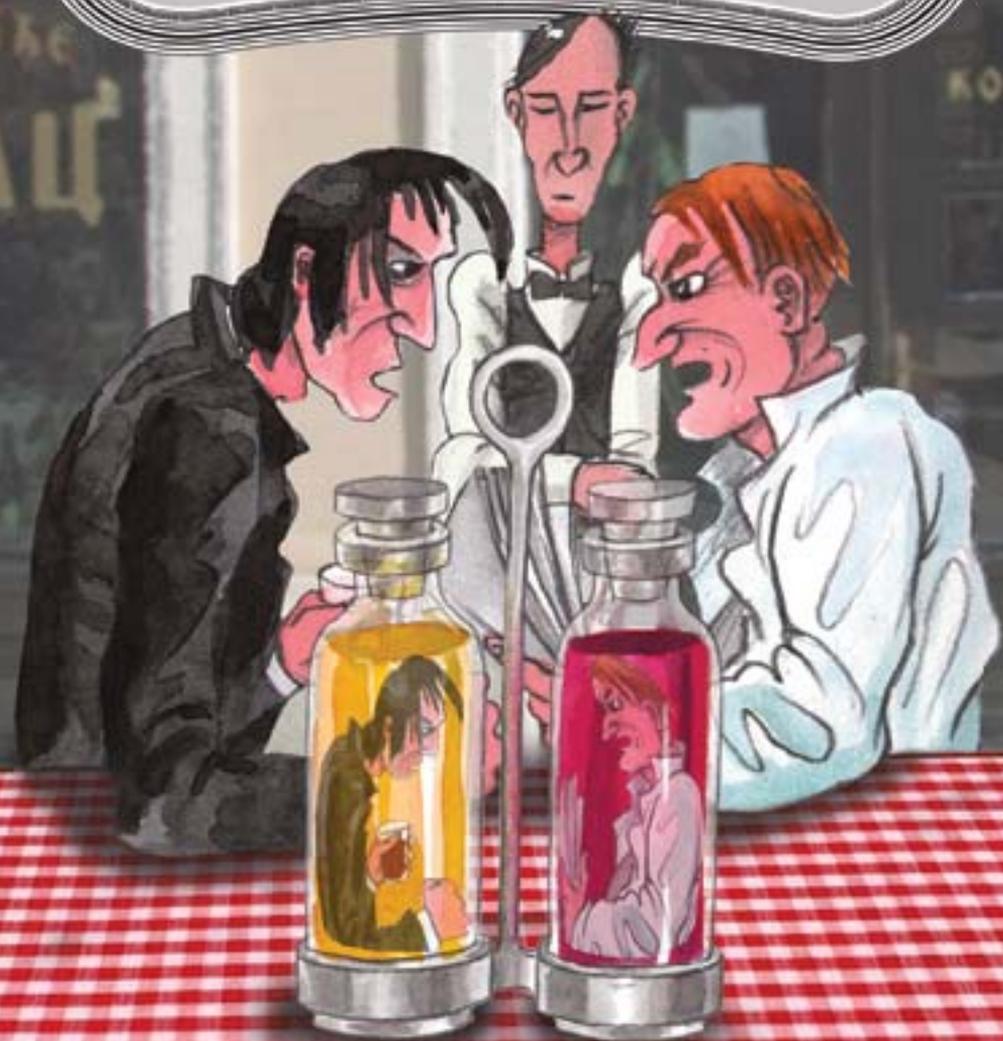


BRANKO DIMITRIJEVIC SERBIAN POET'S DREAM

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SERBIAN NATIONAL CHARACTER FOR DUMMIES



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**Branko Dimitrijević**

SERBIAN POET'S

DREAM

— NOVEL —

Edited by Marisa Rowland



**Čarobna  
knjiga**



Zahvaljujemo ERSTE banci, uz čiju pomoć je objavljena ova knjiga.

## Prologue

“The guy’s an idiot!”

“No, you are an idiot. And he is a genius!”

