

Vodeni Grad

Dragana Tripković. Crna Gora

Teški su bili posljednji dani starog Milutina, bivšeg radnika pošte. U lučkom gradu Baru, noć ga je zatekla na rivi, gdje je oholim turistima nudio bočice maslinovog ulja, pomiješanog sa ljekovitim biljkama, za sitan novac. Svaki put kada se bližio kralj ljeta, prisjećao bi se jedne posebne godine kada je upoznao ljubav svog života na igranci u vili blizu grada, koju je priredila njegova tadašnja služba. Dvije godine je proveo sa njom, nakon čega ga je ostavila. Više nikad nije tako volio, a svaka sljedeća žena u njegovom životu, morala je po nečemu da liči na nju. Više nikad je nije vidio, niti je išta čuo o njoj.

Milutin je svoja ulja spravljao s velikom brigom. Maslinovo ulje je kupovao od jednog majstora iz Ulcinja koji je, kažu, bio najbolji. On mu je nekada davno objasnio kako “100 kila maslina najviše može da dâ deset litara ulja” i da su sva ostala ulja iz regije ili razblažena, ili su masline ostavljane duže da zriju, ne bi li se njihovo meso dobro nakupilo ovom rajskom tečnošću. To ulcinjsko ulje je bilo mnogo skuplje od ostalih, ali Milutin nije žalio. Od kad je otišao u penziju ovo mu je bila najvažnija stvar na svijetu. Sadržaj ulja je zavisio od godišnjeg doba. Milutin je tako u svoja ulja stavljao vrganj, suve smovke, lavandu, kantarion, orah, ruzmarin, neven... Da su samo nesmotreni sezonski kupci znali kakve eliksire dobijaju, platili bi mnogo veću cijenu.

Te noći je umorno pokupio neprodane bočice u platnenu torbu i krenuo kući. Njegov rodni grad Bar nije bio opterećen turistima koliko su to bili ostali gradovi na Jadranu. Ipak, ljeti se ta slika katkad znala promijeniti ako je sezona dobra, pa su se na njegovim teškim lučkim ulicama mogle vidjeti gologuze posjetiteljke i njihovi dlakavi pratiodci. Obično se namjenski nije dolazilo na ljetovanje u Bar. Turisti su često bili rođaci stanovnika ili siromašniji građani iz okolnih zemalja kojima se nudio jeftin smještaj na moru. Milutina je veselila slika turista u svom gradu. Izgledalo mu je kao da odjednom stanovnici nekog ozbiljnog kontinentalnog grada skrenu pameću i obuku svoje kupaće kostime. Zamišljao ih je kako u kostimima idu na posao. Ređale su mu se slike šalterskih službenica u jedenodjelnim kupaćim kostimima sa animalnim printovima, vozači taksija u speedo šortsevima ili pak slika velikog okruglog stola za kojim sjedi bord direktora neke velike korporacije, poput Luke Bar – svi u havajskim gaćama. Okolina grada je, ruku na srce, otkrivala prelijepe plaže.

Noć je Milutina zatekla nespremnog. Obuzeo ga je strah od mogućnosti da je u jednom trenutku ispred svoje male plastične tezge sa bočicama ulja, zaspao. Čovjek ne može nekontrolisano da zaspe, mislio je. Pogotovo ne na radnom mjestu. U vrijeme kad je on bio radnik barske pošte, sigurno bi kaznili onog kojeg bi zatekli kako spava. Ili je to kraj ljeta označavao skraćene dnevne svjetlosti. Kako god, svijest o vremenu znači svijest o sopstvu. Kada čovjek počne da gubi oštrinu, prepušta se smrti. To nema veze sa godinama. To se može i u mladosti, ako je duša stara. Ova nesmotrenost je Milutina značajno uzdrimala.

Odlazeći kući, ostavljao je iza sebe rivu i lučke dokove. Kvart u kojem je živio zvao se Makedonsko naselje. Tamo je Milutinu nakon 20 godina službe dodijeljen stan. Odslužbovao je

još toliko. Stan je bio na prizemlju veoma stare zgrade. Zgrada je napravljena mnogo prije velikog zemljotresa 1979. Te stare konstrukcije, kažu, odlično odolijevaju vremenu i nevremenu. U zgradi je bilo dosta njegovih starih kolega, ali se vremenom struktura stanovišta mijenjala. Sada su tu uglavnom njihova djeca i unuci. Ovi što su ga poznavali bili su veoma ljubazni. Ovi novi, jedva bi mu nazivali “dobar dan”. Nije važio za čangrizavog komšiju, ali mogće je da su novajlije o njemu imale prljave misli. Ljudi tako hoće da u nečemu o čemu ne znaju puno vide najprljavije slike sopstvenog uma. Samo zato što ne znaju.

