

Contemporary Slovenian Literature

MOJCA KUMERDEJ

Fragna

Beletrina*

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Fragma
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Mojca Kumerdej is a philosopher, a cultural chronicler, a theatre critic and a writer. If she was still settling accounts with the Slovenian literary tradition and trying to find her space under the sun in *Krst nad Triglavom* (2001), *Fragma* (2003) shows an utterly original world of the author, which derives from the contemporary society and its problems. Short stories thematically move on the slippery edge of corporality and attest to a new recognizable feminine writing. *Fragma* is an excellent book regarding its writing as well as its interesting duality of the characters and the adventures of its (anti)heroes, their unusual mediocrity and unusually different fates, which most frequently turn out very differently.

UNDER THE SURFACE

“Are you sure you aren’t coming swimming with me?” he asked me while he was entering into the cold water on the lakeside gravel.

“You know I’m not ... I don’t like swimming,” I replied, just as I do every time he asks me; as if he had forgotten, or else he does it because he doesn’t want to remember.

You will never know the real reason. I will never tell you. For us to spend the third summer, our summer together, by ourselves, without anyone interrupting us, there had to be a sacrifice. On that early July afternoon not only did I see everything but I didn’t do anything – and by doing so did everything. It was probably fate – that I went to the house from the beach because I was feeling sick all morning and wanted to throw up. Perhaps I was reading, perhaps not, I probably wasn’t doing anything, except walking around the house and going out onto the terrace a few times. I saw you playing on the beach, you and the little one with long curly fair hair. It isn’t true that I didn’t think about what happened later that afternoon, that I didn’t even wish for it. I have never cared much about children, I haven’t even thought about them and it only seemed that we would have one – just because in a relationship between two people who love each other this usually happens. I probably wouldn’t even think about that seriously if I hadn’t seen that woman selfishly moving around you, flattering you, purposely setting her hair right when speaking to you, the corners of her lips trembling before uttering a word, biting her lower lip and – seemingly incidentally but in fact meanly and selfishly - licking it, and your look becoming moist and frozen.

That’s when I knew I had to take action. After all she was more attractive than me and she had the ability to release a kind of a warm magnetic field around her, which I simply can’t do. And that’s how it happened. When you put your hand on my stomach I knew I had you and that’s when I decided to have you forever, whole and completely, without intermediary, disturbing elements, which could jeopardize our love.

But when the little one came along, you changed, especially you didn’t look at me the way you used to. Not anymore as a lover but as the mother of your child. As the mother of the little one who was becoming a girl and then more and more, I noticed, a little woman. Every time you returned home you first hugged the little one, played with her honey brown hair, kissed her on the cheeks and only then was it my turn. And the first months the little one was crying, she was crying indescribably a lot, so that already at that time I thought something should be done. She was waking me all nights with her piercing screaming so that I was getting up trying to silence her, while you rarely got up because you needed your sleep, as if I didn’t because I was staying at home with her. To take care of her. To take care of your child. For your favourite sweetheart, as you often put it, and didn’t even notice that it hurt me. She knew all too well that she came first, that you loved her more than you loved me. Often I noticed a mocking smile in her big bright eyes when you hugged her while I was waiting my turn after you grew weary of each other. The little one could be mean, very mean and conspiratorial. She was making up totally false things: like, for example, that she didn’t get the food she wanted that day or which I promised to her the day before, and that I slapped her a few times because she didn’t obey me at the shopping centre, when she tore herself away from my arms only to attract attention and the employees were searching for her over the loud-speaker and the shop assistants were rummaging among the coat-hangers together with me until they finally found her in the sportswear department. She was laughing in my face, as if to say, look how many people were looking for me, everyone wanted to find me, including you, who don’t have anyone in the world who would care for you the most. And then at that moment when they brought her to me I didn’t really slap her but I held her stronger and slightly touched her hair, and she screamed as if it hurt;

but it didn’t, I was the one feeling pain because she embarrassed me just as so many times before; all eyes were turned to me, as if to say, how did you bring her up so badly, what kind of a mother are you and similar things I was reading from their looks. And you, at home, weren’t furious with her but with me, for letting her out of my sight, for allowing your child to tear away from mother’s safe arms.

