

Me – You
by
Daniel Bartak

„That was one hell of a trip wasn't it surgeon?“

In the toilets of the Prague main train station, the first drops of piss hit their target.

„Yeah, it was, coach.“

„And all along it was so obvious! It would have been enough to listen to our intuition, and we would have saved ourselves all the trouble.“

„Intuition? Are you philosophizing again?“

„Well yeah. Look at how it all started. Had someone else sold me the tickets to Katowice at Prague main station, I would still be sitting in the inspector's office.“

„For a five hundred crown bill?“

„Don't forget it was a fake five hundred crown bill! I just don't get it. The paper was so different, should have noticed it!“

„Well yeah, but you can't go around checking all the bills that pass through your hands, you'd go nuts!“

„Ok, and what about Bohumin, instead of getting on the train to Katowice, we got on the express to Vienna?“

„I did tell you that it looked kinda too luxurious for an old school polish train. Thanks God it stopped in Ostrava and in the end we managed to catch our train.“

„Yeah, but I left my book there, with the five hundred bill in it which I used as a book mark. Wrong again, surgeon.“

„At least you did not end up in the slammer in Poland for faking hard Czech currency.“

„Don't laugh too much, they would have thrown you in right next to me, cause I'd immediately point at you as my accomplice. And if that wasn't enough, I'd tell them about your nick name, surgeon, and why they call you so. That it is not because of your job, because of those devilish hands of yours that know how to fix everything that stops working in the human body.“

„Its probably because I go blabbering about it in America?“

„No. Its because you hit people. However, I don't understand how you can still be practicing martial arts at such level. That nobody forbids you to do it. Especially when I consider all you putting at risk. It would be enough to sprain a finger and your career would be over.“

„No worries, nothings happening to my hands.“

„Wishful thinking.“

„No, for real.“

„As you think. The truth is that from yesterday you have more worries with your head than with your hands. Does it still hurt?“

„Like a bitch, but its already much better than yesterday.“

The pants were zipped and heavy boots set in motion. They passed through the tourniquets around glass doors and they then emerged on the main artery leading to the trains. But the boots went the opposite direction. To the metro.

„I don't want to lecture you, you know best what's good for you, but in your place I'd go to see a doctor. The sooner, the better. Just to be safe. When I just remember how that polish dude banged you on the head, I thought you were done. Lucky your head is made of stone. I really don't understand how you managed to stand up.“

„Yeah, but until that time I was better. I was winning on points wasn't I?“

„I don't know how the judges had it. In my eyes for sure. Well, the important thing is that you survived.“

„So we were lucky? Just like in getting back to Prague.“

„Like as in making it to the last fucking train that got out of there?“

„Well, tell me when was the last time you traveled in a sleeping car express from Moscow.“

„Never, and I hope never to have to again.“

„I can't complain, even though you are right, getting on it was damn hard.“

„Exactly. And that is what I have been trying to tell you all along. Someone up there just didn't want us to go to Poland. We should have given it up straight from the beginning, when you came up with the stupid idea of going by train.“

„It was the last tournament of the season, and I had already paid my registration fee,- well and I don't really understand why you never got your drivering license? Nowadays everybody drives.“

„That's the reason. When I see them... Well I ain't no suicide.“

„If you say so... Well anyway we did manage to see one of the shittiest train stations in Poland.“

„Including the service.“

„You mean that woman by the counter?“

„Yeah.“

„She was pretty brutal, 'Yes, the train stops here, but just for the people getting out, and similar bullshit.“

„But then again maybe not. Maybe it was a sign. It was supposed to warn us not to get in there.“

„Where?“

„Onto the train obviously!“

„I don't get what your deal is, you are still here, healthy and all.“

„I know, but I feel kinda out of my skin.“

„Come on, and why is that?“

„I don't know.maybe that dream.“

„I'm still getting Goosebumps from it now.“

„From a bad dream?“

„Yeah, it was a pretty scary dream, Until now I'm not really able to tell a nightmare from reality, it was all so weirdly connected.- the last time we spoke was when you asked me to lend you my Swiss knife and you pulled out from your rucksack the plastic bag were you pig keep your food, your first aid kit and your dirty bandages right?“

