

Dear Grandma,

Have you ever felt like a second-rate person?

I'm in Dalmatia, in your birth town. I haven't come here led by mourning emotions; I could be just another tourist visiting Šibenik,¹ hoping to relax a bit by the seaside. But I can't relax. I'm trapped in this snare of nerves, with your stories of the Italian occupation during World War II stalking me... and of you as the activist of illegal Yugoslav revolutionary communist youth.²

At nights you climbed out through the window of your parents' house and hid yourself from Italian patrols... I've learned how to hide myself from police, too. I've learned how to keep watch when my comrades are... I don't believe in communism, Grandma, I don't believe in the State. But the things you did at that time, carrying bombs under your skirt... I can't compare with you. You were a terrorist at that time, and what am I? Your anti-fascist slogans on Šibenik's walls made Italian soldiers less cocky. My anti-capitalist graffiti only make the neighbours nag about the ruined façade.

When I get drunk with my comrades on the eve of some demonstration we fantasise about a mess we're going to do, but usually it ends with my throwing up in a bush on the way home. I am a second-rate person. I remember the first time we broke through a police blockade on the protest against European austerity measures. I was overwhelmed by the common power. Do you know the feeling? I was under this spell until police units trapped us in a small alley and transferred us to a prison. Fascists never caught you, you didn't let them. If they had they would have shot you. Policemen didn't let me close the toilet door when I asked to pee.

I understand why sometimes people shoot in all directions. The oppression now is so indefinite. You can't blame fascists now, Grandma.

Šibenik has changed, too. It's been transformed into a tourist attraction. The façades and pavements are polished clean, sterile. No sign of the resistance, just an artificial, aesthetised history. I'm a tourist drinking coffee in a hotel lobby. But I'm restless, I can't enjoy the beach when I'm haunted by your freedom fight. What is left for me to carry under my skirt? Just the memories of your struggle to carry?

Grandma, we haven't talked for nine months – since you passed away. But this is the moment I need something reassuring from you. A sign of your recognition... that you are proud of me.

But you give me no signal at these small hours. Not the sound of a distant firecracker, not even a seagull's cry. I'd like to hear your running steps echoing between the narrow streets of Šibenik. But I don't mind your silence. I'll keep trying to creep into your skirt... hidden pockets under it need to be reloaded.

With love,

your granddaughter.³

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¹. Šibenik, on the Dalmatian coast of Croatia, is best known for its UNESCO-listed fifteenth-century cathedral, hilltop fort, narrow cobbled streets and ancient stone buildings, and for the excellent sardines sold at the bar beside the fishing harbour.

². Šibenik was occupied by Italian forces from 1941, as part of the wider Axis occupation of Yugoslavia, until its liberation in 1944 by the Partisans.

³. Vesna Lemač is a fiction writer from Ljubljana, Slovenia. She made her debut in 2008 with *Popularne Zgodbe* (*Popular Stories*), which won the 2009 Zlata Ptica Award, the 2009 Slovenian Book Fair Award, and the 2010 Fabula Award. In 2010, her novel *Odlagališče* (*The Dumping Ground*) was published, and in 2014 she had a story included in the Dalkey Archive's *Best European Fiction 2014*. Which, if you ever feel your short fiction reading is becoming dominated by UK and US writers (which if you live in the UK or US it almost certainly is), is well worth your attention. Vesna divides her time.