

**Pavao Pavličić**

***Chronicle Of A Provincial Theatre***

**Translated from Croatian by Miljenko Kovačiček**

He turned off the TV and from his apartment he climbed upstairs. Up there it was clearly obvious from the first step that everything was different from downstairs. This was because there wasn't a door into any of the three rooms: they had all been knocked out † and into the passage † which was otherwise half dark † the light was now coming from the windows facing the Danube. There was plaster all over the floor, the ceiling in the passage was damaged, a door was lying diagonally on the floor.

He peeped into the first room. That was a one-time rehearsal hall; there were a few chairs and all in all nothing else. The windows were knocked out of their frames, there were wood splinters all over the floor, the top of the piano was covered with tiny white dust, and on one of its legs † black and varnished † one could see a big yellow wound from bomb shell fragments. Bartol had no place to hide here.

After that he looked into the former Head's room where a computer used to be. For a moment he was struck by a thought: what if the madman stuck to one of those games of his and what if in this place, turned towards the Danube, a bullet found him? The computer was broken, a huge black hole was gaping in the screen, the device itself had received a few hits, the mouse was freely hanging from the table. Also here, everything was full of dust and plaster, paper thrown around, wood splinters, glass.

Antun Lipovac peeped under the table. Bartol wasn't there, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

There was only the former theatre Head's office left for him, in which now there was a memorial room to Antun Gospodnetić, the builder of the theatre. There too † everything was broken and destroyed. Leaning on a stick, dragging his right leg, Antun Lipovac entered slowly. The room had received a direct hit, that was clear right away. Since the parquetry was raised, one could see soot on the walls, pieces of cabinets, in which there used to be exhibits, were lying all over the room. It seemed there had been a fire there too, because one could see the traces of dampness, as the fire was put out, and the partly burned door-posts bore witness to it, too. Of course, the documents were burning, everything they had managed to collect about Gospodnetić and his life was burning, everything that testified to the origins of this theatre and

its history. What did not burn out was thrown around, torn, destroyed. Antun Lipovac was not willing to watch that. He felt his right eye twitching as if it would fall out.

Then his glance fell on a cupboard in the corner. It was brown, solid, dark, they used to keep a part of the theatre archives in it. The closet, it seemed, also got its share. Because, when Antun Lipovac made another step, he saw that only the side of the cupboard facing the door was whole, while the one towards the windows was all wretched and the boards were hanging in splinters and barely holding. Thus one could see the inside of the cupboard, too. On the inside † behind the right-hand door half broken off† something was glittering.

Antun Lipovac made another step, and another one. What was glittering had the colour of gold.

He approached the cupboard and tried to open the broken door, but it wouldn't go, because the part with the lock was still holding. He forced his stick between the two wings of the door and started to shake, faster and faster, more and more enraged.

Finally it loosened, the wings of the cupboard opened with a bang. Now he could see.

In the closet there was an angel. His angel.

It was the angel that long time ago, almost a hundred years ago, stood on the top of this theatre for a short time. The angel because of which the builder of this theatre † Lipovac's father † lost his head. The angel that Antun Lipovac had been looking for all of his life. Now it was here, in front of him, within the reach of his hand.

Antun Lipovac stretched his hand and touched it. For a moment he thought all this was not true. He remembered that downstairs, in his flat, he had seen on the TV somebody he couldn't have seen. Maybe this was also like that? Maybe it all just appeared like that to him? Or even this isn't that angel, his angel, but some other one?

He slowly pulled it out of the cupboard. The cupboard was high enough and deep enough for an angel to fit in, even its spread wings. Somebody had made the effort and emptied the cupboard and knocked out the shelves that were in the way. Antun Lipovac was touching the statue, caressing it, checking its gilt layer while slowly getting it out in the semi-darkness.

It was rather hard. One could feel the hardness of the wood, the refinement of the gilt layer, under the palm. There were scratches on the gilt layer, there was dirt, here and there gold peeled off and wood protruded. But, if one takes into consideration everything it had been

through, it looked good.

Antun Lipovac took a long look at its face. It was the image of his mother, Eva. It was her image, that's how he remembered her, that's how she looked that winter afternoon when she was dying. Her face was gentle, almost happy, angelic. This was the face of his mother.

But who could rely on his dotting memory? Hadn't eighty years passed since then? What a variety of things happen in one's brain in that time? Is it really that angel?

He looked at its hands. On the left one, in which the angel was not holding anything, and it was slightly moved away from the body, a forefinger was missing. That is the one that once upon a time Kvirin Jukić threw on Head Marković's desk offering trade. Another finger was missing: a ring-finger. Antun Lipovac reached into his shirt under his neck and drew out a finger that he had once found in Kupinovica and since then he had been carrying it on an angler's string. He placed it next to the angel's fist. It fitted to the tiniest detail. It was the one.

Then he felt the room leaning, the right side of the floor flying up. Was it another attack? Now, when he had finally got to his destination? He was standing quietly, feeling his heart drumming. He wasn't falling yet. The floor calmed down. Then he realized he could move the fingers on his right hand. His right foot was better, too. The angel had already started to perform miracles. He was standing in front of him and weeping.

