

I often walked along the path leading to the pine with the dried branch. I would gather slippery jack mushrooms in the pine copses and penny buns in the oak glades dappled with sunlight. Further on were some clearings where, in June, you could find wild strawberries. In the early autumn threads of gossamer would float about through the air above the road, some catching on the stumps, others sailing high above the field. Spotted nutcrackers would flit from hemlock to hemlock; I would sit upon the moss and rest.

Once, passing by that way, I heard a howl. It emerged from the oaken glades, from a distance, I reckoned, of about a hundred metres. I stood stock-still, listening. The howl was repeated every now and then: now loudly, now softly. Suddenly, it would grow silent, before resounding again. As I went on, slowly, I had the feeling that now it grew distant, now it approached nearer. Sometimes, it seemed like a whimper.

I decided to search for the trapped animal. And if necessary – to free it from its snare. Even if I'd have to return for snips or a hacksaw. I was certain that it was a dog, whose owner had left him in the woods, tied to a tree with wire. How many times have we heard of such a thing? Or maybe a fox, with iron claws gripping its paws? Would I be able to free a fox?

I entered the bright glade, pushing my way through the thick pines. I leapt over windthrows and waded through waist-deep grasses. Every now and then I halted and pricked my ears. The dog or fox was whimpering somewhere nearby. But here, among the thick pine growth, his voice was muffled, indistinct. I went back to the path.

A little while later I turned toward Lipów. Here too I heard the whimper. And again I entered the brush and circled around. It seemed as if the dog's voice was coming from everywhere: left, right, echoing. I called out a few times: "Hey! Hey!" I was answered with silence.

Fifteen minutes later I returned to the path. I couldn't find the dog. It occurred to me that it was all an illusion, all in my head, my ears, the way we sometimes hear that rushing sound in our ears. That animal doesn't exist. That's when I started to worry. As I was going away, I paused a few more times to listen. The howl came twice again, and then dead silence.

I came back the next day. I began a systematic search: I combed the woods – walking from the road by the lake to the path in the direction of Lipów. Through the scrub and the oak woods – back and forth. That dog (or fox) took voice less frequently now, but again – just like the day before – I heard the howl before me and behind me, from the left and the right. I scratched my arms on the pine branches. Jumping over a stump,

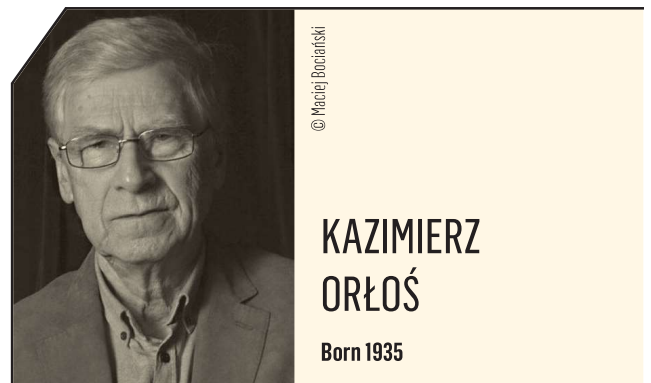
I twisted my ankle. There was no dog to be found anywhere.

I kept up the search for a few days more. I always had hope – as long as I could hear him. I looked through the oak woods and the scrub. I peered into caves, depressions, and under fallen trees. Five days later he called out only once. As if from a distance and indistinctly. I called back: "Hey! Hey!" All I heard was my own echo. I waited a long time.

Threads of gossamer fly over the path. Rustling in the oak woods. Silence.

2002

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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### **Selected books**

*Dzieje człowieka piszącego*, 2019

*Historia leśnych kochanków i inne opowiadania*, 2013

*Dom pod Lutnią*, 2012

*Bez ciebie nie mogę żyć*, 2010

*Letnik z Mierzei*, 2008

*Dziewczyna z ganku*, 2006

*Drewniane mosty*, 2001

*Święci tańczą na łąkach*, 1996

*Niebieski szklarz*, 1996

*Zimna Elka*, 1995

Kazimierz Orłoś is also a film and television scriptwriter, playwright, writer of radio plays, publicist.

### **Foreign language translations**

Kazimierz Orłoś's short stories have been translated into Czech, French and Russian, and have appeared in anthologies in Bulgarian, Estonian, Dutch, Romanian and Italian.

### **Selected awards**

Marek Nowakowski Award (2022)

Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2019)

Kościelski Foundation Award (1970)