She did this lots of times only to be at the centre of attention. When friends came over to visit, she would sit in the armchair, cross her legs and then like a little woman asked for a child rather unusual questions, also

about sex. Oh, how everyone adored her, this one will be the true destroyer of men, she will hold them at bay, even now you can tell how smart she is and on top of that, it's clear she will be a real beauty. Smart and beautiful, guests said while looking at you. Her father's daughter, they must have thought, thank god she doesn't take much after her mother. She has his blue-greenish eyes, his big lips and disarming smile with which she can achieve everything, his remarkable skill of communicating... Surely many a man asked themselves what you saw in me. OK, now that we have a child, yes, but what you had seen in me then when you were falling in love with me. People are always calculating things, falling in love with people, pretty like themselves, judging for whom they aren't pretty enough and who is the one not worthy of them. But when they looked at us, they probably noticed and thought that he would probably deserve someone more attractive than me. But no woman in this world would be capable of loving you as much as I do, no woman in this world would be capable of doing what I did – just by doing nothing in that crucial, fatal moment.

When the little one came, everything changed. Our Sundays were no longer there, like they used to be, when we would lie in bed until noon, with a huge wooden tray on the floor, laden with fruit, wholemeal bread, cheese and coffee with cardamom. No, just as we started to wake up and you hugged me, the door would open and she ran to us in her nightgown, jumped on the bed and hugged you. And everything was over for that Sunday, for that week. Our time was becoming more and more the little one's time, she was the one giving the rhythm to our mornings and nights. You didn't want us to, as I suggested once, simply lock ourselves in; you never know when she feels like it and she creeps from her room into our bedroom. That isn't good, it isn't human, you said, she is still a child and she needs us... That's true, I said, but not every time she feels like it... what about us? She is our daughter, you looked at me sharply, reproachfully, as if I didn't love your child enough. Every time I woke up in the morning, felt you beside me and started touching you, I was looking towards the door in fear, listening carefully and wishing not to hear the tiny steps coming towards our bedroom and the door handle not to bend.

She always managed to steal attention. Even on my birthdays. I had prepared everything carefully, tidied myself, everything was all right, but then, when people came, some also with their children – so it is if your birthday is

in summer and everyone is delighted by the barbecue, set in the garden, where children can move around without fear and danger - the little one was again in the centre of attention and interest. And the moment after they gave me presents, they forgot why they had come at all. I mentioned to you that I wanted to celebrate differently, not in the afternoon and with all those children, but in the evening, the two of us together, alone, and we would take the little one to our parents. You were against it both times, as if to say my birthday was a holiday for the whole family and that also our parents would be insulted if we didn't invite them. I gave in only because I would do anything for you, because I love you as much as I have never loved anyone else and especially as much as I have never been loved. But you don't know how it is to love someone more than they love you, to know that his touch and squeeze can squeeze someone else harder while you're willing to give him everything you have and find, do anything, give him even what you don't have. And precisely that I did for you and once in my life took what meant the most to me and was slipping away for the fifth year.

That summer the little one was four and a half years old. It was a very hot summer, such as I would be delighted about once, like the summers before the little one was born which we used to spend on the Adriatic, alone. But with her arrival some kind of family vacations started, with our friends and their children. The couple we spent July with three years ago also had a child, who was no longer that. She was fifteen years old, tall and slim, even a little taller than I was and with skin so perfect like only some teenagers can have. You think I haven't noticed how she stretched her young, long and not entirely developed body like a puma, how she purred and pouted her lips whenever you asked her something and -seemingly without interest but in fact completely in love - she talked to you? About what, I was thinking, when I watched you from a distance so that I couldn't hear words and saw only body language which was unambiguous and clear: we like each other very much. I knew you wouldn't dare do anything, she was only fifteen, she was the daughter of our friends, only a decade older than your daughter. But as I was watching this creature, a growing woman whom you would surely touch in a few years, three perhaps, and in different circumstances and wouldn't just stick to the foolish conversations with her – whatever can you talk about with a teenager as long as the conversation is not an excuse to be with her, exactly the way and the amount of time the rules of decency allow-, I was discovering more and more the little one in her.

