

Literature / Philosophy

report: August 2006

Kill the Barbie

And now listen carefully. The best part of a party is the moment when it's over. You go out, the clean air makes you a bit dizzy but you manage...

A short story by the young Czech author Jaroslav Rudiš.

You don't even light a cigarette. You don't feel like a joint. Nothing of the sort. The sky is blue already and the sun licks at your lips. Just a little, though. It's not hot or anything. The music has stopped a long time ago but you can still hear it all around you. In the trees. In the bushes. Inside yourself. And the birds join in.

You close your eyes and feel that this is the most beautiful moment ever. You want to stretch it as long as possible, like a long invisible rope.

But then a car honks somewhere or someone next to you says how beautiful it is and the rope snaps and everything is over. Snap. Like putting out a cigarette. But you don't care because you have lived that moment and besides, you know that nothing can be stretched forever.

The moment was beautiful though. It's more than sex. More than the best orgasm. You don't mind I say that to you? It's probably just that it's never been so beautiful for me. Don't take it personally, alright?

I can remember that moment any time. Any time. Say, when I am pissed off. Fucked. Kicked in the ass. At the unemployment office. At the welfare office. On the street. I remember that moment and I feel fine. And I know that I will be able to remember it even when I am no longer 22. When I am old and fat and sitting somewhere on a bench in a park with my back all bent, waiting for my man to stagger out of the grocery store. That moment will always save me.

When I first ran away from home, I was thirteen. They searched for me for a week and all that time I was at the train station, close to the house where we lived. I hid in a little shack by the switches where the railroad guys store their junk. Old signs. Shovels. Boxes. At night I would go to the pump for water and to a garden for apples. And bathe naked in the river. And during the day I listened to the trains and imagined where they were bound and wished I could get on and all of a sudden be somewhere totally different but I could not move. Leave. But mainly I did not want anybody to find me, like, say, my mom's boyfriend. My substitute father.

Not that he was really after me; it was enough for me to see how he looked at me. Once, I am asleep at night and all of a sudden I feel real hot. I totally broke a sweat. I wake up and he's standing next to my bed, staring at me. He smiled. A weird sort of smile. A crooked one. I kicked him. And ran to my mom. She gave him a mouthful. And he hit her. And then he hit me.

And you know what's funny? I got my period for the first time that night. That's why I was so hot, you know? All of a sudden I was a woman. My belly hurt like crazy and it lasted

three days. I guess I cannot be normal after all that. And when it was over, I ran away. In the end, I came back home on my own. I did not want to leave my mom all alone. And then we ran away from him, both my mom and I. We did not have our names on our door for a year so he couldn't find us. And once my mom bought the paper and found out that he won't find us again. A truck took him down, milk delivery.

I thought she was relieved, just like I was, since he beat her all the time, but my mom just started crying.

"What's up," I said.

"Nothing."

"You upset about that?"

"No."

"Don't you know he was an asshole?"

"I know."

"A mega-asshole."

She did not respond to that. She lit a cigarette. But I knew how much the news upset her. Maybe she secretly hoped that in the end he would find out where we live although it would be hell.

After that, she never met anyone. Said no man was worth it. I know what she means. Hey, don't take it personally, OK?

Mom now lives alone in an apartment block. Have you ever lived in an apartment block? It's like everybody does not live next to you but right there with you. I knew when all the neighbors came back from work. When they fought. When they did it. We could not get used to it there.

"Don't listen to it," my mom used to say. "I don't listen to it either."

But I happened on her several times, sitting there by the wall with a glass to her ear.

Especially after they kicked her out of work and she had nothing to do. But then she started playing checkers. With me. With our neighbor. Alone. She just kept on playing. I think that if there were some sort of a world championship in checkers, my mom would win it and would be famous and on TV. No kidding, she would kill you in a minute, your degree would not help you. You do have one, right?

I never liked school. But I did learn one thing there. Fighting. Once I beat up this boy. Had no business touching me. I'd never believe how much strength there is in me. He touched me. My boobs, you know. I told him not to do that. Nobody will touch me unless I want them to. He touched me again. My butt. And my hand just shot up and then the other one. Automatically, if you know what I mean. And when he was lying there on the ground, I gave him a kick.