“An idiot!”

“A genius!”

“Idiot!”

“Genius!”

“Idiot!”

“Genius!”

“Idiot!”

“Genius!”

It was afternoon of a day in late August 1974. Two men in their early thirties were sitting at a table outside *The Kolarac*, a restaurant on Belgrade’s Knez Mihailova Street. They were alone. Not only was there no one at the other tables on the sidewalk, but the street itself was deserted. A huge gray cloud covered the sky. It was getting darker by the minute, and the wind was picking up.

One of the men was dressed in black. He was skinny with long, dark hair. The other one had a crooked nose, and his hair, what was left of it, was light brown. After a brief break, they continued their conversation. The one in black spoke first.

“I’ll sum it up for you: this piece of writing suffers from too much dialogue! That’s what’s wrong with it.”

“No, that’s the best part! It’s a lovely dialogue. The writer does not interfere with his characters. He does not tell us what they were thinking, and I like that. Otherwise

I keep asking myself: How does he know what's in their heads?"

"Because that's what they are! Characters. His characters. He created them. He can make them think whatever he wants!"

"I know, but it is somehow unnatural. This way it's as if he only recorded their voices. The only alternative that I would accept would've been if he made one of the characters tell the whole story."

"That's a cheap trick. Anyway," the man in black lifted a thick manuscript from the table. "My dear comrade Petrarch, the reader always knows more than the characters. It's some kind of irony. Tragic irony, I think."

"You're tragic," Petrarch said with a sigh. "*Dramatic irony* is what you're talking about. You know, when the reader knows more than the characters. *Tragic irony* is when someone is about to become a victim of fate. Like in war movies, as soon as someone starts talking about his plans for the future, you know that within thirty seconds he'll get a bullet right between the eyes, unless he steps on a landmine first."

"Irony or no irony, I want to know what's going on. And I don't want to be confused."

"Well, my dear comrade Gravedigger, if only you cared to read it carefully--"

"I read it carefully, but you know me. I am all for serious, important, big issues and big words. I want strong emotions and human suffering on a large scale. When I hear the word novel, what comes to my mind is *War and Peace*, *Les Misérables*, *Oliver Twist*, *The American Tragedy*, you know, two thousand pages and long descriptions of whatever."

"Whatever is right. True, this manuscript is only two hundred pages long, but I wanted it to be much longer. And I felt the same when I read *Don Quixote*, *The Three Musketeers*, or *Ivanhoe*."

"Oh, perfect, now you're comparing him to Cervantes."

"And Dumas, and Sir Walter. Yes. And why not? We, as a nation, should finally abandon the inferiority complex. There are neglected and unknown geniuses among us, and it is our sacred duty to recognize them. And who should lead the way, but the poets!"

"I know what you think that I think," Gravedigger said. "Do you want me to tell you what I think?"

"Please tell me. What do you think that I think that you think?" Petrarch asked.

"I think that you think that I think that nobody that I know can be any good. You think that I think that geniuses live in Paris or London or New York, and maybe even here but only in the past. If it is the present, then they can only exist if I don't see them, or, in the final instance, if I don't see much of them. Consequently, because I've seen this guy in a few bars, drinking his brandy, I cannot perceive him as capable of producing a masterpiece."

"You've read my mind," Petrarch said to Gravedigger.

"So, basically, you think that if I saw Shakespeare a few times in *Sumatovac*, drinking beer, I would talk disparagingly about *Romeo and Juliet*?"

"Exactly. Go on"

"You think that I think that the real genius must be so involved in his craft, that he would be unable to deal with the requirements of modern living, becoming either an outcast, or a hermit, or an easy to spot eccentric. And, since the guy we're talking about is none of the above, according to you, I've made up my mind even before opening this manuscript." Gravedigger concluded.

"Stop it, you are scaring me," Petrarch said. "This is uncanny. Comrade Gravedigger I don't know what's happening to you."