It was probably fate – that I got up that July noon and went from the beach to the house above it. I don't remember exactly what I was doing then, probably nothing special, except going out onto the terrace a few times and watching you talking to a fifteen-year-old girl while playing with the little one. The next time I looked you and your sea princess were building sand castles. You were alone, after our friends also the girl had moved from the beach to the shadow.

When I looked through the window the last time, I saw your sunburnt body, lying under the sunshade. The little one was playing on the sand next to you. The tide started to move the inflatable plastic dolphin you had left on the sand by the sea. The little one noticed that. When the sea ran all over the dolphin and the first stronger wave started carrying it away, she ran after it. I stepped onto the terrace and at that moment wished for exactly what started to happen. You were still sleeping, the little one was walking after the dolphin, trying to grab it, but it was evading her more and more. I knew: one scream, one strong scream would have woken you up, you'd have jumped after the little one, grabbed her and torn her from the foam, which was bubbling on her body. At that moment I saw a chance for things to be the way they used to. Me and you, alone, and no one to measure the rhythm of our hours, days, nights, our years in the future. It seemed as though everything around me had stopped, the sounds disappeared and the light was blindingly white. With eyes slightly open I was watching the scene, and it seems to me I didn't feel anything. No pain, no fear, I was only watching what I thought as it went along. The little one clung to the dolphin's handle fins but then a big wave tore the inflated animal away from her so that she helplessly let go. I saw her little hands trying to hang on to it and then she was drawn into the depth... I didn't watch anymore. I turned round and went into the house, poured myself a glass of cognac and fell onto the bed. I shut my eyes, and the world in front of me and behind me darkened. I fell into a sleep without sleep. And when, after a while, I felt a hand and saw the watery eyes of our friend, I knew it had happened. That the story was over. The little one - she hugged me and squeezed me tight. The little one is gone, the woman burst into tears. I got up, dizzy from the cognac and probably a weird sleep, and saw you sitting in the armchair of the living room, wrapped up in a white cover, squeezing the little inflatable dolphin. Our friend was sitting next to you, on the sofa beside his fifteen-year-old daughter, who saw death for the first time in her life. There were some more people in the house, then

policemen and the coroner came. The girl had found her. When she returned to the beach after lunch, she saw the little one's body on the surface, with her face turned towards the seabed. As if mad, you presumably jumped into the sea and tried to revive your sea princess who had already swum away to different seas, oceans, rivers and lakes. Yes, it seems to me that although we had buried her body, she somehow spread into the waters of the Earth. I sometimes even feel that I remember her meeting my eyes, seeing I was watching everything but didn't help at the moment she was trying to hang on to the dolphin with all her might. That I just let her die.

Not that I didn't feel bad after her death; after all, she was my daughter as well. But in those few months I felt bad because of you, reproaching yourself with her death, because you, as it sometimes happens, fell asleep on the beach for half an hour at the wrong time. And you felt guilty because of me as well, the mother of your child whom you didn't protect against death. I was loving, very loving and understanding towards you, I was persuading you, consoling you that it was an accident, that it wasn't your fault that this happened. It seems to me as if her death became your final commitment to me, although at the same time I know that what you feel for me isn't as much love as the feeling of guilt.

Once, for a moment, I think, you doubted me and asked: You loved her, too, didn't you? Of course, I replied, she was our child. I remember your look, as if you weren't satisfied with the answer and wanted to hear more...

And I hugged you, snuggled up to you and started slowly and gently to make love to you. It was Sunday morning and nothing could interrupt us.

You have changed with the little one's death, you're more vulnerable and soft and don't flirt with other women and girls so much anymore. When you carefully mention to me that we should have another, second child, I sadly turn away and say: you know that I can't, it's too painful. You caress me and let me know with a kiss that you understand. But you don't. You will never find out the truth that I don't like swimming because I feel that as soon as I would sink into the water, I would feel her soft hair on my skin, her little arms would cling on to me and drag me into the depths.

