

The Privilege of Being a Human Being

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Waves break over ridged rocks. Seaweed residues cling to their foot, dark grey from the weather. Jonathan lets his gaze wander over the horizon. Quietly, he sits on the shore and watches a group of young people standing around a small kiosk that sells greasy chips and too-sweet ice cream. The young people match the colour of the cream-coloured exterior of the sturdy booth. They seem interchangeable, driven by youthful recklessness and daring thoughts of the future. By now he is aware that it is only here, on the slight curve of the horizon, that one can really tell that the earth's not flat.

When he was five years old, Jonathan had realised that only his father ever called him John. He smiles when he thinks about it today. His brother Samuel had put his hand on his shoulder as they left the cemetery after her funeral. It was early summer and the wind blew roughly. "This is the summer here," his mother used to say. Now it's late summer, but the phrase resembles a chameleon. When the house was suddenly empty and he imagined he could hear the wind from the sea through the walls and, he often thought of the colour blue. The darker shade had always calmed him when he was on repeat mode between memories and the blank pages she used to fill.

"How can I help you?"

The glass door fell silently into its lock. A salesman dressed in grey and dark blue smiled at Jonathan with enchantingly straight teeth.

"My mother died last winter."

"Oh, so you're mourning? We've got just the right thing for you!"

He walked off towards the high shelves on the left side of the shop. The room was elongated and sterile with bright lighting, almost as if they wanted to look under your skin. Grey-blue climbed three steps on a ladder, which was leaning against the shelves. Back on his feet, he presented a jar which said *Conny Segman – Traveller* in delicate letters. "How about memories of a trip around the world? Especially the one to Italy is said to be particularly beautiful."

Images from a long past holiday flashed into Jonathan's memory. Samuel was running away from him in the mountains of Germany. Mother sat in the hotel. She had convinced the two brothers to travel together but then preferred to stay among the books she had brought with her. This woman. Uncompromising. But only with good intentions. How he had always admired her stubbornness, her search for the truth or any truth at least. Sometimes almost in a panic, somehow as if in fear. But always with an infinite love for her two sons, as wide as the sound of the sea, as if they were some saving anchors in what-so-ever-times.

"I can tell you're hesitant. It has to fit from the very start." The salesman turned to his left and scanned the shelves once again. "This could fit."

Darius Mistral – pianist. "Something's stirring inside you, I can see it!" With a light smile, the salesman descended the ladder, discreetly straightened himself and watched him again closely. "Thank you." Jonathan's hands were annoyingly sweaty. Maybe that would change too. "When can I give it a try?" He still didn't know how exactly this was going to work. Samuel had been ambiguous, which he usually wasn't, but he'd put on *Jasmina Gordon – Actress* five months ago and was a different man ever since. Faster, more bewildered, sometimes nebulous. Always on the move. "I'm really having the best time of my life, maybe you should give it a try, too!" "Cash or card?" "Card." He would be able to get over the cost, but perhaps not over disappointed expectations. "If you're ready, then we can go on with the installation process right now." "Gladly." Enchantingly straight teeth again. "Please follow me, it won't take long."

New room, new shades of grey. Who could have guessed that grey was the colour of new beginnings? A dark green chair stood in a capsule, at least that's what it looked like. "And the doctor?" "The machines are doing most of the work now. A few years ago, it was very different. Oh, how time flies!" The salesman shook his head in amusement. Then he stopped smiling and lingered over a button. The capsule closed. The sound of a small saw blade cutting quietly through metal blurred with the feeling of growing tired. Jonathan's vision became cream-coloured kiosk walls.

