

Roman Simić
THE PLACE FOR US TO SPEND THE NIGHT
Naklada MD, Zagreb, 2000
Translated by Željko Bobanović and Caroline Hopkins

Starlings

And here we should stop telling the story.

Because there are stories which should be stopped before the end and this one of them, a story about starlings is definitely one of them. It's one of those stories which, however much effort you put into them and dance around them, they don't give in to words and probably never will, because they feel good in their nonportrayal, and better, and because that very nonportrayal is a story in itself, just as every rose remains real until it is kissed. It's extremely rare to find someone who will spare a rose of that kiss and who won't try to tame the uncaptured story. Because both, meaning, the story and the rose, are, in their nonportrayal, both a memory and a promise and before us they both open the door a fraction at that moment where the unpicked flower is neither told, possessed nor repeated.

And who are we Morgans to consider ourselves better than others to abandon that fruitless hunt?

The only thing, in the whole story, that we can do for a story is to attempt to attract The Un-told in our own way, the way we used to do, the way it was done for years in our region and for generations in our family and in the way that it will probably be done in the future. Right up until there is only one Morgan left with a story beneath his tongue.

Because a story is like a bird.

You have one and go with it into the field. The sun is shining and you hide in the shade while you leave your tamed storybird in the wide open, that space making it truly intoxicated so it forgets how to sing. And finally it does start to sing ... one just needs to be patient and know how to wait. Sooner or later, attracted by the call of the *virtually* free story another one will appear, the desired one, the one for which you have been waiting for so long, and it gets very close to your story so that they can touch each other with their beaks. Of course, all that wouldn't be nearly enough nor even close to the hunt if, earlier, you hadn't put something sticky, cunning all around the cage, something on which The Never Told would get caught, start to dance, and then be yours for ever, finally getting caught in a white cage of paper.

What happens with the story after that I shouldn't tell you while just now I'm hunting. Sometimes, on better days, if it's loved and looked after, it appears happy. But what is constantly bothering the owner, what is hurting and niggling all day is the strange feeling, that however much you try to write it into that cage, however much it jumps and sings, every morning what is captured is never the same as that which, with its colourful feathers, was looking at you in the open space, making you sweat under the broad shouldered sun, as that which came, landed and got stuck. And that confuses you so much that you're almost ready to believe in all those stories about the birds' conspiracy, their spectacular ruse or whatever, or the theories in which by some dodge the real story always actually stays outside the cage; untouched, unstuck, untold and free.

And after this what can I tell you.

That the door of a dusty, light, green pickup opened and that she stepped out, the Girl? That she was slim? And white? And beautiful? And that she got out of the car spreading the scent of blackberries, blackcurrants and thorns, so much so that all three of us, wanted to fly away from our cherry tree at the very same moment and forever replace the well known fruit for those mysterious dark red berries that she, certainly, along with wood grasses and roots, carried in her pockets.?

All that could be said in such a way. It could be said that on the dusty windscreen the first shower drops started to splash, as big as cherries leaving behind washed out spots and that we were watching them roll down the sky and magically slide down her face not stopping on her cheeks, down her forehead, down her nose, darkening her eyebrows and lashes and disappearing, full and curved on her lips, in her mouth and hiding under her tongue. All that could be said in just such a way and everything would be correct and true. As true as is our cherry tree here with us on its branches. But what my story is whispering, what it's singing in my ear is that there and then and in just such a way I might not have been there. Actually that I both was and I wasn't. That I was watching and not watching that girl, seen and not seen, as well as the drops and the lips and the rest of the things the story talks about. The things that are more vivid and clearer to me than anything are the branches and leaves. Our branches, our leaves. We were sitting within that green room and looking through its windows at the road, the pick up and the girl. Father and brother. Father, a long man in a linen suit, the day was sticking it to his skin, the father who is struggling out through the linen, who would go out, to France, under the tower, on the meadow, with a cigarette lit on the flame of a magic match the girl carries in some place undiscovered by rain, a secret place, promised only to him that will wait but only for a short time, too short, and for which one needs to decide quickly, wave arms and separate oneself.