Sometimes I dream about her being taken away by the sea on her dolphin and I run after her, then about her and the dolphin grasping me and dragging me to the seabed. I always wake up in terrifying pain from such dreams, clinching me in a rigid spasm, while I can hardly breathe and my heart pounds, not only as one but beside my own I can hear another, smaller heart, beating quicker. I never wake you up. I wait until it goes away, go to the bathroom and take a shower. Then I come back, lie down next to you and kiss you with immense love and tightly squeeze myself to you.

MORE THAN A WOMAN

“Who is this woman?!” it went through my mind when I saw you for the first time. When I was going towards the chair with my lecture paper and saw you somewhere in the back. No, before the lecture you weren’t there. I would have surely noticed you.

You were exactly what I was dreaming of. The woman without a face who touched me from the darkness – when I took my penis into my hands with my eyes closed – part by part: with strong lips, with a look of her slant green eyes, with long eyebrows and high forehead, covered with thick fair hair. Only with individual parts of the face and body which I couldn’t – until I met you – put into one image. You were the woman with whom I had a better time than with anyone else I actually do this with. And there are quite a few of those, as when you once asked me I told you. No, I didn’t hide this from you.

I don’t have to be careful about getting attached to anyone or even falling in love with anyone. It simply doesn’t happen to me. I didn’t want love with you either. It would be too complicated and especially impossible. We live hundreds of kilometres apart in different towns and countries, and in reality we do different things.

Immediately after my lecture our looks met and from eye language to word it went fast and smooth. During our first encounter you told me that you were going to report about the symposium for your newspaper, of which, understandably, I had never heard. I invited you to late lunch and you told me that you would like to put your luggage away.

“I can walk you to the hotel,” I suggested but I almost regretted it. The hotel wasn’t even a hotel, but rather a run-down private hotel, not far from the culture centre where the symposium was taking place, with accommodation for fifteen euros and without a doubt the cheapest and the most pathetic for miles around. When I entered I felt uncomfortable and rightly so. A bulky man behind the desk with an obscene smile, surrounded by a black moustache, was handing the keys - speaking in one of the Slav languages through riddled teeth - to a cheaply dressed girl and behind her went a middle-aged man. While you were picking out coins – the receptionist demanded payment for one night in advance as a kind of warranty – you put

on the desk next to the passport a return Ryanair ticket for seven and a half pounds. I didn't even know that such cheap flights exist.

"Go ahead and put the luggage down, I'll wait for you downstairs," I told you and the next minute felt like a complete idiot. While you were making an effort with the heavy dark green suitcase along the narrow stairs to the second floor, the receptionist, leaning against the desk, was leafing through a magazine and I was standing at the inner side of the door of this pathetic hotel like a Doric column, waiting for a woman who in half an hour – when you were coming down the stairs with freshly washed, still wet hair in dull light – looked like Leni Riefenstahl in the film *Das Blaue Licht*.

"Can't your newspaper pay you a decent hotel?" I asked. You told me that you weren't even on the active list, that you worked part-time and that only with payment of the fee would they partly repay you travelling expenses. Surely I couldn't allow you to sleep in that dump. After dinner I took you to my apartment and the next day picked up your luggage from the dump. You stayed with me for three days until the end of the symposium and came back two more times. At your expense. You didn't want me to pay for your plane ticket.

I have never met a person I would be so sure about that, despite her talent she didn't make at least an average career and ruined her life. When you mentioned that you were writing something, I did some checking up on you. Nobody, nobody indeed, knows you, nobody could tell me what exactly you do and how you make a living. Yes, supposedly you do write, but a lot of people write without anyone seeing them, except themselves. I know it's harder for you because you write in a language only few people read and understand. But as I have checked, even over there - where you live - you don't have a symbolic value – I was, indeed, surprised at myself when I said so during a conversation with my good friend.

