

She wiped the kitchen surface with a damp cloth. She could hear that Bartek was reaching the end of the kids' bedtime story. As she was putting the remains of the dried fruit compote back in the fridge, she noticed an envelope sticking out from behind the toaster. Now she remembered finding it in the letterbox yesterday. She'd been so laden down with shopping bags, she'd brought it into the house between her teeth, chucked it on the toaster and started unpacking the groceries, and had completely forgotten about it.

The envelope was carefully addressed in blue pen. Probably a Christmas card. She wasn't sure who it was from. There was no sender's address and she didn't recognise the handwriting. She cut the envelope open. Inside were some folded pieces of A4 paper with a small yellow Post-it Note stuck to the front. Written in evenly-spaced letters, in the same handwriting as the address, were the words: *Do you think your life is so big? You're a flea.*

Agnieszka frowned. What the hell was that supposed to mean? She unfolded the pieces of paper and started reading the printed text.

How would you feel if you heard that 40,000 people had been shot in two days? You'd probably think: 'that's a lot'. Or perhaps you have more empathy? In which case you'd slip into a momentary reverie and say: 'God, what a tragedy!' And then you'd return to your life. To your problems, which are weighing heavy on you after all. If you were to stand over a mass grave and read some of their names: the old, the young, the really tiny. If you could imagine those people, their fear, their despair, and their end, perhaps then the melancholy would engulf you for a few hours. Whole families that disappeared like dust blown by the wind. You'd start to understand that those people experienced a hell you can't even imagine. Nor can I. And if you're thinking that fate couldn't be any crueller, guess what...

Some people survived that hell.

Agnieszka turned the piece of paper over and skimmed the first paragraph on the other side: *Let me tell you a story. When the Warsaw Uprising broke out, Basia was just six years old. Her mother...* She threw the letter down on the table. She didn't want to read any more.

'Who is this headcase?' she muttered under her breath. Angrily, she crumpled up the pieces of paper, opened the drawer under the sink and threw them in the recycling bin.

The door to the kids' bedroom closed with a gentle clatter. Agnieszka heard her husband's soft steps in the hall, and a moment later Bartek appeared in the kitchen.

'I know it's greedy, but I'm cutting myself another piece of poppyseed cake...' he began cheerfully, breaking off when he saw his wife's face. 'What's wrong?' he asked, the tone of his voice instantly changing.

Agnieszka shook her head. She was annoyed that the

letter had upset her so much. Or maybe it was because she hadn't been able to hide her mood changes from her husband? She wasn't sure. She rubbed her forehead hard, as if to chase away the bothersome thoughts, and trying to make her voice sound as care-free as possible, she replied: 'No, it's nothing. The tiredness just caught up with me. Put on the DVD. I'll just cut the cake, I'll be right there.'

When she heard the first few bars of The Pointer Sisters' hit song, her legs started jiggling and she broke into a smile. She pranced over to the sofa. Even though they knew the film by heart, they still watched *Love Actually* every year after their Christmas Eve meal. They'd developed a tradition of starting from the part where Hugh Grant displayed his incomparable choreography to the song *Jump*. That scene was just too good to watch only once.

Today, just like every year, Agnieszka got caught up in the magic of the film. But although she was cuddled up next to her husband on the sofa, alternately amused and moved as she followed the capers of the well-known characters, her mind kept coming back to the words on the yellow Post-it Note: *Do you think your life is so big? You're a flea.*

You're a flea.

Excerpt translated by Kate Webster



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ANNA
POTYRA

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Pchła [Flea]

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anna.giry@zysk.com.pl

Books published

Facet kontra kłopoty, 2011

Anna Potyra has also published children's books, including *Zuzia* series.

Selected awards

Piła Crime Fiction Festival Award (2019) – nomination