Milutin je prilazeći ulazu zgrade na samom pragu zatekao plavokosu djevojčicu kako sjedi i čeka. Oči su joj sijale kao u mačke, a lice joj je bilo umrljano cjelodnevnim igranjem. Kad ga je primijetila, djevojčica je ustala naglo i krenula mu u susret.

–Vrati mi loptu – rekla je plava djevojčica.

–Kakvu loptu?

Milutin je bio zburjen. Djevojčica je pokazala rukom na prozor u prizemlju. Prozor je bio polomljen, a lopta je ostala u uglu pored parčadi stakla.

–Aha! Znači razbila si mi prozor. Loptu ću da vratim tvojim roditeljima. Reci mi gdje živiš i donijeću je sutra. Sad treba da ideš kući. Pao je mrak.

–Kod Kanala – povikala je djevojčica i trkom otišla u noć.

Mnogo puta je Milutin u životu razmišljao o djeci, pogotovo posljednjih godina kada mu se bližila smrt. Bio je srećan što je čak i kao starac zdrav i što može da se bavi sobom bez ičije pomoći. Kroz život je prošao bez puno stresa. Od mladosti je naučio kako da svakodnevicu podredi sebi, a ne sebe nekom izmaštanom životu iz kataloga ili sa televizije. Nakon one velike ljubavi imao je još nekoliko žena. Međutim, ni jedna od njih ga više nije uspjela uvjeriti u praktičnost zajedničkog života. Nikada sa drugom ženom nije proveo više od nekoliko mjeseci. Onda, kada bi one počinjale da lukavo donose svoje stvari u njegov stan, strast prema njima bi se smanjivala proporcionalno donešenim sitnicama. Ono što mu je u mladosti pričinjavalo ogromno zadovoljstvo, vremenom se pretvaralo u neprijatnost, u nešto poput kopiranja prošlosti. Ni jedna nova žena nije ga mogla uvjeriti u svoju originalnost. Za njega su sve one bile riznica tuđih uspomena. On je smatrao samo jednu ženu svojom uspomenom. I sebe njenom.

Milutinu nije smetalo što je sam. Bio je vrijedan radnik, ali nije imao volju da radi za bilo koga osim za sebe. Nikad to nije smatrao sebičnošću, već sudbinom. Onim što zaradi od prodaje ulja u ljetnjim danima, jedva uspije sebi da kupi ogrijev za zimu. To nije život koji bi mogao da ponudi bilo kome, znao je to odlično.

Bio je 22. avgust. Ustao je oko 5 i po sati. To je navika iz radnih dana. Svjež miris sa mora i buka lučkih mašina su bili isti godinama. Prozor je polmljen, pa ga otvara sa oprezom. Njegova kuća je uvijek uredna. On ima stare stvari, ali naviknut je na njih. Svaka promjena, čini mu se, unosila bi nered. Komadi namještaja su tek ponegdje izbljedjeli od godina i korištenja. Nema slika, osim jedne reprodukcije mrtve prirode kupljene u robnoj kući, tek da popuni bjelinu zida. Nema fotografija. Nema ničega. Napravio je sebi bijelu kafu i odlomio komad hljeba. Danas će otići na rivu i izložiti svoju kolekciju ljekovitog ulja prolaznicima. Prije toga, gledaće se u ogledalu nekoliko trenutaka. Svakodnevno posmatranje sebe u ogledalu po nekoliko mintu mu ne dozovoljava da ostari. Sebi je iz dana u dan isti. Prije toga popiće svoju bijelu kafu i pojesti koru hljeba uz vijesti sa radija. Najviše ga interesuje prognoza. Kažu da će danas živa u termometru dostizati 38 stepeni Celzijusa. Bliži se kraj ljetu i vrućine se lagano spuštaju ispod 40. Uskoro će i neka kiša pasti, siguran je. Ljeta su ovdje ista. Prije nego izađe iz kuće mora dopuniti današnju

