

SONJA KASIPOVIĆ

RIJEKA, CROATIA

Long before my parents were born, people came to our village, and to the whole area across the stream on which the village lies, from several villages on the other side of the stream. The first time they came was when grandmother wasn't around, but the second time was when she was young and in love with my grandfather. Both times a quarrel about the forest and fields broke out between the village leaders and some of those who came to us, presumably to cultivate our land, but others said that those who had come were not good people and that we should drive them away.

In our village and the surrounding countryside the people did not know which side to choose and a quarrel broke out on our side and there was destruction and ruin. The older people were astonished at these fine, young, well-fed people being in our spare fields and our wretched villages. They thought they might possibly take a fancy to those springs by the bends in the stream on which the wives did their washing and the children swam and caught the fish that were put on the table after Sunday mass. The young men from the area did not like this, nor were they pleased that they invited our girls to their merry-making where they danced strange dances; some of the girls went out in sheer blouses, their faces scented with creams. **That is why the young men, full of passion and brandy, carrying banners in the dark and heavy night, inspired by old tales about heroes and predictions of a better future, drove out the strangers.**

When they were driven out a second time, they destroyed the little bridge across the stream as they retreated. They were helped in the destruction by those we had driven out, presumably so we would never visit them again. Those others from other villages across the stream (and who when we fought, were with us after both wars) advised us that some hamlets would join us and that we would be strong and that we should not quarrel amongst ourselves. That seemed better to us, and the advisers were from the more prosperous villages and should certainly be listened to. In the whole region there was no bridge over the stream, just a small ford in our village which one could cross in summer to the other side when the water was low.

In the first years no one went to the other side. And who would? We had been at war until yesterday. The old God, the one who had never been seen and who, it was said, through his agents on earth, had ceaselessly promised people untold wealth once they died, somewhere in heaven where no one had yet been, disappeared from our side of the stream. The best sons, the young men from each village replaced him. It was the leader, the one who knew everything and was our own, although we didn't all know everything about him, his childhood, or home, but we would see him walking through the village smiling at everyone. The village settled for this opportunity and reaped the fields, so we would not disgrace ourselves before the leader, when he was already so good. In return he always spoke so nicely about the future that this goodness that would come tomorrow gave one a tingling feeling.

By the will of the leader all the mills and ploughs in the village became communal; the ploughing and milling, digging and building, celebrating and dancing were done communally. The singing was mostly about the leader, and then about each of our hamlets and the harmony that held it together. In school my parents were taught that our village was the most bountiful, the girls the most beautiful, and the young men the best.

Then little by little people began in the summer months to cross the ford from our village to the other side. We were in their land, they in ours. We went there to see what it was like, to confirm our faith in this, our village, and they to swim in the clean solitude of the river where the water was pleasant and warm, and the fish tasty and healthy. As it happened, the first to leave was the leader. But not just to the nearest wealthy villages across the river but much farther away, to other poor villages, explaining to them how we had made a success and bringing them the new faith. He returned with gifts and glory. My parents were told this by those who were with the leader. To some of our heretics, life there in the wealthy villages across the river seemed better and they had to be re-educated after returning, or had to be forbidden from returning. In the other villages left on our side of the

stream no one had any doubts because they did not have a ford and knew that their leaders spoke the truth and that life for them was excellent. As our people were increasingly crossing the stream and as the leader too was frequently away on long journeys and heretics were no longer punished severely, our village unexpectedly became important to everyone. Superb novelties arrived from the other side, not only plastic raincoats and “synthetic” shoes, but also music and fashion and then, just imagine, “their” newspapers as well in which they wrote all sorts of things about their leaders, and they even changed them and elected new ones themselves. Then those from the other side of the river began to unite, to manufacture jointly, started to abandon borders and talk about something that bordered on the unthinkable – unification into a large communal village to suit all the inhabitants, with the same currency, without customs...

In that village they were at first astonished, then they shook their heads suspiciously, “nothing good will come of this”, but then they concluded “this is nothing new, they saw that before us, and we have been taken to it and beaten it, and here we are now intermarrying as if nothing had happened”.