„Yeah.“

„Then you scrambled up to your bed bunk and disappeared. I went to my bunk straight after you, and after a while, as the sounds of you munching were replaced by snoring, I switched off the light and went to sleep.“

„I was woken up by a weird sound close to my head, for a while I kept dumbly staring while trying to reckon for how long I had been sleeping. I thought of closing the window curtains, which we did not close before going to sleep, when I actually saw your hand. It was hanging from the edge of the bed.

And then something absurd happened. The right hand lifted itself in the air, and then with gravity fell back banging on the side of the bed cot. It really made me freak out, especially since I heard that awful sound and saw the arm bend at such an unnatural angle that it made me wanna throw up. Just that, before it broke off completely it bounced straight back into the bed.“

„Wait, you mean like, my hand?“

„Yeah I know it sounds incredible, but let me finish all the story, its really something you could hardly come across.

Then at once there was silence. My stomach cramped in fear. What was all that about? A joke? It just didn't let me be in peace so I jumped out of bed. Just that after a second I completely forgot about you and, unable to breathe, I leaned on the cabin door.

You know very well how I hate spiders and all similar creatures. And now imagine that something of the sort, as big as a fist, maybe bigger, was crawling on the bed. In the dimlight all I saw was a silhouette, but even so, I was shaken by disgust. I stared at it for about a minute, until it finally noticed me and disappeared in the shadows.“

I got to the door and focused my eyes. Where could it have gone ? I scanned the room. Nothing. It could have been anywhere. Under the bed, under the blanket, inside the backpacks.

I'm telling you, if it had been up to me, I'd have gotten off that train immediately. On the other hand, I kept calming myself down thinking I must be tripping, I mean, how would a tarantula get on a train like that? But one never really knows, at the end of the day the train was coming from Moscow.

I switched on the lights. At that moment I couldn't care less about waking you up. The mere thought of something dancing on my head at night...brrrr!

Just then the light bulb burst. And again it was pitch black dark. I aimed towards the bed, where I suspected the enemy to be, but I did not get there. I collapsed on the floor and began to swear.

At you, at all this bloody business, and I was shaking with anticipation, waiting for you to get up so I could shove all of this right in your face. Just that you were sleeping.

When I finally managed to calm myself down, we were going through a sparsely lit area. So I looked down at my leg. There was a cut in my foot, from the toe to the pinky, and blood like...“

"I don't understand why you didn't wake me up?"

"Whilst dreaming? And anyhow, what could you have done to help me? In the end it was not that bad. I just got scared. Maybe had I stepped on it with all my weight, but just like that? I fished a T-shirt from the back pack, tore it, and wrapped my foot in it.

Just then did I see it. It lay close to me, that little fucker. I even think I felt a tingle in my cut, as if it was accusing: that's him!"

"Who?"

"Well obviously that Swiss knife I lent you. At first I thought I'd get up and strangle you. I mean, I could not understand how it could have, with all your intelligence, fallen out of your hands on the floor, and even open. But then I changed my mind and grabbed it. It was bloody. Instead of the knife I expected, the little saw was pulled out.

As I was looking at it thinking why you needed to pull out the little saw, the train bumped and I stabbed the palm of my hand with its point. I yelped. The Swiss knife fell out of my hand and we got into a tunnel. In that darkness it disappeared from my sight. I started to feel for it. I know, if I had grabbed it by the blade and not by the handle.. But honestly, had I known what was about to happen, I would have rather been holding the blade.

Instead of the Swiss knife, I grabbed a weird, slightly hairy thing. It was moving a lot, too much for my taste, But let it go? No way.

Fortunately it did not take long and we were out of the tunnel. A ray of light wondered in on us, and my hair almost turned white from the horror. I was holding a hand! Do you get it!? A hand! A right hand. Severed from the body at the elbow."

