarajevo), radio feature,
SFB/ORB/DLF/WDR/SWR, 1997

***Frauen in Mostar – Lieber mit einem Popen
unter der Decke als mit einem Pfarrer auf dem
Dorfplatz / Women in Mostar – I'd Rather Go to
Bed with An Orthodox Priest than to A Village
with A Catholic Priest***

radio feature SFB/ORB/DLF/NDR/SDR/SW, 2004

***Some Like It in Sarajevo oder Überleben,
ist das alles?***

radio feature, SFB/ORB/MDR/NDR/DLF/SWF/SDR/ORF,
also broadcast in Spain, Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Netherlands and Norway, 2004

***Vjetar ide na jug i obrće se na sjever / Veter gre pro-
ti poldnevu in se obrača proti polnoči / The Wind
Blows to the Midday and Turns to the Midnight***

(Biljana Jovanović, Rada Iveković, Maruša Krese, Radmila Lazić),
Women on nationalism and war, essays,
in Slovenian and Serbian, Radio B92, Belgrade, Serbia 1994

***Der Wind geht gen Mittag und kommt herum zur
Mitternacht***

radio play, SFB/ORB/NDR/MDR/DLF/SWF/BR, 1993, the radio
play of the month of July, published as a book by Suhrkamp,
Frankfurt am Main, with support of Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

ALL MY CHRISTMASES

(Selected Chapters)

Translated by Tina Mahkota (2011)

All My Christmases, All My Life

I could have died years ago, actually. So they say. I'm walking along a street in Berlin. The shop windows are glistening as if the shops were open for the very last time, as if the world ended tomorrow, as if people had never shopped around in their lives. Tears are running down my cheeks. All my Christmases, all my life, all my children, all my nights spent baking cakes and sewing hand-made gifts. All the joy of presents, all those tiny sorrows as presents are being opened, all the waiting at a candle-lit Christmas tree, and all the questions asked with a blank gaze: »What are we going to do now?«

I'm sitting alone in my Berlin flat. Should I head off to see my family more than one thousand kilometres away? I don't want to go back. Once upon a time I had a strong wish finally to be alone.

Biscuits, tea and candles

The snow is so deep that my child nearly got lost in it. "Ana, Ana," I shout. But Ana is determined to go for a walk, God knows why, at thirty or forty degrees below zero.

We are living in Iowa City by the Iowa River in the state of Iowa. We are living in a house on a hill top; the only hill as far as the eye can see, at least three hundred, possibly one thousand miles in the distance. Ours is the largest pear tree too. In Iowa City, at least, that is. The house is owned by an elderly man, a true Democrat through and through. On Election Day he brought us fresh fish. "To celebrate the day and a Democratic government," he said. Unfortunately, it was Nixon who won, Ana is a vegetarian, and I never eat fish, and the Poet can't fry them unaided.

Good heavens, where have I ended up? I'm chasing Ana in the snow. Ana is wearing a rabbit fur coat my mother bought for her in Ljubljana, and I'm wearing a Salvation Army coat from Chicago. I can't wait to be back in Ljubljana to show it to people. Bombs are falling on Vietnam, and I'm making cookies to decorate the Christmas tree and to give away as presents. I've got loads of jam left over from the autumn. I had a terrible headache then, and doctors couldn't identify the actual cause, and they filled my veins with

morphine, so I lost my sense of proportion completely, at least as far as jam jars are concerned. Quite possibly I lost my sense of proportion for other things too, but the loss is most blatant with jam. Still, I can now give jam away as presents. I managed to get a plastic Fisher Price radio in a sale for Ana, and it cost me as much as I was paid for cleaning the house, in other words, as much as a reward for my Live Art. The only genre of art that I could never make any sense of was poetry, which is probably why I married a poet, and I was blissfully ignorant of the fact that this makes you a public property and that your every sorrow, every laugh and every secret may end up on paper and become a complete stranger to you. Who on earth is this person, you wonder, when reading about her in black and white?

