

“I met your father at a party in Gdynia, darling,” says Mum. “I knew at once there’d be trouble.”

For forty-three years she’s never said a word about him, and now she’s gabbling away.

This happens while I’m assembling a desk she’s ordered from IKEA.

What she needs it for I have no idea. As well as the desk, she bought a whole lot of binders, a waste-paper basket, a scanner, a printer, marker pens in every colour under the sun, and a document shredder. The delivery man dumped the boxes by the gate and vamoosed. The poor sod knows what he’s up against.

A couple of years ago my mum would have lugged all this crap upstairs on her own, but her hip’s gone, so she acts the goat, saying it’s just a temporary weakness and she’d be able to cope with the desk on any other day, just not this one.

I love her more than anything on earth. No question. [...]

Mum, not in her first youth either, refuses outsiders entrance past the gate. As a kid I couldn’t let my pals into the house, and I was constantly trying to find ways to smuggle a girl in here. The postman avoids Mum as if she’d swallowed a bomb, the bravest delivery men get halfway across the yard, and a Jehovah’s witness who climbed all the way upstairs fell down the steps, knocked out his teeth, and, lisping away at the cop shop, he begged them not to press charges; I think he even threatened suicide: he preferred to go and stand before his vengeful God than to face Helena Barska in court.

As I say, I love her more than life itself. And every true love is difficult. My wife could tell you a thing or two about that. [...]

Mum is very beautiful. I can’t see old age in her at all. She’s like a cross between a koala and a cobra. For several years she’s worn fluffy sweaters and she has a soft face with wise, snake-like eyes burning in it.

“It’s going to take us a while,” she adds. “Your dad loved me very much, and if it weren’t for that guy who flew down from the sky, he’d probably still be loving me to this day.”

I came very close to screwing my finger to the desk top. Oh well, Mum’s brain sometimes gets a bit scrambled. [...]

My life is plain and simple. That’s the kind I wanted, so that’s what I’ve got, and there’s an end to it. There are just two tricky questions that disturb my peace.

One less so, the other more.

The first question is this: who was my father? Sons have fathers, except for me. It’s tolerable. Better to be born without a father than without a leg, in my humble opinion. Mum has never said a word about him. His name, profession and further fortunes were a secret for so long that I learned to live with it. In fact she could have kept it to herself. But let her speak.

I’m eager to know the answer to another, more burning question.

Why the bloody hell am I called Dustin?

Excerpt translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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ŁUKASZ  
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#### Selected books

*Kult*, 2019

*Exodus*, 2017

*Inna dusza*, 2015

*Rękopis znaleziony w gardle*, 2014

*Szczęśliwa ziemia*, 2013

*Widma*, 2012

*Ogień*, 2012

*Nadchodzi*, 2010

*Święty Wrocław*, 2009

*Tracę ciepło*, 2007

#### Foreign language translations

Hungary (*Inna dusza*, *Kult*), Ukraine (selection of stories)

#### Selected awards

Kraków UNESCO City of Literature Prize (2022)

Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2020)

Polityka Passport Award (2016; nomination in 2013)

Nike Literary Award (2014, 2016 – nominations)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2016 – nomination)

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2017 – together with Michał Cetnarowski; nominations in 2007, 2009, 2013)