

**Drago Glamuzina**

*Everest*

**Translated from Croatian by Tomislav Kuzmanović**

*Why did I want to climb Mount Everest?*

*Because it's there.*

George Mallory

## **The Fight of the Century**

Instead of finally pulling my life together,  
night in and night out, I watch Muhammad Ali's fights  
against Joe Frazier, against George Foreman, against Sonny Liston.

Fifteen rounds in New York  
eight rounds in Kinshasa  
fourteen rounds in Manila.

Hatred for life,  
yet always side by side,  
in every sentence,  
even now, when one of them is dead,  
Ali and Frazier.

The blows that make  
all internal organs stop working  
are just a small part of this great life story  
that tonight, in some overstrained arc,  
joins mine.

I'm surprised I've found them after so many years  
now that I'm also fighting.

That boy that used to wake up in the middle of the night,  
together with millions of others, to watch them  
fight in the jungle. Ali and Foreman.

I was seven years old, and, of course, I don't remember anything  
about the battle, except for my father,  
the thrill when he woke me up at three a.m.

the feeling that we're in it together,  
his teeth clenched and his head  
swinging left and right  
in an attempt to avoid the crosses  
flying in from all sides.

It's night now too, four a.m.,  
and I'm watching that same thing  
I watched back then.

But, as I've already said, back then I saw something else.

And back then I was someone else.

What do the two have in common?

The first one doesn't even know about the second, he can't even imagine him,  
and the second one only vaguely remembers the first.

The first was happy that his father asked him to join him,  
and the second one saw his father die  
and he's now getting ready to throw a death punch  
at a life,

to put an end to one of those that came before.



## **Alone in That Forest**

I sit by the window, smoking,  
the rain beats on the roof. And against the window.  
I watch four horsemen riding  
along the bank of the Sava. In the rain.  
What made them do it, I wonder,  
and imagine them riding, at the same place,  
300 or 400 years before.  
Except no one watched them from a skyscraper window.  
In the afternoon, I'm on Mount Sljeme.  
Alone in the forest, I climb up the hill,  
shuffling the wet leaves with my feet,  
and I imagine that guy who, 4 or 5 centuries ago,  
also clambered through the forest.  
Alone. In the rain that's drenching his raincoat.  
No one in sight, neither the city in the valley. Nor the hikers.  
He's in a hurry to reach the shelter before nightfall.  
I see what he saw.  
Trees, the forest, a steep path.  
I get away from the rain, just like he did.  
It's cold and we blow into our hands.  
Then we think about that woman,  
who keeps us warm, on the inside.  
We walk with her while the forest  
slowly grows dark.  
We're alone in the world,  
alone in that forest.  
And we're afraid,  
even though that woman, on the inside,  
keeps cheering us on.

## **Sub Specie Aeternitatis**

I'm at someone else's apartment  
under someone else's sheets and blankets,  
around me are the remnants of someone's life,  
a life that's not mine.  
I read a post-it note on the refrigerator,  
I watch the photo on the wall  
some Japanese kid,  
leftovers of someone else's food in the trash  
someone else's bathroom  
contact lens case, old toothbrush  
a scarf thrown over a stepladder...  
My friends will come back tomorrow  
and I will, after I've spent days watching  
the dregs of their life,  
move to a place that belongs to some other friends  
who haven't gone anywhere  
but who have a room to spare  
and who call me their child  
as they're making dinner.  
Later on I'm lying in bed  
watching the wall  
the portrait of my friend's father,  
who died in this same bed  
in which I'm trying to sleep.  
I open a book sitting by the pillow  
and watch the photos of old Zagreb and people  
who are long gone  
but, there you have it, they ended up here in this room  
with me  
and my friend's father.  
It crosses my mind that such things  
must have happened to them too  
and that no one cares about them anymore.  
Then I try to find  
some comfort in that fact.

## **An Afternoon with My Son**

I spent the day today  
With my son  
Just like before  
We played basketball  
Then went to the movies  
In the end I drove him home  
I parked in front of the building where  
I'd once lived  
But he stayed in the car  
So we talked for a long time  
I wanted to ask him  
Something about  
That life  
In that house  
Now  
  
But I didn't

## **A Happy Divorce**

Yesterday someone called  
from the TV station,  
they wanted my ex-wife and I  
to talk about our divorce,  
because her therapist  
said we were an example  
of a good divorce,  
after which things worked  
maybe even better,  
that's what she said,  
than they had before.  
I didn't want to talk on TV.  
It's out of the question, I said  
and she too agreed that it was nonsense  
but it was enough  
to dream of us last night in front of that judge.

