

Adam looks like a former wrestler, boxer or maybe a footballer, but one of those less brilliant ones, the sort you love for ‘tough tackling’, a ‘good engine’, being ‘solid and dependable’. It’s the way he walks, his body straight, with a row of invisible medals on his hard, skinny chest. A gold medal in the shape of a calf muscle, a silver one with horsehair and a cross engraved with drops of oxygenated blood.

[...]

Since we moved here, I’ve seen him almost every day, and almost every day I’ve tried to match him up with former glories. Football glories one day, wrestling ones another, and boxing ones on other days. But his nose is rather unboxerlike. I ought to be the sort of person who looks for an opportunity, starts a conversation, buys the first round of vodka. Unfortunately, I’m not. So we’ve been walking past each other, sitting back to back at the Frigate or standing in parallel queues at the supermarket. Till today.

A small concrete square behind a large shop – a good shortcut for those in a hurry, with a low wall for the likes of us. Adam is sitting on the wall as I’m walking with my shopping, arms weighed down, a cigarette in my mouth like a compass needle. In the middle of the square, right in my path, in front of Adam’s feet, there are two dead cats. It’s impossible to say, ‘They look like they’re asleep.’ They’ve been mauled and are lying in unnatural positions, even for cats. Adam keeps getting up from the wall to chase away birds.

Suddenly he says to me, ‘The fuckers are taking revenge! Who knows how many of their children they’d killed.’

But he’s got no sympathy for bird revenge. A magpie trying to poke at a dull dead eye gets a kick and flies away shrieking. I’m standing there like an idiot. We know each other and we don’t, I was walking home, there are two dead cats in the spot where they probably liked to sun themselves.

‘Best to call somebody.’

‘Who?’ I reply, spitting out my cigarette, because I haven’t put my bags down. I’m just standing there like a scarecrow, for magpies and pigeons – there are no crows in sight. Finally, I rest my shopping on the wall and say, ‘One time when a bat flew in through my window, I called the municipal police. They have a special number for animals.’

‘They do?’

‘Yeah, they do.’

I call and a woman tells me they won’t come if they’re dead, that it’s up to animal control or the city cleaning department. I pass this on to Adam. He curses under his breath, spits and lights up a Viceroy.

‘Somebody killed them.’

‘What do you mean? A dog maybe; there’s lots of big dogs around here. Or foxes – I heard they’ve been spotted in Kępa.’

‘Two of them? One would be hard enough for a dog, but two? No, somebody killed them and dumped them

here. When I find out, I’m going to kill them.’

‘Who?’

‘Whoever did this. I’m going to kill them.’

We’re smoking, chasing away birds, people are looking at us in surprise and disgust. There’s no good way to start a conversation over dead cats’ bodies. It’s muggy – there’s going to be a storm before dusk.

Eventually I hear, ‘Why don’t you go home. There’s a vet around the corner, I’ll go and ask, maybe they can... Or they might tell me who...’

I say goodbye, and he extends the hand of a former boxer, wrestler, or footballer. Or maybe a weightlifter? ‘See you.’

I pick up my bags and turn into the street from where I’ll turn into my own street. I don’t look back; I don’t buy the vegetables I was supposed to buy; Adam is going to kill them.

Short story *A Skinny Man*, translated by Eliza Marciniak



© Monika Sołtys

**PAWEŁ
SOŁTYS**

Born 1978

Nieradość [Nonjoy]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wotowiec 2019

ISBN: 978-83-8049-919-5; 176 pages

Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw

anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl

Books published

Mikrotyki, 2018

Music

Under the stage name **Pablopavo** he has released 14 albums and played 1000 concerts. He has also received Polityka’s Passport Award (2015).

Selected awards

Nike Literary Award (2019) – nomination

Marek Nowakowski Prize for the best short story collection (2018)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2018)

Witold Gombrowicz Literary Prize (2018) – nomination

Joseph Conrad Award for the Best Literary Debut (2018) – nomination