I'm following Ana's footsteps in the deep snow. "Isn't it pretty?" she says, laughing. The snow is pretty, the snow is white. But the sand in the desert, the sea at the edge of the desert. What in hell's name brought me here among American rednecks? Was it my craving for something higher, different and more holy? If I stay here just a bit longer, I won't be able to tell a cow from a pig. I'm freezing. "Mummy, when is he coming for Christmas?" Ana runs to the house with her runny nose. We're drinking tea and waiting for a miracle. The phone rings. It's the Poet calling from San Francisco: "Happy Christmas, my darlings. I'm arriving tomorrow with my male lover." Ah, Christmas – why should I give a toss? I replace the receiver, and Ana is screaming: "I want my Daddy! I want my Daddy!" I fetch Janov's *The Primal Scream*

given to me by a friend for my birthday. "I want my Daddy, I want my Mummy." "Ana, you can make paper boats and airplanes out of this book," I say to her, pushing the psychobabble into her hands. "I want my Daddy!" she cries, undeterred.

We go to a Midnight mass at a nearby Catholic church with my Jewish friends. As we walk, the snow is cracking under our feet, exactly as it was cracking, according to my father, when he was a child. The priest delivers his sermon for God, the nation and the President beneath the American flag. We look at each other and leave the church. Justice rules the world. Bombs are falling on Vietnam, Ana sleeps blissfully, and the poet is in pursuit of happiness in San Francisco. I'm sitting in my car, a Ford for a hundred bucks, and I'm driving around Iowa City in the snow, beneath a clear sky, passing the houses with illuminated reindeer and elks and sleighs and angels and red stars. I tell a lie, there are no red stars. I'd like to go home, by boat, to a place across the ocean, if I wasn't so embarrassed to admit how difficult I find it here. I stop at a Happy Shopping supermarket. It's still early. Three or four a.m. But I'm not alone. I'm walking along the aisles watching people I never see in daytime. A friend told me they lived in trees with squirrels.

Ana is sitting in her nightie by the window. She's waiting for the Poet and listening to her Fisher Price radio happily. There's a nice smell of cookies, tea and candles in the house. "Happy Christmas, my little darling."

Travelling on Christmas Eve

I'm listening to the radio. In tunnels high up in the Alps. It's become almost a habit of ours to drive from Berlin to Ljubljana on Christmas Eve, changing radio stations, listening to every possible cover version of *Silent Night* in every possible language. The motorway is empty, and at every service area people are staring at us with compassion. The cashier at a petrol station, I think it was near Leipzig, wishes us a Merry Christmas and gives us a small plastic Christmas tree as a present. She probably feels sorry for the kids with such an irresponsible mother. However, we think we're being extremely smart. Yes, smart, for this is the way to avoid unnecessary tears, superfluous grudges, last-minute Christmas presents, bought mainly on account of their pretty wrapping and a need to have as many as possible under a tree, and due to a bad conscience. But travelling on Christmas Eve, we manage to avoid kissing and hugging and inventing unnecessary lies.

I seem to be having this excruciating pain in my heart far too often recently, mostly when I'm driving or lying in bed. I seem to be too preoccupied with dying. I'm driving and wondering if any of the kids would react quickly enough if I lost control of the wheel. I seem to be too deep in my thoughts while I'm driving, reflecting on things I have failed to do

in my life. But I never, ever, think of the things I did manage to achieve. Looking at my life like this, I find it hard to believe in it. But it is a real life, I have eyewitnesses. I always end up erasing everything and starting all over again. I seem to be a bit too old for that, and it's high time I came to terms with it. I've been constantly on the move from one country to another, from one town to another, and, if nothing else, from one flat to another. I'm always leaving behind cardboard boxes full of stuff that I might come to fetch one day. One day. This must be quite hard for the kids too, I guess.

We take a short break in the parking area and start running around in snow and counting stars in the sky. This is my first Christmas since my mother and father died. I hope it's not my turn yet. I'm fed up with all these aches and pains and all the foolishness, but I haven't even lived yet. It's a good job I haven't become an alcoholic.

The kids are enjoying a snowball fight, but then my youngest starts to cry because he's freezing cold. "How come Baby Jesus didn't freeze to death as soon as he was born?" he asks, trembling with cold. "You, jerk," his older brother replies. "Because he was Jesus, that's why." We're in the car again, driving to the next service area. We're drinking tea while we're waiting for apple strudel to be reheated. If their mother was a proper mother, she would have prepared a flask of hot tea in advance and made them sandwiches with love.

"You've missed Christmas," we're told at the border into Slovenia and are kindly waved on. Thank

God for that, I think to myself while trying to guess what exactly the officer had in mind when he mentioned a missed Christmas? The Archbishop's television address? Or else, does the Slovenian president now address the nation on the telly at Christmas too? I must find out.