After he told us  
we were divorced  
we went to have a cup of coffee  
and then I drove her home,  
because the kids had to go to school,  
and they needed lunch.  
As I was driving  
in my head I wrote a poem  
about what had just happened  
at that courtroom, café, car.  
It seemed it nicely  
caught the moment when people  
who'd been living together for twenty-five years,  
and loved each other,  
sign a piece of paper saying that all that is done for,  
and I thought I should write it down  
when I wake up  
but when I did  
it was no longer  
in my head.

## **Jogging on the Bosphorus**

We've just rumbled out from under  
the Bosphorus,  
and all we have to do is come out of the underworld.  
Crushed by the cold, I  
barely manage to crawl to the escalator  
that's hauling us up  
to Sirkeci Station.  
But she's taken the stairs.  
She's climbing fast,  
jumping over them,  
while the rest of us stand in a crowd  
on a metal snake  
that slithers up  
along the edge of the stairs.  
There's only her on that  
giant staircase  
and of course everyone watches her,  
even the three men  
with moustaches and large bellies  
who are standing in front of me.  
They turn to one another  
pointing their chins at her  
and commenting.  
I don't understand what they're saying  
but surely it's something about  
fucking her,  
that beautiful, blonde woman  
who has dared  
to walk up the stairs alone  
and to provoke all those people  
swarming from the undersea.  
They think that she's in a hurry to get into the city  
impatient and eager to conquer  
and that she's going to slay them all  
like El Fatih  
who slayed all the Christians  
who took refuge in Hagia Sophia,  
and then bowed to his God.  
Or that she's already conquering them,  
running up those stairs.  
They have no idea she only exercises  
whenever she gets a chance.





## Everything's Going to Be All Right

*We're monstrosities. If we could really see this, we could love ourselves...*

Charles Bukowski

She's scared of me  
and I'm trying  
to get everything that upsets her  
out of my life.  
I'm trying really hard  
but fear is a hungry  
animal.  
As I undress her  
she asks me about something I once  
said or did  
and although I don't remember either what or where  
it's enough to make her skin break out in spots  
which tomorrow she's going to scratch until they bleed.  
I try to convince her  
that I'll do everything  
that she should stay calm.  
But her list is long.

She wants me  
not to sleep with other women  
not to go to sleep at six a.m.  
not to be so dark  
to believe in god, at least a little  
to say that what I did and how I lived  
was wrong  
and to really think so  
not to write about women I once loved  
not to write about her  
to see my children at the arranged time  
and not to get into the apartment where they live  
to be nicer to her friends  
to wake her up when she's having a nightmare  
and to tell her everything's going to be all right...  
She doesn't like the monster in me

and knows nothing about the monster  
in her.

## **My Daughter**

It's a summer night in Omiš,  
we're lying in bed  
under the open windows  
and we're holding hands,  
that little body  
and I.

A long time has passed  
since we slept like this  
and I  
listen to her breathe  
feel the warmth of that small hand  
that brings a speck of sense  
and a lot of fear  
into my life.

Then she starts singing  
in her sleep  
and all those moments  
when I hurt her  
come right at me,  
it's nighttime  
and nothing can stop the chills.

## **The Young Deer**

Last night we were lying next to each other again  
saying nothing  
from time to time we'd put out a cigarette in the ashtray  
and our hands would touch  
but that's as far as we could go.  
I asked her what was wrong this time  
but she kept quiet and I dared not  
push on in that direction.  
I kept pressing against her back  
but the pain was still  
everywhere around us.  
And then I remembered that young deer  
that came out of nowhere  
when we were walking among the tents  
some ten meters from the sea  
lit by the moonlight.  
The young deer, its antlers already grown,  
lifted its head and looked at her  
then it took a step towards us  
and she took a step toward it  
then we just stood there  
anxious and ready  
to tumble down  
in the very next moment  
into the rest of our lives.

## **Ski Running**

My friend goes ski running  
when he's not well  
and when neither pot nor pills  
can help him anymore.

This passes through my mind  
as we're climbing towards Mount Sljeme  
through the snow that reaches to our knees  
and trying to understand  
what's wrong with us.

For a moment, everything seems like it's making sense  
as we jump over trees  
collapsed by the weight of the snow,  
as she follows my tracks  
to avoid getting snow into her boots,  
as I pee and write her name in snow  
to make her laugh.

We don't want to stop  
we don't dare even say it yet  
but something is marching within us  
and it's going to change  
not only our future  
but also our past lives.

## **My Daughter**

On Christmas Eve,  
I snatched that Angel  
from the top of the tree  
and smashed it against the floor.  
Back then we were still living together.  
The next day I turned the whole town over  
looking for an identical one,  
and I found it,  
but none of us  
have ever forgotten  
the smashed one.