"That's just gross. I don't get it, where do you get this stuff from?"

"Neither do I. But wait, there's still more. It bent at the wrist, and its fingers were stretching towards me. Immediately I thought I was delirious. For, how else could that be possible? A zombie hand strolling in a train? Ridiculous!

But then, that little bastard made me think otherwise. It was as alive as only a hand can be alive. It took advantage of my weakness and it escaped my grip. One moment I was holding it by the wrist, the next it disappeared under the bed.

I immediately dived after it. The Swiss knife almost unconsciously slipped into my hand, and thus armed I flung towards the unknown. Once, twice and again and again. The only result was the pain in my foot and a rage that was growing at astronomical speed. Even if I knew I could not endanger the hand with the saw (unless I would saw it down to tiny pieces), I chopped and stabbed at the darkness like a madman. But the hand was gone.

When I finally crawled out, something told me to leave it alone. Like, who knew to whom it belonged? I could even catch some infection and...

...who did it belong to? I did not think about it that way, there was no one else besides the two of us here. I stopped. No that's impossible! But it all seemed to come together as the wheels of a machine from hell.

I leaned on the bed. I wanted to understand what was going on. Because if that was your hand, than what happened to you? I stood on my healthy leg and scouted the upper bunk.

You were lying on your side facing the wall. In a T- shirt and covered by a blanket. I could not see your hands. I wondered if you are breathing, but I had too much to do with my own balance to be able to perceive the slight alterations of your breath. There was but one thing to do, turn you around.

I leaped forward a bit and got a hold of the bed sheet. It was damp, sticky. Blood?

My stomach contorted. Holding my breath, full of fear and anticipation, I grabbed you by the sleeve and pulled you. How easily you turned!

The horror made the knife fall out of my hand. I stepped on my injured foot, and with my jaw open I stared at the hole by the ear. I swallowed.

,This cannot be true.'

I wanted to shake you, to make sure you were really dead, but instead I screamed and gracelessly crumbled to the floor. You cannot imagine such frightening pain. For the first time in my life I wanted to die. Here and now, so easy.

Maybe a second before falling unconscious, in the moment when death felt so close to me, I touched myself between my legs. My balls were on fire and on them, you won't believe this, the hand. I groaned, and close to the borders of insanity, I ripped it off me, finger by finger. Then I was holding it. It was hard not to let the stump go, but a truly bloodthirsty craving for vengeance drove me on. At that point it didn't matter at all how stupid it sounded. Revenge on the hand.

Rallying the last bits of my strength, I turned, swung with it and hit it on the side of the bunk. Something cracked, but not enough as to satisfy me. I straightened up again, and for the first time in the past few hours, I laughed.

,I'll break all of your bones. I swear!' I hissed between my teeth and aimed my new toy at the target.

But the hand did not reach it. It slipped out of my grip and silently as a cat fell on the floor.

I put my hand on my hip. At first I thought some huge wasp stung me from the back.

A big one, that's true, but still just a fucking wasp. But what was sticking out of my hip, didn't have anything in common with an insect.

The saw stabbed into my hip scared me a bit. On the other hand it perfectly fitted to the scenario of our, so magnificently planned, expedition. Especially with the hand that was hanging, swinging from it.

More precisely a left hand, detached exactly above the wrist."

"Well that's hard stuff. That's what I call a dream. You should write it down."

"Oh come on. It does not even make sense."

"Well maybe not, but at least you can be calm no? As that stallholder in Egypt said when he was trying to sell me a wooden camel. You have a head, you have arms, you have feet, so what's the problem?"

"I guess nothing. I just have this weird feeling that it's not over yet."

"What's not over yet?"

"That's exactly the thing I don't know."

Heavy shoes left the escalators, stopping at the metro platform in the station ,Hlavni Nadrazi'. A train was just coming. They got in and walked through the aisle to the doors at the opposite end which opened at the next station and the boots left the train.

"Is something going on? We wanted to ride up to Vysehrad."

"Just something bugging me surgeon."