Christmas lights in Ljubljana are modest and beautiful. It's past midnight. You can see a lonely figure every now and then walking a dog, as well as young couples in no hurry whatsoever to go home. The traffic lights are stuck at amber. Every time I arrive in this city, I drive by my old primary school and my old high school where I was utterly miserable. I point out both buildings to my kids, and the youngest murmurs: "As if we didn't know already."

We arrive at my sister's who's still awake and ring the doorbell. She brings beef soup to the table. "Exactly like when Mum was still alive," she says. "Granny's soup was tastier though," says my youngest. Tears flood my sister's eyes. Should I slap my youngest? Not on Christmas Eve. "That's what happens when kids are raised without a father!" snaps my daughter. So, we're in for Christmas, no way out.

I'm sitting on the floor by the decorated tree. There are so many stories in all these wretched ornaments. We've bought so many over the years - over the centuries, it seems to me - we've broken so many, we've bought so many again. Small birds, bells, stars, balls, trees, mushrooms. And on the moss, instead of a nativity scene my sister has just put some sea shells.

Among Shells and Snipers

I jump over one gutter, and then another. It's dark, but I'm not allowed to switch on my torch. Or light a cigarette. This is how it goes in this miserable city. As soon as men on the hills surrounding the city catch a glimpse of light, they fire. And target people, just like that. There's no curfew, and people are wandering the streets of the besieged city, because it's Christmas. A Catholic Christmas. The men on the hills are having even more fun than usual shelling and sniping. I wonder what it's going to be like when it's the Orthodox Christmas. Hopefully I'll be out of this miserable hovel by Ramadan.

Not that I know, really, why I keep coming back to this city. To a city where I freeze and starve, where there's constant gunfire and people are dying on every corner. To a city where I'm on such an adrenaline high I don't fear anything.

Today is Christmas, and mortar fire is so intense, and snipers are so hard at work that you almost forget it's wartime, and think it's New Year's Eve in some peaceful part of this country. I run across the street, thinking of my children and my sister. The only people I'm genuinely fond of. Renata also. I'm thinking of my brother too, okay, I'm still fond of him, after all. Satellite phones have stopped working, so I can't give my children a call. But they know I'm

alive and alright. Have I the right to involve them in this mess over and over again?

I'm hiding behind some gate. A friend of mine who insists that one never gets used to war, looks me in the eye, and asks: "But why have you come to this city? What is your connection?" I look him in the eye and begin to feel fear. I fear his despair. Actually, I'm very fond of him too. "I hope the guy with the jeep will be here soon. He promised he'd pick us up." "He's always late," I say. But I fear something might have happened to him. As a matter of fact, I'm fond of him too. Actually I'm fond of everyone in this city. They're the only people I can share my numb fear with. Whenever I leave this city, I always fear something might happen to some of them. And when I come back, we act out a normal life and meet for coffee, as if you could get coffee in this city, as if there'd been peace and prosperity for centuries, and as if it were the only place on earth where I could sleep really well. And laugh properly. It's not sorrow that rules this city, but joy.

From my hiding place I can see a garbage dump, but to be honest, the whole city is a garbage dump. Cats and dogs are crawling over the heap of rubbish; in daytime, it's people who are doing it. Cats and dogs don't fight over food, and people share their loot from the garbage dump. Humanitarian organizations distribute tinned food all over the city, but it is unclear whether the tins contain dog or cat food, or a weekly ration for an entire family. At any rate, today is Christmas, Christmas in the city with no Christmas trees, with no trees at all, actually, as every

single tree has been burnt as a log to keep the people of this city warm for three days, this being a city that even God ceased to love. God has granted it nothing but a never ending fireworks display.

This city of misery. Is it really true it used to be as cheerful as its inhabitants claim? All its joy erupted like a volcano and turned the city into a sea of tears and blood, lies and theft, lack of forgiveness and silence.

Its people are nice though. Especially the men. They would hold a chair for you and your coat and light you a cigarette during the most intense gunfire and fear. They would reassure you, albeit with fear in their eyes, that you have nothing to be afraid of, and then run for shelter. It is only rarely they take the time to show you where you can hide. They can hardly wait for you to come back to their city and to bring them cigarettes, coffee and vodka. Money isn't a bad thing to bring either, should you find yourself in this mess.