When I think about that now, I shouldn't have done it. I mean the kick. He had enough and it must have hurt. My mom says that compared to women, men are not sensitive, but I think that they are. At least down there they are. You should have seen him.

I had fun with mom. We talked over lunches. Laughed. Smoked. Badmouthed our neighbors. And men. And eventually ourselves. And on Sundays after lunch we would lie down on the floor in the living room and listen to the radio. To fairy tales, you know. Our heads touched and I felt that my hair was getting entwined in hers. That we were growing

together. We looked into the ceiling. We were falling asleep. We were waking up. And the radio kept on playing. It was all happening in some sort of a weird half-sleep, if you know what I mean. And when I think of it, I know that it was beautiful.

But sometimes it was just a bit too beautiful. And so I would split. Later on, she wouldn't even call the cops. She knew I would always come back in the end.

My mom and I like each other. Even if we sometimes fight. I live in my grandma's old apartment on the other side of town now but I do go visit her. She still is worried about me. Says I should have stayed at school. Or graduated from high school. Right, so I could work in some sort of a store for minimum wage? I am not that stupid. I can work in a store without that. Hey, I know how to take care of myself and don't have to ask favors from anybody, if that's what you mean.

I slaved away in a bakery. I worked the bar. And now I plant trees of all things. You must get there by six or you get no work. You get two crowns for a little fir tree. Two fifty for a pine. Larches are the best. You get three crowns for those.

It's grand to be in a forest. Clean air and all that. But last week I broke my tooth. This one, see? Just like that, my foot slid on a spade and that was that. I fell to the ground like a pine cone. Everybody laughed. I didn't care. I make two hundred crowns a day so I have money for smokes. And for music too. And one doesn't need more than that. I'll get out of here pretty soon anyway. Where would I go? Just somewhere.

If it's true that a woman looks for a man who is like her dad, that suits me fine because I have a thousand and one options. I have never seen my dad. Well, I did once. But luckily I have forgotten what he looked like. It was not difficult.

When he did not send child support, I went to see him at his work.

"So this is me," I said to him.

"I see," said he.

"Mom says hello."

"Is that all?"

"She says it would maybe be good if you started sending her money again."

"That all?"

I nodded and he turned around. I stood there for a bit. I cried. But I am alright now, if you know what I mean. I'm over it. Yeah, I am happy enough. But sometimes I hate the living crap out of everything.

And now listen carefully. I love the Dutch the most of all the people in the world. I don't mean men, you know, although I did sleep with one once. He was my first one. It wasn't bad, just kind of too quick. Like getting run over by a train. But that's where it's at. I am not saying techno is no good anywhere else, but the Dutch are the fastest in the world. Indian says that it's because there are so many of them living in one spot that their heartbeat is quickened and so they have to compose fast techno too. Blood pressure's up, tempo's up. And you know where they make the slowest techno in the world? In Iceland. Indian says that it's because there are so few of them there. Nothing like it to wind down. The Icelanders just drone and do not jolt. As if they weren't even there. Who is Indian? A DJ. My friend.

Indian also says it doesn't matter what you play; what matters is how you play it. How you dish out beats. Where you dish them out. Who you dish them out for. You always need to

think of the people, he says. Love them. I guess he is right.

They say techno is dead. But they lie. Same as the politicians who keep blabbering about freedom and then send the cops out to get us. As if we bothered anyone there in that forest. I had a bruise on my back for two months and had to hitch-hike across the whole country with a shiner, you know?

Techno is here to stay. They say it's dead but rock'n'roll was supposed to be too and as you see, it came back from its grave. Take a load of the Rolling Stones, four regular walking corpses. They have their blood and teeth exchanged, hair shot into their skulls and all of that just to be able to stick around, to keep at it. They make me sick but I do admire one thing. They are here because they believe rock'n'roll is not dead. And I will be here one day just like that.

I was secretly in love with Indian. I can say it now because it's all gone. He is gone. Got a child with his girl, bought a new car and a collapsible swimming pool for the yard. But he still plays music sometimes.