In our village, said grandfather, everything was fine until one day, a Sunday, a misfortune came which we had not expected and did not believe – the leader died. The world, they say, had not seen such misfortune and such sorrow before. But again, what can you do, life went on, his thoughts and wise advice remained, and other leaders, those who were with him, calmed the people and promised that everything would stay the same. Somehow everything survived, the ploughing and milling continued, songs about the leader were sung and it seemed everything would be all right. Then, bit by bit, my parents acquired a reputation in the village and began to manage some properties in the village. They were young, fortunate and respected. Those from the other side became welcome guests and friends. When they came to our stream they brought pictures of their beautiful and modern homes and towns. They told my parents stories about democracy, about freedom of association, about a better world... My parents, began to doubt some of the leader's words, initially feeling ashamed at their own disloyalty.

But then, in the summer, one day in 1989, when mother was carrying me in her womb and sunbathing by our stream and my older sister was just learning to swim, a rumour spread through our village that in the largest village on our side their leader wanted to build a small bridge across the

stream, and said the same thing that “those from over there” had been saying when they visited us in the summer. And he didn't just say it; the people wanted it and believed it. In a short while, a couple of months around about the time of my birth, people from both sides of the stream, weeping and kissing, built the bridge, as if nothing had happened, feeling like brothers after a serious family quarrel about which we knew nothing, or do not wish to know either how it had started or why we had been involved in it. There was no great celebration in my village in the days before and after my birth. After all, we hadn't needed the bridge, we had a ford which they from over there had never had, and life in the village wasn't any better. Anyway, those six hamlets of ours couldn't agree about the bridge or whether we should stay as a community. The leaders quarrelled, from somewhere some figured out that we in the village were not really the same and that our old people were not praying to the same God. Those close to the stream wanted the bridge but those farther away, those below the wood and those over there at the bottom of the hill who had poor land wanted everything to stay exactly as it was, to plough the bend by the river when they sowed and to share the corn.

Again the young men in my village trained, carried banners, paraded with brandy and hatred around that bridge and those fields and waged war. My father and all of us were falsely accused of treason and driven out to another hamlet in that same village in which, as was said, were “our” people.

Our village collapsed in discord and many friends quarrelled to death. “Those from over there” were afraid of our misfortune. They came to calm us and stop the quarrel. They did not know that in our beautiful village love and hate were stronger than elsewhere. It couldn't be otherwise; the hamlets and their new leaders begged those from over there to spare their young girls and lead us and protect us from ourselves. Thus the war ended, and each hamlet became a village. Democracy came, human rights and freedom of association came. Today we elect our own leaders and we can say bad things about them. Our shops are colourful and the roads are good. Visitors and friends from over there and further afield come. We still use the ford because we didn't make a bridge. We're probably not good enough and anyway, the people over there don't want us yet.

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SONJA KASIPOVIĆ

RIJEKA, HRVATSKA

Davno prije rođenja mojih roditelja, u naše selo i u cijeli kraj preko potoka koji leži uz selo došli su ljudi iz nekih sela s druge strane potoka. Prvi put su došli dok ni bake nije bilo, a drugi put onda kad je bila mlada i zaljubljena u djeda. Oba puta je kod njih, radi šuma i njiva, među seoskim vođama izbila svađa pa su jedni došli k nama, valjda posijati našu zemlju, a drugi su govorili da ovi koji su došli nisu dobri te da ih trebamo otjerati.

U našem selu i cijelom kraju ljudi nisu znali na koju bi stranu pa je i kod nas izbila svađa i došla pogibelj. Stariji su se čudili što će ti lijepi, mladi, uhranjeni ljudi na našim posnim njivama i u ubogim selima. Pomislili su da im se možda sviđaju oni virovi uz luke pokraj potoka na kojima su žene prale odjeću, djeca se kupala i lovila ribu što se nedjeljom iza mise stavljala na stol. To se momcima iz kraja nije sviđjelo, nije im se sviđjelo ni što su na svoje zabave na kojima se plesalo nepoznate plesove zvali i naše cure, a neke od njih išle za bluze od finog materijala i pomade koje mirišu. Zato su momci puni strasti i rakije, noseći barjake u tmaste i teške noći, ispunjeni starim pričama o junaštvu i slutnjama o boljoj budućnosti otjerali tuđe ljude.