I'm trying to think how to brighten up their miserable lives. I bring them rosemary, sea and shells; in May, I bring fresh cherries and onions; sometimes, I bring them garlic, aspirin, matches, pencils and warm socks. In winter time, I'm tempted to bring them long johns but I know this would hurt their manly pride, and they might slaughter me on the spot. In their hungry eyes I'm constantly turning from Madonna to a whore, and vice versa, so every time I vow to myself I will stop risking my life and I won't have to look at these bright soldiers from Nepal, Taiwan, or Columbia any more, and put

up with patronizing Canadian pilots, and be afraid of Serb soldiers, of starvation and the freezing cold, and of the fear of my own children back home in Berlin. The inhabitants of this city adopt you as if you were one of them. The inhabitants of this city think you can't count to three on your own anyway, the inhabitants of this city think you have to live their lives. The inhabitants of this city are cruel to people who have forgotten them, but keep sending polite invitations to people who won't even listen to the details of their hellish ordeal. The inhabitants of this city behave as if you were born yesterday, and it was them who showed you the wisdom of life. The inhabitants of this city know very well that their misery and their obliterated city are killing you, and know that you won't take any of their ugly secrets into the world. The inhabitants of this city know that you'll bring word of their courage to the wide world outside, word of their upright attitude and enlightened spirit, too. The inhabitants of this city know that you won't write anything dark about them. The inhabitants of this city don't know that they haven't trapped you. The inhabitants of this city don't know that you keep wondering how they could be drinking merrily with their assassins until the last. The inhabitants of this city don't know that you keep wondering what on earth was going on in their city in peace time. The inhabitants of this city don't know that every time you take shelter from the shooting in a mosque, you immediately get orders what to bring along from Berlin when you visit next. And the inhabitants of this city don't know that you can see their narrow

faces and big dark eyes in a military aircraft the very moment you leave the city, and you know you'll come back.

I'm still waiting for the jeep. I'm cold and I need to pee. I stopped feeling hungry a long time ago. "Why do you keep coming here?" my friend asks again. I close my eyes and think of my mother and my father. Am I really that burdened with their story and with their home country? With their naïve belief that life can get only better? I can see my father crying when he was decorated by comrade Tito, and soldiers firing a salute at his state funeral, I can see my mother singing songs of brave partisan fighting to my children when we drove in the car. I can remember us always wanting to play partisans and Germans in our courtyard, but we never managed actually to do so, as we always ran out of kids who wanted to be the Germans. I can remember people all over the country crying their eyes out when Tito died. I can remember war heroes, the sick and the old, marching at his funeral. That was their final charge. Is this why I have come to this damn city? Have I come to erase these black and white memories?

I can hear car brakes during gunfire. A white jeep with no windshield stops outside my hiding place. My friend and I run for the car. "The car got broken into again," the driver says. This is like being in a movie, I think to myself. We drive across the city. Gunfire has receded. "This is a present for you, the Catholics," both my friends say. "To wish you a happy holiday, because we're Muslims, you know. It was a joke."

I'm lying in bed freezing. There's plastic foil with the UNHCR logo where a window pane should be. I want to fall asleep, but I'm hungry and grumpy. In my mind's eye, I can see the disgusting American military airbase in Frankfurt full of arms, but right now it seems more beautiful than paradise itself. I'm dreaming of a hotdog I'll have at a railway station in Frankfurt, and of a toilet that I'll be able to flush after use and wash my hands with warm water and soap afterwards. I'm dreaming of my kitchen in Berlin and of my early morning coffee and a cigarette. I'll be able to sit around in my pyjamas without freezing.

Snow is forecast tomorrow. This means gunfire will be even heavier, and there won't be any aircraft landing and taking off, and even the UNO soldiers will starve.

Christmas Day, Christmas Eve, Holy Night. It's all these damned non-believers' fault. Am I one as well? But I've been begging and praying for something all my life.

Ana, Baby, Christmas

I'm laughing. In the past few years a phone call from Sarajevo on Christmas Eve has become almost a ritual in its own right. Muslims from a former brotherly republic want to wish me, a devout Catholic, a Merry Christmas, and then we reminisce about the war years. I guess we're even worse than veteran partisans.

I can hear whispering outside my door. I step out and see my sister, Ana's boyfriend Miha, who's become almost a member of the family now, David and Jakob. "You're going to be a granny, and I'm going to be an uncle," cries Jakob who's beside himself with joy. "Go and see Ana," my sister says. "We were teasing her how much weight she'd put back on. Then she told us she was pregnant. And now she's crying and has locked herself in the bathroom."