"And can't it wait? I'm really pretty tired now and I can't wait to get home and lay down. If it is another one of your dreams..."

"Just one question."

"Yeah?"

"Where am I?"

"What do you mean?"

"How come that on that stupid glass by the doors the only reflection was of your face taped up with that black stinky bandage?"

The train left. The heavy shoes and its contents stayed on the crowded metro platform.

"Coach, isn't this getting to your head a little bit? There's the two of us here. Together."

"Yes, but inside your head you asshole. So it was not all just a dream, wasn't it?! The hands, the saw, even that hole in the head, it was all true?! For God's sake what have you done?"

"Just calm down coach, lets not jump to any conclusions now. You are right, it was not just a dream. But understand, without you, I would have died. That polish guy properly smashed my brain with that kick. I had but hours left, minutes maybe. I had to take action. I needed a piece of your brain to replace my damaged one. And they knew how to do it."

"They?"

"The hands."

"So they were really yours?"

"Sure, I have had them since that sky trip when I broke my old ones. They changed, piece for piece. As gloves. Hard to say why they chose precisely me. Bottom line is, they changed my life."

"And you want me to believe all this?"

"Believe what you want. You are a proof of their existence too, and the fact that we are having this conversation inside my hand. I dot know what more could you want? Or you believe I could have managed to operate on myself on a train in motion? Wake up! That's beyond human capacities. But not for those hands. For them its as easy as snapping fingers. They can manage all you could possibly imagine. I could be a better painter than van Gogh or Leonardo da Vinci. But what for? It would only be wasting their incredible talent.

I can feel it in my bones. Something really really big is just awaiting us. Maybe the operation of some bigwig? Who knows? Otherwise why would they have wanted to bring me back to life? Evidently I serve some big purpose to them. You can go down in history do you understand?"

"Fuck that, I wanted to live my life. And you robbed me of it."

"But..."

"There is no but. To me, you are a murderer, who did not think twice about murdering a friend! And its completely irrelevant if it was your hands or the devil himself!"

"Shut up! You have no idea what's this all about! I swear, one more word and ill take care that they, on the first occasion, scratch off that tiny piece of you I'm dragging with me."

„Nobody asked you for this. Who do you think you are? God?!“

„I just wanted us to stay together. Do you understand? Me, You, the team! As we've always been. - Wait, what are you doing?“

„You are boring me, see you in hell.“

The heavy boots started to trot and just at the edge of the metro platform bounced to jump. They landed a hard fall on the concrete and they stayed still in the water canal between the rail tracks.

„What on earth are you doing?! Stop manipulating my body.“

„You should have thought about that before, about who you are letting into your brain.“

„Have you turned mad? You'll kill us like this. Both!“

„No. Only you, you bastard! I am already dead! It looks like your operations day are over surgeon!“

A train was heading fast towards the station.

The noise of a circular saw snapped him back to consciousness. Not so much, just enough for his head to hold one single thought. "But I had switched it off!"

Novak truly had switched it off, immediately after having sewed the bottom of a door, as to make it fit its frame. He then went on to hang it in the kitchen, but from the moment it slid in its hinges, his mind blurred. His eyes swam in the twilight. Mist. He felt as if the thick Sumava forest behind the fence did not exist. His whole body was paralyzed with strong narcotics, on top of that his wrists and ankles were tied by a rope, the remainders of which were lying in the garage under the working table. But he did not know that, just as he did not know who had dragged him from the kitchen to the garden.

A strong twitch in his shoulder brought back movement to his one hundred and ten kilos, distributed in almost two meters, in the direction of the circular saw. Around his head, a foreign hand passed by. Had he been conscious, he would surely have thought of the news that together with his wife, he had watched on TV the day before in Prague.

„A suicider jumped under a running train in the metro,“ announced the presenter in the studio. He was dead on the spot. Naturally, thought Novak.

Just the fact that the wheels chopped off both of his hands, that had yet to be found, was a little surprising.

„Maybe they are looking for a new body,“ joked Novák. His wife just mockingly tapped her forehead.