It was clear to me from the beginning that I could never have a serious relationship with a woman from a country such as yours. My acquaintances and friends are proclaiming themselves as feminists, yet - despite publicly condemning racism and intolerance to strangers, supporting gay movements and tolerance to being different -, but they would never really accept you. In the beginning they would be nice and polite to you but this politeness would be more a kind of curiosity, narrowed down to anecdotes from yet another communist country in transition and to culinary specialities. But here, in the west, we are tired of suchlike social and political exotic features, too many people from where you live came to live here in the last

decade and truthfully we have never really got used to them and neither have they to us. Yes, my friends would at first be polite to you and I would feel like your lawyer having to justify and defend you from them. Because in time their enthusiasm would calm down, you wouldn't get the attention anymore and perhaps they would even ask you unpleasant questions. They would let you know that despite everything you don't have the same origin they do. That you're not one of us. Because some things you simply don't know. When we were once sitting in a Japanese restaurant and I told you that your face reminded me of Jean Seberg from Godard's *A bout de souffle*, you had no idea what I was talking about. Even when I translated the title of the film in English and tried to remind you by summarizing it, you asked: What did you say – Godard? – dipping the side with rice of your sushi into soy sauce. I warned you that sushi isn't eaten this way, but raw fish is dipped into the sauce also to disinfect the meat, but you just ignored that and clumsily went through the rice with the chopsticks and ignored my remark.

Furthermore your knowledge of foreign languages isn't fluent, on the contrary, I would have to translate to you all the time, which is awkward and tiring. And not only boring for the listeners, but also the person you are translating to – like it or not - seems less intelligent, yes, sometimes it even leaves the impression of retardation. I don't understand why you didn't learn contemporary Euro English, even with that distinguishing eastern accent. You surely had a chance even where you were born and where you live.

I know that you are intelligent, that you have the energy, as if radioactive caesium was driving you, but with all this you haven't done anything. I admit, this duality, the speed of your mind and insufficient education at the same time, not only puzzled me in the beginning but excited me as well. Because of this duality you seemed more feminine. When I was watching you, not being able to follow your thoughts with your words and your sentences becoming interrupted and your language less and less comprehensible, I saw that you were very talented and that you had potential that would remain undiscovered. When we weren't together and I was thinking about you, I was always imagining you in scenes of low-budget Polish films, with a dreary, faded background where pale yellow colours mixed with cold green or grey and you were aimlessly wandering around in the dusty environment and where you were headed, there was nothing, except a dull anonymous end. But at the same time I was envious of you. When I was watching you, during my only two visits to you, sitting at the computer, ignoring me

completely and not hearing me when I said something or called you – you were doing all that from some incomprehensible inner urge I never had. I love my work, I enjoy professorship, travelling and writing books, but the passion you work with – that I don't have. You don't care if only a few people read you, you disregard the effects of your work and when you finish, it drives you into something new. To me this is pure madness, a waste of time, but pleasure without profit is madness in itself and in this sense you've always seemed a little mad. Not mad as we sometimes say and it sounds like a compliment. No, you move in your worlds with incredible speed, but in reality you stay on the same spot. And you're probably lucky that writing is what you enjoy and that another, much less dangerous obsession doesn't drive you.

At first I thought that in your letters only form is important but then I surprisingly found out that you're serious. I know that women – most women – can express their states and emotions easier but you, you were invincible. Every time I saw your letter on the screen, I clicked it as a sixteen year old and a bashful nice warmth came over me. I printed out your letter many times and read it before sleep. When I was alone in the evening, which wasn't often, I fell asleep with you in my mind. You talked with full and clear metaphors with otherwise a lot of linguistic mistakes, but perhaps even in your mother tongue you're better at writing than talking. It's just a game, I was certain at first, I thought that you write and talk only out of communication pleasure.

I was wrong. I was dreading meetings with you more and more. Until then I didn't know that the worst thing which could happen to me was that which I wanted – or I just thought I wanted – came true. Other women always avoid it as if to say let's do something else, I didn't mean it like you understood... I said that?... no, I never said that... But you realized everything you've predicted or promised...