Kad su ih otjerali drugi put, za njima su srušili mostiće preko potoka. U rušenju su im pomogli i oni što smo ih otjerali, valjda da se više nikad ne posjećujemo. Oni drugi koji su bili iz drugih sela preko potoka i koji su, kad smo se tukli, bili uz nas iza oba rata su nas savjetovali da se nas nekoliko zaselaka udruži da budemo jači te da se među sobom ne svađamo. Nama se učinilo da je tako bolje, a i savjetnici su bili iz bogatijih sela pa ih je sigurno trebalo poslušati. U cijelom kraju na potoku više nije bilo mosta, samo je kod našeg sela bio jedan mali gaz preko kojeg se ljeti, kad se voda smanji, moglo prijeći na drugu stranu.

Prvih se godina na drugu stranu nije išlo. A i tko bi? Do jučer smo ratovali. S naše strane potoka nestalo je starog Boga, onog što ga nitko nije ni vidio i koji je ljudima stalno, navodno preko svojih suradnika ovdje na Zemlji, obećavao neko nepoznato dobro, jednom kad umru, negdje na nebu, gdje još nitko nije bio. Zamijenili su ga najbolji sinovi, mladi momci iz svakog sela. To je bio vođa, onaj koji sve zna i naš je, iako o njemu ne znamo sve, ni djetinjstvo, ni kuću, ali ga vidimo kad prođe kroz selo i svima se osmehne. Selo se za tu prigodu sredi i njive pokose, da se pred vođom ne sramotimo, kad je već tako dobar. On zauzvrat uvijek tako lijepo govori o budućnosti da čovjeka prođu žmarci od te dobrote koja će već sutra doći.

U selu su, vođinom voljom, svi mlinovi i plugovi postali zajednički, zajedno se oralo i mljelo, kopalo i gradilo, blagovalo i pjevalo. Pjevalo se najviše o vođi pa onda o svakom našem zaseoku i slozi koja nas drži. Moje su roditelje u školi učili da je naše selo najbogatije, cure najljepše, a momci najbolji.

Onda se malo pomalo iz našeg sela za ljetnih mjeseci počelo ići preko onog gaza na drugu stranu. Mi kod njih, a oni kod nas. Mi smo išli vidjeti kako je to tamo, da osnažimo vjeru u ovo naše, a oni da se kupaju u čistim riječnim osamama gdje je voda ugodna i topla, a riba ukusna i zdrava. Prvi je išao, kako i spada, vođa. Ali ne samo u najbliža bogata sela preko rijeke, već i puno dalje, kod drugih siromašnih, objašnjavajući im kako smo mi to sve uspjeli i prenoseći im novu vjeru. Vraćao se s darovima i slavom. O tom su mojim roditeljima govorili oni koji su s vođom bili. Nekim našim krivovjericima učinilo se da je tamo u bogatim selima preko rijeke bolje pa su ih morali po povratku preodgojiti ili im zabraniti da se vrate. U ostalim selima s naše strane potoka

nitko ni u što nije ni sumnjao, jer oni nisu imali gaz i znali su da njihove vođe govore istinu i da im je odlično. Budući da su naši ljudi sve češće išli preko potoka i kako je i vođa često i dugo putovao pa ni nevjernike više nije žestoko kažnjavao, naše je selo odjednom svima postalo važno. S druge strane dolazile su sjajne novotarije, ne samo šuškvaci i „šimi“ cipele, već i glazba pa moda, a onda, zamislite, i „njihove“ novine u kojima oni o svojim vođama svašta pišu, pa ih čak svako toliko i smjenjuju i sami biraju nove. Tad su se oni s druge strane rijeke počeli udruživati, zajedno proizvoditi, počeli su ukidati granice i razgovarati o nečemu što je slutilo na nezamislivo – na ujedinjenje u veliko zajedničko selo po mjeri svih seljana, s istim novcem, bez carina... U mom su se selu prvo čudili, zatim sumnjičavo vrtjeli glavom, „neće to na dobro“, a onda zaključili „nije to ništa novo, to su vidjeli od nas, i mi smo se ono davno svađali i tukli, a evo sad se i ženimo između sebe, kao da ničeg nije bilo“.