Just like that night  
when I had a fight  
with my new wife,  
about her  
among other things,  
and she woke up  
and heard it all.  
The next day she kept throwing herself  
into her arms and mine  
to show us that everything was all right.

Life has already  
embraced her,  
but she doesn't know a thing about it.  
She just loves me.

## **Barnacles**

I was reading that story at a time  
when I didn't know all that much about life.  
And it terrified me,  
maybe more than any other story  
I've read since.  
The story about a man whose face was  
covered in barnacles  
from which only his eyes could be seen.  
And his teeth.  
Try to imagine what you see  
in the eyes of a man  
whose face is covered in barnacles.  
Today they came out of my memory,  
thirty years later,  
as I gazed through the window  
and watched the snow  
and a woman trying to remove it  
from her car.



## **Sometimes He Wakes Up**

There's a woman  
I go see  
Only when I'm fucked up  
When I'm feeling really bad  
Maybe once every  
Two or three years  
The moment I walk in  
We end up on her couch  
Years went by, we lost our looks  
But the sex is as good as it ever was  
Later we tell each other  
About all the crap that  
Happened to us in the meanwhile  
For the most part, things are never  
Better than they were the last time  
Her bed-ridden kid sleeps  
In the next room  
And sometimes he wakes up  
As our two miseries  
Bump against each other

## **A Pervert**

Back then,  
when she was young,  
a little girl almost,  
there was a neighbor who lived across the way  
and he would see when she came home  
and he would call her on the phone  
and when she picked up  
he would say  
what he would do to her  
when he got his hands on her.  
Every time he got more and more disgusting,  
that's what she said,  
and more brazen.  
Most often she would just hang up  
the phone  
but one time she handed it to her mother  
so she could hear what the nut was saying  
and tell him to go to hell.  
And her mother told him  
but she didn't hang up,  
she kept listening,  
she would only say from time to time:  
Aren't you ashamed  
I'm a grown woman  
I've never heard something so  
What kind of a person are you...  
And so on,  
it took a while  
so much that it made her wonder  
and that she told me about it  
twenty years later.  
And it made me wonder too  
so much so  
that now  
after all these years  
I've remembered it again.  
That shiver of desire,  
the tiny ripple  
that the little girl noticed  
and that has been travelling all these years  
through space and time

to wash over me.

Or over you.

## His Wife's Photos

I know neither him nor her  
but he keeps sending me her photos.  
First, one without a head in a tight  
see-through evening gown,  
maybe from a wedding.  
On the other she's in her underwear  
but again without her head.  
There are many such photos of her,  
half-naked or naked in a number of ways  
but always without her head.  
Finally a photo arrives in which she's naked  
with her head, his wife's face showing.  
From a beach, clearly. It's not all that pretty  
but it's interesting, so I tell him that.  
He's turned on by the fact that I like the woman  
he loves and he wants to pull me all the way into his whirlpool,  
and he's dangerously approaching the line that scares him.  
Desire is strong enough  
to burn through all of his caution  
fear and shame,  
and his debauched heart shivers  
as he sends me the photo of his  
naked wife  
her legs wide open  
and a smile on her face.  
In one photo  
in the background  
I catch sight of a changing table that belongs  
to their daughter  
or to their son,  
I don't know which  
because we're not that intimate.

## Everest

there's nothing new in my room,  
I keep destroying myself  
regularly, every night  
I barely make it through the day  
and then again, in the evening  
I take myself to the edge  
when the sun comes out, I lower the blinds  
as if that will change anything  
I get caught on something and don't let go  
that rump pleasure ravages me  
did Mallory climb to the top in 1924  
that's what I've been thinking about these days  
books, the internet  
films, photos  
a hundred scenarios for that last day  
the first to ascend everest?  
let the brain make an effort, do its best!

his body.

I'm examining his corpse together with the explorers  
I'm going through the things they found seventy-five years later  
a letter from a woman who obviously wasn't his wife  
a watch without hands  
protective sun glasses  
they found in his pocket  
so we know it was dark  
when he fell.  
why did he bring that inexperienced boy with him  
some say he died for love  
he's neither first nor last  
the handsome boy slipped and dragged him into his death,  
all of that despite a host of gentle letters  
he sent to his wife from Tibet  
promising that he'd leave her photograph  
at the top of the world  
why didn't he give up, why didn't he go back  
when he saw that he was too slow  
that it was too cold  
and that he was running out of oxygen?  
why was he pushing himself to the edge?  
what was he running away from?  
during all those years, the birds pecked

at his body  
they got into him through his behind  
and pulled all of his intestines out  
the corpse was completely empty  
but the back was perfectly preserved  
you can still see where the ropes bruised him  
and the letter from that unknown woman  
hidden in his inner pocket  
and so now, after all those decades  
we're reading those sentences  
who did he actually love  
his wife, that other woman  
the boy he'd taken to death with him?  
Everest?  
his children?  
all of them?  
and does it even matter after so many years?  
I imagine him descending through the darkness  
(the moon didn't come out before 1 a.m.)  
completely exhausted  
the first person who climbed to the top of the world  
(and I do believe he was there)  
and then losing his step  
sliding down hundreds of feet off the icy cliff  
then I study the point  
where they found him  
trying to guess where he fell from  
feeling for the edge  
from which he slipped  
into my room

