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FAFARIKUL

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SAMPLE TRANSLATION

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Victories

Some fifteen years ago, I started translating a collection of short stories by Olga Tokarczuk *Gra na wielu bębenkach*. One of my children was very little, the other but a spark in every look shared by me and my husband. I was writing my master's thesis, my cooking skills went beyond the five dishes I had mastered so far, I wasn't stressed at all, I slept like a baby, my job made me happy, and, in the afternoons, I had the next door neighbours' kids over, so that they would not be alone when their parents were working shifts. I thought that life was a wrapped up project and that we only needed to find motivation and pleasure in what we had built, since the structure could never collapse, and the foundations were rock solid.

I translated the stories one after the other on the computer my parents had bought me five years ago to write my degree essay on, slurping coffee from a pint-sized mug while I fought my way through the pages of Olga's book. One year later, seventeen out of the total of nineteen stories were done. I loved each and every one of them as if I'd written them myself, they all seemed absolutely worthy of dedication, both of myself as translator in the present, and of all their readers in the future.

I have no idea why I stopped, what new obligation or (in all likelihood) distraction had drawn me away from the stories, but I didn't translate the remaining two, and the book was never published.

In the meantime, I moved three times and went through four computers. And I made a fresh start in life at least six times. Two of which were made in a single day.

The spark in our eyes is now fourteen years old, while the little child is all grown up and uses his own shaving cream. Olga Tokarczuk is a Nobel laureate. In short – everything is more or less the same. Especially me – for I have no clue where all the translated stories are. Of the seventeen, I've been able to find only seven. Actually, my husband has, though he is my husband no longer, but he's still just as reliable and meticulous as he used to be.

Where are the stories, where's all the time and all the effort put into translating them, where are the brilliant solutions I came up with when I hit some tough spots and got stuck, where are the words I dug up to replace the equivalents for Polish terms which our language doesn't have? Gone. Irrevocably. The first book of Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* comes to mind; at some point one comes across the motif of a writer who is deprived of his newly completed manuscript – it is engulfed in voracious flames. Now, as a true romantic artist, he accepts the loss with stoic wisdom as decreed by fate, as a gesture of a higher

order. For him, there are reasons beyond the fathomable and the logical, and consequently there is also the readiness to embrace even that which one does not understand.

There is, however, as much stoic serenity in me as there is method in the madness of my computer folders – none at all. I was terribly annoyed, I bit through all my nails in a single evening, I cried a bit, then I was furious with myself, with my chaotic life, and with my attitude towards unfinished business I get into with great enthusiasm and lots of fervour.

As of last night, I am translating from scratch, and only now I realise that the joy of starting to work on something that matters is better than the satisfaction you feel once the work is done. And, generally speaking, in my life I actually keep postponing the end. Until the one time when the end wins out. But its single victory compares in no way to the countless small victories of my own.

House by the sea

I am a child of Central Bosnia, my landscape was defined by hills, my climate was defined by fog. This is why I am uncritically fascinated by the sea, and why all my life I wanted to have my own seaside home, be it a tiny one. To become close with the locals, to have someone supply me with wine, figs and olive oil, to use words like "lancun" for bed sheet, "spiza" for food, and "lanterna" for lamp, to replace, for at least six months a year, my running trails along the Sava river with some slower swimming route on Silba, or Korčula, or, say, in Dalmatian Novigrad, because I wouldn't want to be perceived as partial to the island shores.

Wherever I went for summer holidays, I immediately pictured myself there long-term. I made inquiries about building sites on Brač, stole glances at old houses for sale on Lastovo, and, in my imagination, I transformed a cramped "konoba" on Cres into a spacious house. I took stock of my non-existent savings, and turned on my credit calculator. I spoke with chattermouths from real estate agencies, I negotiated with owners of houses and land lots, I haggled as if I were actually able to buy anything more than a fridge magnet with a small town panorama and a bottle of oil from a local olive-grower. I went inside those houses, I listened to tales about their troubled past and I endowed them with a comfortable future, I pictured where my books or the armchair for my afternoon stupor would go, which stone in front of the house I would sit on to have my morning coffee, what food I would offer my guests, where my children would come with their friends and experience unforgettable summers. In that way I bought houses upon houses, and conjured up in my imagination hundreds of tipsy evenings by the sea and sluggish mornings in the shade of pine trees.

This year I decided not to buy a house. For if I bought one to be my very own, all the others would be lost to me forever.

And not having so many of them, now, that I can't afford.