Bilo je, kaže baka, u našem selu prelijepo sve dok jednog dana, u nedjelju, nije došlo zlo kojem se nismo nadali i u koje nismo vjerovali, dok nije umro vođa. Takvo zlo i takvu tugu nije, kažu, svijet još vidio. Ali opet, što ćeš, krenulo se dalje, ostale su njegove misli i mudri savjeti, a i druge su vođe, oni što su bili uz njega, umirivali ljude i obećavali da će sve ostati isto. Nekako se to preživjelo, oralo se i mljelo dalje, pjevale su se pjesme vođi i činilo se da će sve biti dobro. Moji su roditelji tada nekako počeli u selu stjecati ugled i upravljati nekim seoskim imanjima. Bili su mladi, sretni i poštovani. Oni s druge strane postali su nam dragi gosti i prijatelji. Kad bi došli na naš potok donosili su slike svojih kuća i gradova, lijepih i modernih. Pričali su mojim roditeljima o demokraciji, slobodi pojedinca, boljem svijetu... Mladi ljudi, moji roditelji, počeli su sumnjati u neke vođine riječi, u prvom trenutku srameći se i sami svojeg nevjerstva.

A onda, negdje u ljeto, jedan dan baš te '89. godine kad je mama nosila mene u truhu i sunčala se kraj našeg potoka, a starija sestra tek učila plivati, kroz naše selo pronio se glas da u onom najvećem selu s naše strane njihov vođa želi graditi mostiće preko potoka, da govori ono isto što su govorili „oni od preko“ kad bi ljeti došli kod nas. I ne samo da sve to govori, već i da ga ljudi vole i vjeruju mu. Nije prošlo dugo, par mjeseci, baš oko mog rođenja, ljudi s obje strane potoka izgradiše most, plačući i ljubeći se, kao da ničeg nije bilo, osjećajući se kao braća nakon teške obiteljske svađe za koju više ne znamo, ili ne želimo znati ni kako je počela, niti zašto smo u njoj sudjelovali. U mom selu tih dana oko mog rođenja nije bilo velikog slavlja. Uostalom, nama most nije ni trebao, mi smo imali gaz koji oni nikad nisu, a i u selu nije bilo baš najbolje. Onih naših šest zaselaka nikako se složiti među sobom, ni oko mosta ni oko tog trebamo li i dalje ostati

zajedno. Vođe se zavadile, od nekud se neki dosjetili da mi u selu baš i nismo isti i da se i naši stari nisu istom bogu molili. Ovi bliže potoku žele most, a oni malo dalje, oni ispod gaja i oni tamo podno brda što imaju lošiju zemlju žele da sve i dalje ostane kao prije, da se luke uz rijeku oru kad oni kažu i žito da oni dijele.

Momci u mom selu opet se obukoše, povadiše barjake, opiše se rakijom i mržnjom oko tog mosta i tih njiva i zaratiše. Mog oca i sve nas optužiše za krivovjernost i otjeraše u drugi zaselak u istom selu, u kojem su, kako rekoše, „vaši“. U toj se zavadi selo razruši, a mnogi prijatelji do smrti posvadiše. „Oni od preko“ prepadoše se našeg zla. Dolazili su k nama umirivati nas i prekinuti zavadu. Nisu znali da su kod nas, u našem lijepom selu, i mržnja i ljubav jače nego drugdje. Nije moglo drugačije, zaseoci i njihove nove vođe zamoliše one od preko da pošalju svoje momke da nas razvade i da nas čuvaju od nas. Tako prestade rat, a svaki zaselak postade selo. Došla je demokracija, došla su ljudska prava i sloboda pojedinca. Mi danas svoje vođe biramo i o njima smijemo loše govoriti. Naši su dućani šareni, a ceste su nam dobre. Gosti i prijatelji od preko i dalje dolaze. Još koristimo gaz jer most nismo napravili. Valjda nismo dovoljno dobri i tamo preko nas još neće.



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