Everything in your life is without additional explanations and remarks, very complicated and incomprehensible. For example, the fact that you share your apartment with a Romanian girl, whose ancestors originate from Transylvania... No, the girl really doesn't look like a Romanian, perhaps she looks even more European than most Europeans with her fair skin and eyes. I have absolutely nothing against Romanians but appearance isn't everything – what counts is language and especially customs and experience. And some things just can't be erased out of memory. During one of the trips to Italy someone broke into my car in Florence and they stole practically every-

thing – Romanian men. And Romanian women... yes, otherwise I know a curator from Romania who has been living in Europe for years ... but girls from Romania, just like girls from Ukraine, Russia, the Philippines ... most of these girls lead lives in the west which are humiliating for women ... Besides I remember the headings from the beginning of the nineties: Romanians grilling swans in the middle of Vienna. Well, they were actually Gypsies but they were Romanian citizens. And then, supposedly, a Serbian friend who hasn't been living in Belgrade for a decade but is related to a infamous Serbian general ... Even though the violence in the Balkans hurt us – Vukovar, Srebrenica, then Sarajevo and later Kosovo -, we didn't really have anything to do with it. Except for that – or perhaps despite it - we even helped you – not only materially, by accepting refugees, militarily but also through interpretation because we saw your national and religious melting pot better than you did, who lived it...

Of course I will never tell you all this. I can just think about it as if I was talking to you on the way to the university or while driving. None of us would ever tell you this. All the differences simply can't be uttered and accepted and the differences are huge, in culture, history, in the present – and, of course, in knowledge and behaviour.

When we first met, it became clear to me that you aren't afraid of many things and you aren't in awe of authorities. In me as well you could find all the weakest points – I don't know how you do that, many times I had a feeling that you can see into my brain but you probably only have proverbial feminine intuition and you can make out exactly what one is saying and you notice the details in behaviour, small almost imperceptible gestures from which you make a story. In the stories you tell you're strong, much stronger than me, than most people I know, and for these stories, I know, you need special courage, you have to know the boundaries and the way to overstep them.

“What are you writing about?” I asked you once.

“Just stories,” you replied.

“Stories about what goes on in your life?”

“No. I make them up.”

“Never about yourself and other people, connected to you?”

“No, what goes on in my life, that I live; what I write about, I make up...”

I very rarely deal with such simple-mindedness. With the fact that someone believes that they can just exclude themselves from the world, sit at a computer and simply make things up ... Our worlds – mine scientific-analytical and yours packed with senses and emotions, without any real theoretical basis – are infinitely far away. But despite this you perhaps don't even realise how precisely you've hit my core. I didn't let you see this because I, unlike you, can control my feelings and that's why I was more careful with you. You made out what I was certain would remain hidden ... And something I didn't even know existed ... Your sexual aggressiveness! I can't say that I didn't want it, that I didn't fantasize about a woman who would come up to me in my apartment, unzip me, take it out and drag me into bed shortly after we met and speak just a few words. When this happened to me with you, it happened for the first time ... I have no idea why. Because in reality I was extremely attracted to you. You didn't find this particularly arousing because it happened to you quite a few times and you even comforted me that we only have to get used to each other. I felt pathetic. Even more, I felt like an idiot. Like a little child who fails in a game and the teacher or mother comforts him, saying don't cry, you'll make it, possibly the next time ... For me it was like someone killed me. On my way to the university the next day it felt like the whole world knew about it. That it was written all over my face. When I stopped in a bakery and the saleslady passed me a croissant with jam in it, I saw in her look: what is it, you tiny sweetie, even this croissant is harder than you. It didn't stop you, but you – while I was lying next to you like a corpse! – were taking individual parts of my body and even enjoying it, which amazed and embarrassed me. When we were taking a walk through the town the next day late afternoon, a friend of mine spotted us from his car. That same evening – while you were taking a shower – the phone rang and the friend was asking me who you were, that you looked fine and so on. When I told him where you were from, he wasn't so interested anymore. Oh, yes, he said and added with a smile that women from there are supposedly good in bed and I nodded laughing without revealing to him anything about what happened to me with you ...