ponudu ulja. U platnenoj torbi su gotovo sva ulja od juče, izuzev par bočica sa lavandom. Lavandu najviše kupuju. Spakovao je svoju malu montažnu tezgu od plastike. Uz nju privezuje stolicu na kojoj sjedi. Prije nego ode na rivu odnijeće loptu djevojčicininim roditeljima i tražiće naknadu štete. Zamoliće ih, naravno, da je ne grde i da se svakom djetetu to može desiti. Djevojčica je djelovala uplašeno ali i po malo divlje. Sjetio se njenih očiju što svijetle. Gdje je ono rekla da živi? Kod Kanala. Nije siguran gdje tačno kod Kanala. Tamo nije bilo zgrada. Mada u tom dijelu grada nije se našao vjerovatno više od 30 godina. Kod Kanala su nekad momci vodili djevojke prije nego ih ožene ili ostave. Onda su počeli da se skupljaju Cigani. Kanal sa svojim katakombama i čudnom arhitekturom mnogima je bio sklonište. Policija je uvijek nekoga otud tjerala. Smatrali su Kanal opasnom zonom. Govorili da može doći do pucanja zidova i izlivanja vode. Međutim to se nikada nije desilo. Milutin je na ramenu nosio torbu, u jednoj ruci tezgu, a u drugoj loptu.

Sebi je izgledao smiješno. Loptu nije držao u rukama od kad je bio mladić. Idući prema Kanalu, zagledao je i okretao. Probao joj je težinu. Bila je to mala dječija lopta. Poželio je da njom lupi o tlo. Nasmijao se sebi na tu misao. Zamisli da ga neko vidi. Starca kako lupa loptom. Ali želja ga je savladala. Tražio je pogodan prostor i udario loptom o beton. Lopta odskoči u krivo i starac potrča za njom. Srce mu je lupalo kao da je napravio kakvu štetu. Hitro je uzeo loptu i nastavio put. Ponovo se nasmijao samom sebi. Približavao se Kanalu. Sve je izgledalo kao i prije 30 godina. Možda sa nešto više rastinja. Bilo je rano ujutru i grad je još uvijek bio miran. Pitao se da li su ljudi kod kojih ide uopšt budni. Nije prije razmišljao o tome.

Linija horizonta koju u daljini stvara Kanal počela je da se nazire u starčevom oku. Približavao se ali nije bio siguran u to što vidi. Stavio je ruku na čelo kao da želi da zakloni pogled od sunca. Iz pravca mjesta kojem je išao u suret do njegovih očiju dopirale su nevjerojatne boje. Pomislio je da je nešto pogriješio, ali prepoznatljiva arhitektonika starog Kanala kojim voda sakupljena sa raznih strana otiče u more, ga je razuvjerila.

Kanal je bio širok 20 metara, a dugačak ko to zna... U njegovom tijelu i utrobi nalazile su se mnoge prostorije, čija funkcija običnom čovjeku nije bila jasna. To su više bile neke nasumično raspoređene sobe sa ogromnim cijevima iz kojih stalno kaplje voda. Te vodene “sobe” sa cijevima bile su zaštićene čeličnim ogradama. Ove druge “sobe”, bile su otvorene i predstavljale su svojevrsne šare na kanalu. One su bile poput hotelskih apartmana u zgradi kojoj nedostaje jedna strana. Više su bile kao arhitektonske šare na ogromnom tijelu barskog Kanala. U svakoj od ovih soba živio je po neko.

Starcu je zastao dah vidjevši prizor pred sobom. Stvari su mu skoro ispale iz ruku. Mora da je bilo dvadesetak porodica. To nisu bili Cigani. Fasada Kanala se šarenila od neobičnog pokušaja. Milutin se sjeća da su Kanal i njegovu okolinu znali da nasele Cigani, odnosno njihovih par porodica, ali ovdje se radilo o mnogo većem broju ljudi. Do nekih soba su čak bile stube za penjanje, tako da su i najvišočiji djelovi bili nastanjeni. Izgledalo je sve kao neobična košnica ljudi. Čudio se kako su vlasti dozvolile ovo, ali se sjetio da su se već godinama njegova interesovanje za realnost zaustavljala na prognozi. Pitao se da li je ovo samo njemu čudno i da li iko zna za ovaj neobičan grad. Odlučio je da priđe. Lopta u njegovim rukama sad je izgledala beznačajno, ali bila je dovoljan povod za to. Ipak mnoštvo ga je uplašilo i shvatio je da bi trebao da bude oprezan i prvo osmotri okolinu. Kanal je izgledao kao ogromni nasukani brod, čija posada ne želi da ode od njega. Starac je krenuo u obilazak.