We're sitting on the edge of the bath. I give her a hug. Ana. Tivoli Park in Ljubljana. She's bouncing by the side of the pram in which baby David is sleeping. She's telling me something, and she goes on and on. "Do you remember, David, once you were a flower, and I was the sun, and we made up our mind to go and see Mummy?" In the maternity hospital she sits down, and won't even look at baby Jakob. Tears are running down her cheeks, she desperately needs money to go to the hairdresser's or to Paris. A long

time ago. I combed my hair in the maternity hospital when she was brought to me for the very first time.

Ana. Baby. Christmas. Mum, I'm so afraid. I give her a bigger hug. Ana. Christmas. Candles. Snow. Silence. Will they have the baby christened?





From the collection
Not Today

I enclosed myself and looked for words.
For real words, words for people who are mine.
For my sister, for my children.
And for theirs.

I'm looking for words. On my own.
I'm looking for words that say everything.
Those little ones, the only ones.
Simple and short ones.

I don't know what is happening.
It can't be that I'm departing already?
I can't find the words.
My words, those real ones.

I cannot depart without them.

Translated by Tina Mahkota

From the collection
Even the Testament Got Lost

I laid my hand on the grass,
closed my eyes
and died.

The moon was shining, the stars were twinkling.
You won't get let off so lightly,
whispered someone behind my back.

Translated by Tina Mahkota

Suddenly it was night

Translated by Tina Mahkota and Donal McLaughlin

Egypt, 2001

It's hot.

The silent walls, the dusty roads,
the shadows glistening. The sun is setting.

It's hot. Every day.

We're on our own. Every day.

We're waiting. Every day.

The standstill frightens us. Every day.

No one drops by,

no one cries.

No one lives.

It's hot. Every day.

Albania, 2008

The unrest of thousands of years, and wild horses.
A river of mystery and a blood feud.
There, in the hot wind,
a trampled history,
hunger and an unknown mystery.
Amidst silence and fear.

England, 1998

Everything was fine while we were on our own.
Then something happened.
They all came.
They were jumping in the water and having fun,
patted us and disappeared, laughing.

The sun is shining.
I close my eyes
and wonder
who they are,
who we are.

Austria, 2008

I don't get why they don't understand me,
why they are laughing at me.

I don't get why they don't understand me,
why they don't make their life
as simple
as I've done.

I don't get why they don't look at the world
the way I do.
They'd see there's nothing to worry about,
that the earth is still standing,
that life means more than one two three,
that the moon is constantly laughing,
that the clouds are playing with the wind,
that the river rejoices,
and that our house has turned into a fairy tale.

I don't get why they don't believe me
when I say I'm feeling great.

Azerbaijan, 2006

The sea, the boats, the sun.
I remember everything.
I remember that tiny happiness.
The whispering.
The patch of a sunny sky,
the rush and pursuit of happiness,
the laughter and the surf of the sea,
the fine sand and the paper boat,
the tired wind and the deceptive beauty.

I remember everything.
Everything, really everything,
until the moment
the night crept up on the unrest
and opened the door to solitude.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1994

I don't know.
Suddenly it was nightfall.
I don't know.
Suddenly everything disappeared.
The light.
Children.
Violins.
Pain.
Laughter and bright coloured balls.
A storm and snow.
Dossers.
Lovers.

I don't know.
It was nightfall.
There was a fire.
People became evil
and evicted us,
occupied our dumps,
hid the children,
killed the cats
and left us.
In the middle of the night here
in silence, among cold walls
that will keep a secret.

I don't know.
I'm waiting.
I'm waiting for my friends to come back.
Will they?

Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1994

We went to the church,
but it was no longer there.
We went to fetch water
from the river,
but it was no longer there.
We went to fetch the souls,
but they were no longer there.

We went to collect the will
and read it through.
Not even the sun, the stars, the clouds
were ours any longer,
it said in the will,
only the loneliness.

We kept on walking,
all the way to the sea.
Whose sea?

AWARDS AND PRIZES

Milena Jesenská Fellowship for Journalism,
Vienna, Austria, 2008

Fabula Award for the best collection of
short stories, 2008

Listed among 100 most influential women
in Europe, European project “Women with
a Vision”, 2007

City-Writer of *Graz*, 2005

Anna Krüger Prize, Berlin Wissenschaft
Kollegs, Berlin, Germany

Federal Cross of Merit, German decoration
for her humanitarian and cultural
commitment, 1996

Radio play of the month of July for
*Der Wind geht gen Mittag und kommt herum
zur Mitternacht / The Wind Blows to the Midday
and Turns to the Midnight*, 1993

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