



Gábor Németh

1956

Before I was even born, two attempts were made to kill me. My mother steps out onto the outside corridor in a faded red tracksuit, obviously with some logo on the back: Construction, Electricity or Honvéd, she steps out with a rubbish can in one hand, wanting to take the rubbish down to the dustbin.

It is one of those apartment houses with outside corridors, and there in the courtyard, next to the iron frame of the carpet-beating rack on which the Fehérs' daughter, the one we called *thejanitorslittlegirl*, will do so much gymnastics, on the spot where years later I chuck down small change screwed up in a page of the daily paper if a violin player comes along — two men are standing. On the basis of the false accounts and apparently authentic still and motion picture documents of the era, I have good reason to suppose that one of the men at a minimum is in a windcheater. He's wearing a windcheater, which is what will make the character of Uncle Matula rather ambivalent ten years later when I watch *Bramble Castle* on our back-and-white Munkácsy TV set. As yet I don't watch it. I'm an embryo, sucking my thumb in the warm fluid. Let's give the one in the windcheater a machine gun. They were looking for someone precisely like that, it seems, a Commie whore in a red tracksuit with a big belly, that was the order that had been given out: on Wednesday shoot three Commie whores in red tracksuits, and it'll be double the money if she has a bun in the oven, or whatever. The one in the windcheater raises the machine gun with the drum magazine, my mother comes to a halt, freezes, and dishes out to me a helluva kick of fear via the bloodstream and the umbilical cord before preparing to meet her maker in the simplest possible way.

Not at all.

The why of it springs to her mind, the red Commiewhoeretracksuit that she had on. The day before yesterday, in nearby Oktagon square, a lad in an Újpest Dózsa tracksuit had been hanged. In it, or rather because of it.

It's typical that I can't see the other one, precisely not the one who saves us from them by striking the barrel of the machine gun at the right moment. *She's pregnant, are you blind, you dumb cluck.* That's what he said, according to my mother. A momentary cease-fire in the war of liberation sets in, for obvious human reasons they allow the pregnant enemy of the people to run free and so indirectly contribute to my getting-out into the world. They turn me loose on the world.

The second time, the Russians wanted to kill us. At the time they were still Russians, only later would they again be Soviet persons. The word person is only used in this sort of adjectival construction when we deeply look down our noses at someone, or at least wish them light years away from us. *Jewish*

person, gypsyperson, which I reckon should be written as one word, *Soviet person*. Yet the context generally indicated that we should look *up* to a Soviet person, not down. Indicated maybe, but the language betrayed it all the same.

Sovyetskii lyudi.

The ambulance is bowling along, taking my mother to the Sports Hospital, her waters broke on the day the silent protest was held, 23 November 1956. Premature birth. The Russians, of course, see through the game, they've watched enough Soviet films. That's how fascists make good their escape, this was one of the wheezes they had dreamed up, get hold of an ambulance, or it could be they weren't even ambulances but military trucks, whitewashed, hastily camouflaged, and the Nazis covering the swastikas with red crosses, fiendishly cunning. Clever little Nazis, they have to be mown down in this weird Suez or wherever it is we are. They do everything that is professionally and humanly possible. Let's also give the ambulance driver a face, let's say Yves Montand in that utterly flawless film in which they transport a truck of TNT. Yves Montand leans out and bawls *I'm carrying a woman in childbirth. Don't be ridiculous*, the Russians think and open fire. *The Wages of Fear*. The driver decides to stick the nose of the ambulance out then instantly slams on the brakes, waits for the burst to stop, then gives it the gun and shoots over the crossroad. I can imagine how my mother must have enjoyed that.

We reach the Sports Hospital somehow.

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