Život se budio u Kanalu. Osim što su lokacija i raspored stanova bili neobični, sve ostalo je ličilo na bilo koje drugo naselje u okolini Bara. U jednom dijelu Kanala bile su, reklo bi se,

male zanatske radnje. Majstori i njihove žene iznosile su bakarno posuđe, nedaleko odatle su bile tkanine i tepisi, predmeti od drveta, namještaj, plastika... Stigao je odnekud kamion namirnica. Čula se graja žena koje su širile veš i pravile hranu. Sve je djelovalo sasvim normalno. Sunce je uveliko najavilo vruć dan.

Milutinu je krenuo nazad. Prvi put u životu mu se činilo da ostaje bez kontrole. Ovo mora da ima veze sa onim jučerašnjim spavanjem. Plašio se da je prizor koji je upravo ostavio iza sebe proizvod njegove mašte. Stigao je na rivu. Odlučio je da nastavi svoj život kao da ništa nije bilo. Ako djevojčica dođe po loptu vratiće joj je i gotova stvar. Došao je na uobičajeno mjesto gdje prolaznicima nudi svoja ulja. Loptu je stavio pored sebe i pokušao da se smiri. Oh, kako je to sad bilo nemoguće... Nije bilo osobe koju je mogao da pita da li grad kod Kanala zaista poistoji. Činilo mu se satima prolazili su samo turisti. Nadao se da mu lice ne odražava unutarnji nemir, zato je duboko udahnuo nekoliko puta. Neobična slika nije htjela nikud iz njegove glave. Policajac se kretao pravo prema Milutinu. Pomislio je da je to dobra prilika. Njega će moći da pita. On je javni službenik, shvatiće ga ozbiljno ili će se makar sažaliti na ludog starca. Javni službenik je došao do tezge i prije nego je Milutin nazvao "dobar dan", pitao ga je odsječnim glasom da li ima dozvolu za prodaju.

–Ovo je samo ulje. Jeftino je – kazao je starac.

–Ovo ću sad da zaplijenim, a ti se kupi odavde prije nego sam te uhapsio i nemoj više da te vidim. Je li jasno?

Milutin je bez riječi gledao policajca. Mislio je da ima previše godina da bi se neko ovako ophodio prema njemu. Šta se desilo sa ovim svijetom, pomislio je, i gdje je to do sada živio.

–Izvinite molim vas. Možete li da mi vratite moje ulje? Jako sam ga skupo platio. Molim vas da mi vratite moje ulje – bio je uljudan i ponizan Milutinov glas.

–Budi srećan što te nisam strpao u zatvor! Nema ulja stari. Ovo će te naučiti da više ne trguješ bez dozvole – rekao je policajac trpajući bočice u torbu.

Starac je bio slomljen.

–Molim vas da mi vratite moje ulje – ponovio je tiho.

–Stari, jesi li gluv? Zapljena, hej! Kad nabaviš dozvolu vratićemo ti ulje – policajac gestikulira. Milutin je sklopio tezgu i stolicu. Uzeo je loptu ispod ruke. Policajac čeka da napusti mjesto.

–Samo još nešto da vas pitam, molim vas. Znete li nešto o ovom naselju kod Kanala? O onim ljudima što žive tamo?

–Kod kanala?

–Da. Ima ih baš puno – kazao je starac.

–Nikad čuo – odgovori policajac i pokaza rukom starcu da ode.

Milutin se na putu do kuće borio sa mnogim mislima. Ušao je u stan i odložio stvari. Legao je na svoj veliki krevet u sobi. Kakav dan, reče na glas. Izgubio je dosta ulja, ali nema veze, nadoknadiće. Za par dana moći će da se vrati na isto mjesto. Policajac će ga zaboraviti.

