

I pitched my tent right at the water's edge, its entrance facing the surface of the lake, so I could see it at dawn and at sunset. The lake was enormous. At night it murmured, and the cool air penetrated the fabric of the tent and gently touched my face. It made me think of everything that had recently happened in my life, of why I had ended up at Dargin Lake in the first place.

At dawn, the water was lit up by the pale, light-blue sky. The clouds submerged in the water looked like candy floss scattered over the lakebed. The large pine trees under which I'd pitched my tent stood indifferently, since they saw this image of day awakening over the expanse of water every day and in every season.

I would walk out onto the dock and look at the thin line of the opposite shore. Who lived there? Did someone spend their life there peacefully all year long and could they adapt their fate to the waves' rhythmic breaking on the shore?

I would eat my breakfast at a wooden table not far from the water's edge: tea, bread, sausage, cheese. I would wonder if I was still really myself, if maybe I was imitating someone else, although I was doing my best to shut out troublesome thoughts; I wanted to stifle them and that was why I'd stare at the wall of the pine forest, gaze down the sandy path, and after breakfast, dive into the green water.

By the shore, the lake was shallow. I had to get a hundred meters in before the water would cover me completely and I could swim.

I spent most of my time lying in front of my tent. I listened to the waves recounting their "own incomprehensible thing" – those words stuck in my mind from who-knows-where and kept popping up, coming back, despite the efforts I made to try and describe the sounds the lake was making a little differently, or at least in my own way. I have no idea where those words came from. The scent of the water and the pine needles accompanied these unhurried meditations. I definitely wanted to cut myself off from the world for a while. To forget about my friend's too-early death, which held as much meaning to me as the breaking of the little waves on the sandy beach, as the lapping of the water under the dock.

Stretched out on a sleeping pad in front of the tent, I'd look at the lake, but often without seeing the water. I was back in the hallway at the hospital on Banach Street, where the stench of the sick made you immediately want to vomit, and then took you into its possession and held onto you for a long time – like bitter herb vodka with a dash of beer. On a hospital bed in the hallway, an old man, completely naked, was trying to put on a nappy. Without success.

My friend looked awful. His skin had gone grey and the whites of his eyes were completely yellow. He dragged his feet as we walked down the long hallway toward the window at the end. There were chairs there, you could talk. He was reluctant to speak of his illness, and I didn't want to pry. Out the window, there were cars parked on a little square paved with cement hexagons, and further along was a metal chain-link fence and a lawn.

He told me that in the building next door, whose windows he could see from his room, they'd been shooting a porn flick the night before. He said when he was brought to the hospital he'd behaved like an animal, though he didn't remember the details. And that in recent days he'd seen in front of the hospital out the window of his tiny, rented apartment a young woman, who knocked on his window even though he lived on the second floor. Parrots were flying around in the room, that's what he told me, and he stared straight ahead with sad eyes.

But look, he said, suddenly lively, here's a shelf of books, take what you like!

Excerpts translated by Sean G. Bye



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Selected books

Magiczne światło miasta, 2019

Belweder gryzie w rękę, 2017

Najlepsza dentystka w Londynie, 2014

Kawa u Doroty, 2010

Brzytwa, 2008

Biały bokser, 2006

Selected awards

Cyprian Kamil Norwid Literary Prize (2018)

Marek Nowakowski Prize (2017)

Angelus Central European Literary Award (2011, 2017) – nomination

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2007) – distinction