

As Antoni Sojat squinted, it suddenly dawned on me that he must be on his way back from a meeting at the firehouse, where they had established the rules for the games due to take place on Sunday at the sports field. Combat units from each local village would compete against each other. Mr Sojat was a tad tipsy – they must have had a drink or two.

‘So what’s up, Waldek, what are you doing with that basket? Where are you off to? Lessons are over, it’s getting dark, it’s late, but you’ve gone out for a walk – does your mother know where you are?’

‘Yes, Sojat, I’ve got some saffron milk caps here, I picked them today, real beauties.’

Once again I’m unpicking the threads, once again I’m running away from the falling sky, once again I’m going to give a little bit of myself away without getting anything in return.

‘I’m in a hurry, my wife is sure to be cursing me at home by now – the meeting went on a bit. Come to the games, you’ll see how our boys beat the shit out of everyone, they won’t let those lads from Jastrzębia or Ostrusza win as much as a broken tooth.’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ I whispered.

And when I saw Mr Sojat walking off, everything began to wobble strangely. An abrupt dissonance pervaded the order of the street. I suddenly had to find my place in a new and unexplained situation. Mr Koryga came to my rescue. He had just left the house for a breath of fresh air; what’s more, ever since he got home from work, his wife had been bleating without a break, so his head was aching. He removed his cigarette from its holder and lit it. He soon noticed me too, so he asked what was up.

‘I’ve been to get mushrooms, I picked some saffron milk caps, we’ll be having them for supper.’

‘Mushrooms for supper aren’t good for you, they’re hard to digest, wait until morning to eat them.’

Well, yes, I’m still staring like a calf at a painted gate. I was cross with myself, or maybe just tired? Tired, tired, there were reasons to be tired. Oh well, I had no reasons to take pride just yet.

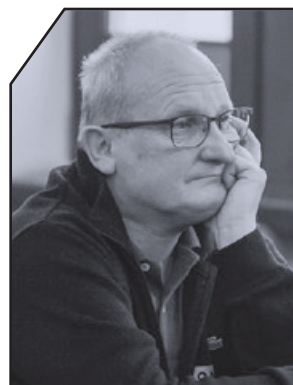
‘Yes, sir!’

First Mr Koryga said that if I wanted, he could take me mushroom picking on Sunday, he knew some places in Przylasek that’d blow me away, nothing but penny buns, gorgeous, pretty as a picture. Then he started asking about my mum, how was she doing? Because he’d always liked her, he still did, such a honey, he envied my father such a beautiful wife, he’d come and see us as soon as he had the time, he’d bring some good wine, to share a glass with my mother, the right thing to do, from the heart, because we should respect and like each other, offer a kind word, after all, we’re neighbours, we know each other, we help each other. And he’d probably have gone on in that vein, but he’d finished his cigarette; he stubbed it out and said he must be getting home.

‘Give your mother my very best wishes.’

I looked into the future of the street, at its perspective, at the horizon. The twilight’s settling, billowing around me. It feels as if every detail is losing its character. What will my street be like one day? What will it look like? What will the old bicycles change into? Will the tired glances give way to energetic footsteps? Will we walk along the pavement without splashing in the mud? Will the neighbours dress fashionably? Abandon their rakes and hoes? The present day cannot explain everything and does not entirely satisfy me, when I look at it that way. Why so? I don’t know. Suddenly out of the greyness comes my granny. She’s walking slowly up the hill, pacing along in a red headscarf. A scarf with fringes, rose-patterned. She wouldn’t have left the house without it, because as she always says, the wind would blow through her ears. There goes granny, stooping, with a rosary in her hand, the rosary’s dangling, touching the ground, Mass hasn’t started yet. Will she notice me, when she’s so intent, probably saying her ten Hail Marys by now. But no, as we pass each other, she stops and looks at me in surprise, she looks at the basket of mushrooms, she’d probably like me to go to church with her, but the basket has put her out of joint, because how can you push your way to the altar with a basket like that one?

Excerpt translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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**WALDEMAR
BAWÓŁEK**

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Books published

Bimetal, 2019

La petite mort, 2018

Echo słońca, 2017

To co obok, 2014

Humoreska, 2012

Raz dokota, 2005

Delecatio marosa, 1996

Selected awards

Gdynia Literary Prize (2015, 2018) – nominations