I have never understood what excited you about me so much, it wasn't my success, that doesn't mean much to you ... Or does it? I was beginning

to think that when you take a man directly and brutally you take revenge not only on men but on the whole world – on the world of unequal opportunities, on its unfair organization. I couldn't shake off a feeling that sexuality is your strategy for revenge and a method of humiliation. And that your infatuation, as you say, is love for what you want to mercilessly subdue and destroy. Yes, in reality you're a kind of a sexual terrorist. Your goal is clear and the method ruthless and cruel: to smash what is the most delicate, gentle and vulnerable on the planet – the image that men have of themselves. From the very beginning I've kept you at a distance so that you wouldn't creep under my skin because I found you very exciting, incomparably more than anyone so far, and especially a little bit too much, so much that I got scared a few times of falling in love with you ... I don't know, are all women from East Europe so brutal and tactless or are you an exception in this as well?

I could never give up the world I live in, the things within my reach or even move to where you live, in a small two-bedroom apartment. I'm not used to that anymore; when one is a student this is a challenge, living with someone is a meeting place, coincidental acquaintances and love adventures, but now in my mid-thirties I want my peace and I especially don't want to conform myself to anyone.

I will never explain to you all this although I feel that you suspect most of it, so I will deal with you, perhaps over the phone or a letter, as fast and as pleasantly as I can. If we ever meet by coincidence, I will be probably glad to see you at first – I like watching you, the way you walk, move your hands and palms while you speak, I like the sound of your voice –, but in the very next moment, I know, I'll feel uncomfortable and bad. I won't plan our encounters. Even if you are in my town – perhaps you will succeed in getting that scholarship – I will avoid you and if you let me know about your arrival in advance, I won't answer you or I'll send you a short message that unfortunately I'll be out of town or that my apartment is already taken. In the house where I live people know each other very well and I don't want anyone to bother me again about when you leave, who you are, where you are from, and I especially wouldn't want one of my friends or family members to pay me a visit then. No, my family surely wouldn't accept you. Neither my father nor brother, my mother and my sister even less. I'm sorry, the world is cruel and unfairly organized and we can't change it ... But at the same time the world is full of surprises and opportunities you have to be able to see and take. I still admit the possibility of falling in love one day. It will

probably be a woman, looking approximately like you, but will be different to you. I wished many times I had sent you a message that you wouldn't respond immediately – not yet, please, wait just a little bit, I wished, at least wait until I start wanting you, hunting you like a male hunts a female ... But no, you struck back immediately. At once. With a reply an electric ray would shoot out, not a letter, an emotional essay in five, six parts, and you completely blocked my phone a few times. Hey – do you really have no idea about the rules of lust or do you do it on purpose? Only to subdue a man! Once you jokingly blurted out that even though you don't have it, it's longer than the one most guys you know have ... Perhaps you should be a man and I a woman, then perhaps it would work, perhaps in a way you are a man and you only look like a woman, a very feminine woman which, without doubt, confuses men. Actually, you're a kind of an transsexual – biologically a woman but your actions are distinctly male, you attack us exactly the same way we have subdued you throughout history. I wouldn't be surprised at all if I heard in a few years that you remained alone and that the only thing you cuddled with in the evenings was a herd of your cats. With them, I've seen it, you can be gentle with them, which means that you're brutal to us on purpose.

With you I started to understand that what a person wants most is not what they want to have. Because having something like that isn't possible at all. No, I don't want you as you've been offering yourself to me beyond all measure. You're not a femme fatale, they know and master the rules of the game, the technique of attack and withdrawal and especially of evasion. They're like game which evades only because it wants to be caught in the end, which eventually happens. You're not game which can be pursued. No, you're a beast, which attacks people. At first you kill your victims with words and then, half dead, you beat them in bed. Whenever I was with you I felt sick the next morning. While you ate and slept less and less, and you would only fuck, there was less and less life in me. I felt you wearing me out. With your attitude, rash energy with which you wanted to let me know that you were stronger than me. I completely understand impulse from centuries ago that people like you were tortured in damp basements or they were simply burnt. In spite of my strict scientific concepts I seriously thought a few times what if you actually mastered certain methods of subduing souls and bodies ... and many times asked myself what is it that you're doing, that you're doing with me ...