The next morning, dewy grey clouds could no longer dampen Jonathan's mood. The procedure had gone as smoothly as promised. Jonathan now felt a small unfamiliar space in his head. Thoughts flew there like courting sparrows just below the ceiling, barely crouching before the approaching moment of getting up. Somehow this was easier. A sonata jumped into his head, Mozart's No. 1 in C Major. *Not a tear in the morning.*

His phone blinked. Flash-Samuel. "How are you feeling?" "Something's missing and I know exactly what it is, but I can't grasp it." "Told you! Amazing, isn't it?" On his way to work, the birds sang differently. More in congruence with his steps. Faster though, within sixteenths time. He remembered a concert five years ago in Berlin, a great success. Jonathan had read about it in the newspaper. The pianist's name began with the letter D. Music was supposed to help. Against sadness, against many things. *Never learned an instrument, tons of notes in my head now.* It felt like this new part in his head had displaced the grief with treble clefs and alien memories that now belonged to him.

A raindrop hit his forehead on his way to work. The wind had picked up since the morning. "This is the summer here!" No sadness, perhaps a little melancholy. Maybe he would open up a bottle of wine tonight. Mother had stashed the red down in the cellar and always stressed how precious it was. He believed the bottles had actually been his father's. He wasn't sure.

The last three days had passed quickly. Today's work in the bookstore was illuminated by the milky evening light that was still shining through the window next to the front

door. Jonathan sat at the dining table. The lamp above the table hung so low that he could not see if a person were to sit down opposite him. The house was very quiet. A light was blinking on the telephone. "Be there in five minutes." He had known it all day. He had repressed it perhaps, but how could he forget? Now at the dinner table, it bothered him. Mother's routine was still important to him, but for other reasons. It almost seemed as if he could understand her illness better now and clung on to what she had already managed. Eating without disturbance at 6 p.m. Another bite of marinated carp, then keys turned in the lock. Jonathan's eyes remained fixed on the cool light of the lamp. Apparently, neither the jacket was hung up, nor were the shoes taken off because he heard the squeaky hallway door leading to the kitchen straight away. Some kind of knot formed in the lower part of his stomach. His head felt as if it was empty and at the same time, a flood of thoughts crushed him. "If you just said something, a little hint would've been great," his brother sat down to Jonathan's left. "Of course, I wanted to see and congratulate you: finally you've jumped over your shadow." Jonathan tried not to blink, even forgetting the knot in his stomach a little. Samuel looked around the room. His gaze lingered on the marinated carp which was placed in front of Jonathan. "Bit like mother always made it," he commented. You haven't tasted it, Johnathan thought, but then his attention drifted away to his daily work. Monochrome. Unusually dark grey. Something deep and dark emanated from him. "Always nice chatting with you." With that smug smile, that Jonathan hated so much, his brother stood up and gave him a quick pat on the shoulder, a little too hard. "There's an event tonight. Next time you'll come with me." The combination of two artists' brains should have actually worked. Jonathan heard the door falling in the lock and the knot disappeared. He continued to eat. The carp had gone cold.

Single rays of light are breaking through the clouds. Somehow, he makes them partly responsible. The incessant focus on things, on him, on his little life. Like a grain of sand in history. The teenagers have long disappeared. Gone to another place, probably more enticing than the looming sunset. In unison, they have gone as loudly as they have arrived. The sky clears a little, but not so much that the light could be called bright. Jonathan touches the golf ball-sized stones he is sitting on and grasps an egg-shaped one. It is wet. It is time.

He moves slowly towards the sea, almost forgetting the joy that he had felt on the first morning after the procedure. It had been pure. Now his whole body seemed to break out in a sweat from one moment to the next. Leaden heaviness poured over him as relentless as the change of seasons. This morning he had been barely able to get up – although the day promised to be a sunny one. If they had told him more about the side effects, he might have reconsidered, but probably tried it anyway. After all, the first day had been terrific, or at least better than the previous six months. Finally, he did research on the internet. *Darius Mistral – pianist. The last tour – will the genius return? Interview with Mistral – How his pieces came into being! The thing about geniuses and their depressions.* Jonathan continues walking towards the sea. "Our promise is that only the most truly incisive qualities will be a new part of you. Good choice with that pianist, you won't even notice the rest!" Perhaps this was meant to be. Even as the water reaches his shoulders, he does not stop. Grief would probably have passed someday, but the longing for non-existence was never to go away. "You won't even notice the rest!" A wave comes towards him, breaks. His thoughts would rest somewhere. Mother had shown him.

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