Čuo je kako neko baca kamenčiće na njegov prozor. Otvorio ga je oprezno jer je već bio polomljen. Dolje je bila ona plavokosa djevojčica sa svijetlećim očima. Milutin joj se nasmijao i ona mu je uzvratila. Otišao je po loptu. Bacio joj je oprezno i mahnuo u znak pozdrava. Djevojčica je zadovoljno otrčala kako samo djeca mogu da odu u igru. Starac se vratio u svoj krevet.

Odlučio je sutra da ode u grad kod Kanala. Iskreno je to poželio.

Water City

Dragana Tripković. Montenegro

The last days of Milutin, an elderly former post office worker, had been difficult. In the port city of Bar, night found him on the boardwalk, proffering bottles of olive oil mixed with medicinal plants to arrogant tourists for tiny amounts of money. As at end of every summer, he was reminded of the year he had met the love of his life at a dance party organized by his former office in a villa near the town. They had been together for two years, then she had left. Never again had he loved so fully, and each new woman in his life had been in some way a reminder of her. Never again had they met, nor had he ever again heard anything about her.

Milutin would make his oils with great care. He would purchase olive oil from one of the masters of Ulcinj, which, they said, was the best. Long ago he had heard it explained that “out of every 100 pounds of olives, one gets ten liters of oil, at the most” and that all other oils from the region were diluted, but here the olives were left to ripen longer, so that their flesh was full of this heavenly liquid.

This Ulcinj oil was much more expensive than the others, but Milutin had never complained. Ever since he had retired, this was the most important thing in the world for him. The ingredients were dependent on the season. So, in season, Milutin would add mushrooms, dried figs, lavender, amber, walnut, rosemary, marigold... If only the careless seasonal shoppers knew what those elixirs contained, they would willingly pay a much higher price

At night he would wearily pack the unsold bottles in his duffel bag and head home. His hometown, Bar, wasn't as loaded with

tourists as other cities on the Adriatic coast. However, if the season is good, the aspect of the city in changes in the summer, and the wide port streets are filled with half-naked girls and their hairy companions. Most have chosen to vacation in Bar with no reason. Tourists were often the relatives of residents, or citizens of poorer neighboring countries looking for cheap accommodation at the seaside. Milutin was amused by the tourists in his town: he would imagine that all of a sudden the inhabitants of a serious Continental city had turned mad and dressed in their swimsuits. Then he would imagine them going to work like that: a slideshow of counter clerks in one-piece animal-print swimwear, taxi drivers in the Speedo shorts or Boards of Directors of some large corporation such as the Port of Bar directorship, all seated at some huge round table – all in Hawaiian shorts. The city is, in all honesty, surrounded by beautiful beaches.

Nightfall had caught Milutin off guard: overcome with the fear of the very possibility of falling asleep at some point behind his small plastic table covered with bottles of oil. One cannot fall asleep uncontrollably, he thought. Especially not in the workplace. When he had been an employee of the Bar post office, those found asleep at work had inevitably been punished. Was it because the end of summer is marked with a shortening of daylight? A sense of time means an awareness of self. As a man begins to lose his sharpness, he begins to die. It has nothing to do with age. This can happen in his youth, if his soul is old. Milutin was considerably shaken by such thoughts.

Going home, Milutin left behind behind the waterfront and harbor docks. The neighborhood he lives in is known as Macedonian village. After twenty years of service, Milutin had been assigned an apartment in this area. He remained in service for another twenty years. His apartment is on the ground floor of a very old building. The building was built long before the great earthquake in 1979. These old structures, they say, superbly withstand the test of time and bad weather. The building had been filled with his old colleagues but over time the nature of the population had changed. Now there were mainly their children and grandchildren. The ones who knew him were very polite. But newcomers hardly ever greeted him with a “good day.” He is not known as a grumpy neighbor, but newcomers might have some bad ideas about him. People who do not know anything about one tend to imagine bad things in their minds to fill the void. Just because they do not know.

Approaching the building entrance, Milutin spotted a blond girl sitting and waiting on the stoop. Her eyes shone like cat’s eyes, and her face was smeared by all-day play. As soon as she saw him, the girl abruptly got up to meet him.

–Give me back my ball – said the blond girl.

–What ball?

Milutin was confused. The girl gestured to the window on the ground floor. The window was broken, and there was a ball in the corner, surrounded by glass fragments.

–Aha! So you broke my window. I’ll return the ball to your parents. Tell me where you live and I’ll bring it tomorrow. Now you need to go home. It’s already dark.