Women like you should be physically inaccessible – trapped on film screens, between book covers and in photo frames. Women like you are for

daydreaming and dreaming but in the morning they are not to be waking up next to. Whenever I close my eyes and touch my penis, I'll still think about something like you. About an image similar to yours but I'll never let you leave my dreams. You'll stay trapped in virtual worlds behind closed eyes and when I open them, it'll be in front of me, with me, I'll be in a completely different, other woman. You're simply more than a woman. And that more is something which turns me off and which I don't want to have anything to do with.

Recently I've met a girl, a few years younger than you, of undisputed, clean beauty. She's very attractive, a real beauty, without the transgressive magnetism which attracts and vulgarly turns you off at the same time. I'm not the only one who has noticed her. She moved into town not long ago and many candidates are moving about her. We're like a group of hunters which is bound to attack sooner or later. I don't have any doubts about my success – I have what women like: I can be gentle with them and at the same time a complete master which, regardless of their world view, makes them feel safe and protected and which they usually translate as love. And even though this is just an illusion, it's an illusion which works and perhaps even makes a relationship into something like love. Which is impossible with you. You clearly and directly let a man know that you can either protect him or destroy him. And not rarely you destroy him with your protection. Your trick which confuses a man is that you appear determined and sometimes even rude but gentle at the same time. You don't look like a feminist and it's easy, at least in the beginning, to mistake you for something the opposite of feminism. You've accepted your appearance and behaviour and turned them into a weapon. You often give the impression that you're Lorelei, but when soldiers come near you, while you're luring them with long hair and sensual smile saying come closer, I'll take it into my mouth, you turn out to be Valkyria who calls men just to send them to death. And then you wonder why we're pulling away and running away from you ...

She's blonde as well, perhaps her lips aren't like yours and her gentle body is more vulnerable but I feel that with her things I haven't believed in for a long time and which, I admit, were woken up again with you, would be possible.

I know that sometimes when I'll be with her, I won't be thinking of her but you. That I'll perhaps really enjoy it with her only when I'll be thinking of you. That while I'll be penetrating into her, the image of you will be behind my eyelids. That doesn't mean that I'll love her any less, that she'll

turn me on less, even though she'll perhaps arouse me – for as much time as I'll spend with her, as long as it lasts ... perhaps even love? –precisely because my desire will be driven by something similar to you.

I'll never forget you, probably I'll slip out of your memory sooner, but that won't matter anymore. Even if I accidentally run into you, you won't be the same woman I once knew, you won't be the same as you are in my dreams and fantasies, where I'll be taking you part by part ... piece by piece ... layer by layer ... in portions still bearable. And pleasant.

With real, true pleasure ... Yes, immensely pleasant.

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REVIEWS

“The stories of Mojca Kumerdej are extremely exciting because they show the function of a desire in contemporary society in a radical way, although they also have, probably because of this, a terrifyingly liberating effect of a cocoon on the reader.”

Gašper Troha, *Večer/Čitalnica*

“The author skilfully depicts different plots, situated between the appearance and reality, which derive from an indefinable but always present crack in the world.”

G.B., *Dnevnik*

“The crack is a wish which will push the heroes ahead, towards destruction.”

Vera Janeva, *Študent*

“The short stories of Mojca Kumerdej invite the reader to a special, always provocative literary world of sharpened mental states of erotic obsession and possessiveness with its imaginary originality and humour and with a vivid depiction of the uncertain state of a contemporary man.”

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“In every person a wild beast is hidden and every person carries a small cocoon of desire in himself, a wish he has never dreamt of, a ‘fragma’, as Mojca Kumerdej would put it, a play of pain and ecstasy.”

Ana Ristović Čar, *Večer*