We were making out once and I can tell you he's not half bad at it. We once did it at his place in the country. Threesome. It wasn't bad but I was simply jealous of his girl having him all to herself. I could not quite focus. Had to watch her all the time. She thought I was doing it because I was getting off that way and that blew her away. Indian too. But I was just jealous and tried to pierce her with my eyes.

And the next day I told him when his girl went to the bathroom.

"I love you."

"You'll get over it," he stroke my hair.

I did.

But it was only thanks to him that I was at the weirdest party of my life. The weirdest and the most intense. It was my idea to call it Kill the Barbie. You know Barbie dolls, right? We simply decided to throw a party in the cultural centre on Christmas Eve and tell people to bring all sorts of Barbie dolls and regular dolls and troll dolls they find at home. Told them that we would throw them around inside. That we will stomp on them. That we would like make fun of all that Christmas shit. That it would be heavy duty. It was a great plan and all, except for one thing. Nobody showed up. Just Indian, his girl and I.

We had everything ready. Food. Drinks. Pot. All the people who said how much they hated Christmas and how they would for sure come in the end kept right on sitting at their idiotic little trees opening presents and pretending to be moved. They all chickened out.

Indian started playing something. We got going. We danced. And then it started and Indian's girl started pretending that she would also prefer to sit a home, stare at the tube and eat Christmas carp. Indian did not let her get him upset. But she would not stop bitching. She started with Christmas and ended with what it's like in bed with him, that he behaves like a pig there. She screamed. She cursed. Might have been bad pot, I don't know. But I do know one thing: Indian was supposed to keep his calm. He must have hurt himself in the end. You don't think it is weird for a boyfriend to have a black and blue girlfriend? If he just slapped her... Slapping, I can live with. That simply just happens sometimes. But headbutting? His own girl? On Christmas Eve?

She fell down. The music played. The razor-sharp Dutch. I stopped dancing. Indian leaned over her, started saying sorry to her, but her nose was bleeding. She did not want to hear it. She spat in his face and ran away. He ran after her.

And all of a sudden I was left there completely alone. I mopped up the blood and had a shot. And then another. I played records. Smoked. I was waiting to see if maybe someone would come after all but nobody did. I was alone in that huge empty hall where Barbies from all the schools have their dancing lessons and where I wouldn't normally go for anything. I stayed there the whole night and I felt real fine.

Indian and his girl are together and have a child. Maybe I would one day want to have a child too. But I think there is plenty of time for that. And so few good men.

And now listen carefully. The fact I slept with you doesn't mean I love you. I slept with you because I wanted to sleep with you, because sometimes it is important to do something just for the sake of doing it. Just for the sake of doing it, you know? Have you ever done anything just for the sake of doing it?

Translated by Tomáš Barendregt.

September 2006 the short story "Kill the Barbie" will be published by Listen.

Jaroslav Rudiš (1972). Born in Turnov and raised in Lomnice nad Popelkou. He studied German, history and journalism in Liberec, Prague, Zurich, and Berlin. He has held various jobs such as teacher, bell-boy, punk-band manager, and journalist.

For his debut as an author, a novel of "rock stories from the Berlin subway" *The Sky under Berlin* (2002), he received the Jiří Orten Award. The book was translated into German, Polish and Serbian. It was followed by a comic trilogy about a Czech-German railway station master Alois Nebel (2003 - 2005) serving at a small railway station in the Sudetenland through which the whole past century passes before his eyes. Based on the comic strips drawn and co-created by Jaromír 99 was a theatre play *Alois Nebel*, written for the inoherní studio theatre in Ústí nad Labem (2005). Rudiš wrote the screenplay for director David Ondříek's movie *Grandhotel* (2006).

Jaroslav Rudiš lives in Prague and occasionally performs with a punk band U-Bahn. In March 2006 he was author-in-residence at "Unabhängiges Literaturhaus Niederösterreich" (ULNOE), supported by "Kontakt. The Arts and Civil Society Program of Erste Bank Group".

More information at "<http://www.labyrinth.net>" www.labyrinth.net