–By the canal – cried the girl and ran into the night.

Often in life Milutin had thought about children, especially in recent years as he began approaching death. He was happy that

even as an old man he was healthy and able to take care of himself without assistance. Throughout life he had not encountered to much stress. Even in his youth, he knew how to subordinate everyday life to his own needs, and not the other way round, he had not reduced himself to a life imagined from catalogs or TV. After his one great love, he had known quite a few women. However, none of them had been able to entice him into the convenience of living together. He had never spent more than a few months with any of those women. Whenever they had coyly begun to ease their things into his apartment, his passion for them would begin to wane as a result. What had been a great joy in his youth, time had turned into a nuisance, somehow a cheap copy of the original past. No woman had proved herself to be the original person. To him, they were all the treasure troves of somebody else’s memories. He had considered only one woman in his memories. And vice versa.

Milutin did not mind being alone. He was a hard worker, but he had no desire to work for anyone but himself. He never thought his self sufficiency selfish, but rather merely his destiny. What he earned selling oil in summer was barely enough for firewood in the winter. That was not a life he could offer anyone, and he knew that well.

The day is August 22. He wakes up at about five thirty – a habit left over from his working days. The fresh scent of the sea and the noise of port machinery has been the same for ages. The window is broken, so he opens it warily. His house is always neat. His stuff is old, but he is used to it. Any change would only bring chaos. Just here and there the furniture shows signs of wear after so many years of use. There are no paintings aside from a reproduction bought in a store just to fill the white space on the wall. There are no photos. No decoration. He makes himself coffee

with milk and breaks off a piece of bread. Today he will go to the waterfront and present his collection of medicinal oils to passersby. Prior to that, he will check his reflection in the mirror for couple of minutes. Daily observation in the mirror for a couple of minutes prevents him from growing old. To himself, he is always the same day by day. But first he will drink his white coffee and eat a bread crust listening to the news from the radio. He is mostly interested in the weather forecast. Today, they say, the mercury in the thermometer will reach 38 degrees Celsius. The end of summer is nearing and the heat slowly drops below 40 C. Soon, the rain will fall, for sure. The summers here are all the same. Before leaving the house he must supplement today's supply of oil. His canvas bag contains almost all the oil bottles from yesterday, except for a couple of bottles made with lavender. Lavender sells the best. He packs up his little plastic counter table. Then he straps to it the chair on which he will be sitting. Before going to the boardwalk, he will pay a visit to the girl's parents to claim damages for his window. He will, of course, ask them not to be too harsh on her, as it can happen to any child. The girl seemed scared but also a bit wild. He remembered her bright eyes. Where did she said she was living? The Canal. He is not sure where exactly. There are no apartment buildings he remembers, although he hasn't been in that part of the town for more than 30 years. Once upon a time guys used to take girls over there before marrying or just leaving them. Then Gypsies started to gather there. The Canal, with its catacombs and strange architecture, was a shelter for many. The Police was always after someone and Canal was considered a danger zone. They used to say that the walls might crumble and water may spill, but it never happened. Milutin carries a bag on his shoulder, pastic table in one hand, and the ball in the other.

He seems ridiculous to himself. He hasn't had a ball in his hands since he was a youngster. Heading towards the canal, he turns it and looks at it. He feels its heaviness. It is a small children's ball. He wants to bounce it off the ground, but smiles to himself at the very thought. Imagine if someone were to see that! An old man bouncing a ball! But the desire to do so is overwhelming. He looks around for a suitable place and then slams the ball to the concrete. The ball bounces the wrong way and the old man runs after it. His heart is pounding as if he has done something bad. He quickly picks up the ball and goes on. Again he laughs to himself. He is approaching the canal. It is just as it was 30 years ago. Maybe with a bit more vegetation. It is early morning and the city is still quiet. He wonders whether the people who he is going to visit are awake yet. He hadn't thought of it earlier.

The skyline, created in the distance by the canal, starts to appear in the old man's eye. He is approaching it, but he is not sure of what he sees. He puts his hand to his forehead as if he wants to shield his eyes from the sun. From the direction of the place he is going to, amazing colors drift towards his eyes. He thinks there was something wrong, but is reassured by the recognizable architecture of the old canal that collects water from a variety of sources and flows into the sea.