## Nice People

We met at the shopping mall,  
so she could see my daughter.  
They hadn't seen each other in a while  
and she missed her.  
As they went around stores  
I lagged behind them.  
She bought her a ton of clothes  
and they laughed  
as my little girl  
tried it on in the changing room.  
In the end, we walked her  
to her car.  
That's where the two of us hugged too.  
And had someone been watching  
they would've thought  
that everything was all right.  
Some nice people.

## **Aleš Šteger**

We were having an affair and she  
was hidden  
in my cellphone  
behind the name of a man  
I see once every couple of years.  
The flashing of Aleš Šteger  
on the screen  
ruled over everything that happened  
in my life. For years.  
Now we're sitting  
at a restaurant in Ljubljana,  
Aleš and I,  
and he is for me  
still  
a little bit of her  
although he has no clue about it.



## **A Party**

We're sitting  
at a café  
and she's telling me  
what she's never told  
anyone,  
about her  
mystical experience,  
about surviving a terrible illness...  
and just as she describes  
how Jesus embraced her  
I  
reach  
under the table  
and part her legs.  
It's all about timing!  
I explained to my friend  
after two days without sleep  
as we were drinking shots and doing drugs  
in his room.  
Some unknown men were with us  
and some women and they all had something to say  
about my story,  
but I remember  
only that one guy who  
dead serious  
explained to me  
that Jesus  
many years ago  
while saving that woman  
was actually saving me!  
And that I shouldn't let her go

**The Stone Thrower**  
**(or how to finish a poem twenty-five years later)**

When you leave your family  
and move out of your house,  
you also need to take  
the pile of papers that for years  
you stored in drawers,  
leaving them for some better days  
when you promised you'd go back to them.  
For years I kept putting that off  
although I was aware they were no longer in the desk,  
or in the cabinet, but in some heap in the attic,  
some of them perhaps in the garbage too.  
Maybe someone vented their frustration on them.  
But here I am now,  
peeping into some other I  
leafing through the texts  
about the women I no longer love,  
about the people who had died in the meanwhile,  
about the time that kills everything it touches...  
And they've been left behind in order to be finished.  
I read that one poem  
about the stone thrower,  
about how I climbed  
to the small hill next to our house  
and threw stones  
at an old stove discarded  
by the road.  
I'm trying to bring back that feeling,  
to see the Thrower,  
and the stone as it flies,  
from that time  
into this.  
It's flying straight at me  
forcing me  
to  
duck.

**Drago Glamuzina** was born in Vrgorac in 1967. He graduated in comparative literature and philosophy from Zagreb's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. He worked as a journalist and executive editor at Vjesnik Daily and then executive editor and editor-in-chief at Nacional News Magazine. From 2003 to 2011, he worked as the editor-in-chief at Profil Publishing, while since 2011 he has been working as the editor-in-chief at VBZ.

His publications include *Mesari* (The Butchers, poetry, Naklada MD, Zagreb, 2001), *Tri* (Three, a novel, Profil, Zagreb, 2008), *Je li to sve* (Is That All, poetry, VBZ, Zagreb, 2009), a book of selected poems called *Sami u toj šumi* accompanied by photographs by Stanko Abadžić (Alone in Those Woods, Bibliofil, Zagreb, 2011), and *Everest* (poetry, Fraktura, Zagreb, 2016).

*Mesari* won the Vladimir Nazor Book of the Year Award and the Kvirin Prize for the best book of poetry, and was translated into German (Wieser Verlag, Klagenfurt, 2008), Macedonian (Makedonska reč, Skopje, 2004), and Slovenian (Litera, Maribor, 2001). In 2009, *Mesari* was published in Serbia by Profil Publishing Belgrade. *Je li to sve* was translated into Macedonian (Makedonska reč, 2010). *Everest* was also published in Macedonian (Makedonika litera, 2016). *Tri* won the T-Portal Award for the best Croatian novel published in 2008. Besides Croatia, *Tri* appeared in Serbia (Rende, Belgrade, 2009), Macedonia (Makedonska reč, 2009), and Slovenia (Beletrina, 2013).