The canal is 20 meters wide and who knows how long. In its body and womb there are impeccable areas whose function is not clear to the common man. They are like randomly assigned rooms with huge pipes from which water drips constantly. These aquatic "rooms" with pipes are protected by steel railings. Other "rooms" are open and are a kind of ornament on the canal. They are like hotel suites in a building that is open on one side. Like like architectural ornaments on the vast body of Bar Canal. In each of these rooms someone was living.

The old man gasps when he sees the scene in front of him. He almost drops what he is carrying. There must have been about twenty families. And they were not Gypsies. The Canal facade was full of unusual furniture. Milutin knows that the Canal and its surroundings are inhabited by Gypsies and some of their families, but this is a lot more people. There were even stairs to some rooms so that even the highest parts are inhabited. It looks like a peculiar beehive of people. He wonders how the authorities have allowed this, but remembers that for years he was interested in no more than the forecast. He wondered if this was strange only to him, and if anyone else knows of this quaint town. He decides to approach. The ball in his hands now seems insignificant, but it gives him enough of reason to do be there. Still, the whole thing scares him and he realizes that he needs to be careful and assess his surroundings first. The canal resembles a huge beached boat, whose crew did not want to leave it. The old man walked around.

Life is waking up in the Canal. Although the location and layout of apartments is quite unusual, everything else looks like any other village in the vicinity of Bar. In one corner of the canal are, as one might call them, small workshops. Owners and their wives are hanging copper cookware, not far from where they have laid fabrics and carpets, wooden items, furniture, plastic... Suddenly a food truck arrives. There is the clatter of women spreading clothes and preparing food. Everything seems quite normal. The sun is heralding a hot day.

Milutin turns back. For the first time in his life it seems like he is out of control. It surely has something to do with yesterday's sleep. He fears that the scene he has just left behind was a product of his imagination. He arrives at the boardwalk and he decides to continue with his life as if nothing had happened at all. If the girl came for her ball, he

would just return it to her and that would be it. He arrives at his usual place, where he is to offer his oil to passers. He places the ball next to him and he tries to calm down. Oh, how impossible it seems now... There are people he could ask whether the Canal city really exists. It seems to him that tourists just pass by for hours. He hopes his face does not reflect his inner turmoils, so he takes several deep breaths. The strange images do not want to leave his head. A police officer is heading towards Milutin. He thinks it might be a good opportunity, for he will be able to talk to him. The police officer is a public servant, he will take Mulatin seriously or might even take pity on a crazy old man. The civil servant approaches the counter, but even before Milutin can greet him with "good day", he is asked in a harsh tone if he has a licence to vend.

–It's only the oil. Cheap too – says the old man.

–It will now be confiscated, and you had better get lost before I arrest you, and never again show yourself before my eyes. Is that clear?

Milutin stares speechlessly at the policemen. He had thought he was sufficiently old not to be treated that way. What happened to this world, he wonders, and when did it get so far from what I knew?

–Excuse me, please. Can you give me back my oil? I paid dearly for it. Please give me back my oil – Milutin's voice was courteous and humble.

–Be happy that you havent gone to jail! No oil for you, old man. This will teach you not to trade without permission – says the policeman stuffing the bag with bottles.

The old man is broken.

–Please give me back my oil – he repeats softly.

–Dude, are you deaf? It a seizure, hey! When you obtain permission, you'll get the oil back – the policeman exclaims.

Milutin folds his counter and stools, placing the ball under his arm. The police officer waits for him to leave.

–Just one more thing, please. Do you know anything about the canal resort? About the people who live there?

–By the Canal?

–Yes. There are quite a lot of them – says the old man.

–Never heard of it – says the officer and gestures him to leave.

On his way to home, Milutin struggles with numerous thoughts. He enters, and puts down his things, then lays on his bed in a large room. What a day, he says aloud. He's

lost a lot of oil, but it does not matter, he can repair the damage. In just a couple of days he will be able to return to the same place. The police officer will forget about him.

He hears someone throwing rocks at his window. He opens it carefully because it is already broken. There is the blonde girl with glowing eyes. Milutin smiles at her and she smiles back at him. He gets the ball, than he throws it carefully and waves in greeting. The girl runs away happily, as only children running to play are able to do. The old man returns to his bed.

Tomorrow, he decides, his will go to the Canal city. By all means.