“Please, I am not done yet. See, let me ask you something. What would happen if we were to become more supportive of the talent in our midst, if we start encouraging them, promoting them, if we nourish them? The answer is simple, we would deprive them of a significant dose of suffering. And, without suffering there is no depth. So, in a way, by giving them a hard time, we’re helping them become better writers, and better human beings. Our best writers today are those who were in prison a few years back. Same thing happened in Russia. They may not see it at the moment, but the authorities are doing our writers a big favor. I wrote my best poem in our beloved city jail, where I had to spend a night for not having an ID on me.”

“Yeah, that was last fall and since then you haven’t written anything. It’s about time they lock you up again.”

“I am sure they will, sooner or later. But please, let me finish. We can’t give our talented people the recognition they deserve. You said that we too should have our Tolstoys and our Balzacs and our Oscars and our Wildes. That is a very dangerous notion. Let me remind you that if we conclude that our culture is equal to that of other nations, we may lose the pretext for our few favorite activities. And I mean activities such as wallowing in self-pity, and whining about our tragic destiny. Imagine our people not being able to complain about the injustice that history has exposed us to?”

“Comrade Gravedigger, you have a point there. That would be extremely hard to imagine.”

“So, to conclude, I just don’t think that this particular piece of writing is ambitious enough. I did not get the feeling that the author himself saw this as a book that will change the world forever. Like, you know, stop all wars, make people embrace each other and vow to stop fighting and start working towards the eradication of poverty and disease.”

“You said it.”

“Can we say that he painted a canvas on which the world can see the good, the bad, and the ugly of our collective psyche? I think not. Did he unmask and reveal the hidden depths of our souls? I don’t think so. And what about our best laid plans and the dreams of our youth turning to dust?”

“There you go.”

“But all that I can forgive the poor, imperfect human being, who probably didn’t suffer enough during his short life to develop the depth necessary for such a serious undertaking. There is one thing, however, that I can’t ignore.” Gravedigger waited for a while to see if his friend Petrarch would ask him what he had in mind. After some thirty seconds, he decided to continue and inform Petrarch what it is that he can’t ignore.

“Nobody walks into the quiet night in the end. I mean, what kind of an ending is that?”

Instead of verbalizing his response, Petrarch whistled.

“I am glad you agree,” Gravedigger said solemnly. “Considering the locale and the circumstances, it would be hard to imagine that the author could send his hero to ride into the sunset and end the novel that way. What is the alternative? Someone could’ve done something remarkable only to die a tragic death. But nothing of the sort takes place, so there is only one way left to end a novel effectively. And that is to make one of the heroes slip into the quiet night and disappear.”

“Can it be a stormy night?” Petrarch asked.

“You know very well that stormy night is out of the question. The night has to be quiet. Just listen: he went out the door and disappeared into the quiet night. The End. What can sound better than that?”

“I don’t know, how about this: ‘and that’s how it was, said old Grandpa Miladin. He lifted a piece of meat out of the bowl and sprinkled it generously with salt and pepper. The End.’”

“Not bad,” agreed Gravedigger. “But that’s when you have a storyteller. In all the other cases an act of disappearance into the quiet night is a must.”

”You are right. Our writer here failed miserably when it comes to the ending of his novel. But that is not all. There is practically nothing in his work about our heroic struggle against the Turks in the centuries past. To say nothing about the fact that he doesn’t even mention the appalling conditions on our public busses. Plus I don’t think he is critical enough when he speaks about women who do not show compassion and consideration for creative people in general, and poets in particular...”

“Oh,” comrade Gravedigger said, “are you making fun of me? Is it that time yet?”

“No,” Petrarch protested, “I wouldn’t dare. It is a well known fact that you are too sensitive for your own good, and—“

At that moment a tall waiter in a very small jacket appeared at the restaurant door. He looked at the two men and shook his head.

“Excuse me, comrade poets,” he said, “but in case you haven’t noticed, it has started raining. A thought occurred to some of the other patrons, that you may find it more comfortable to continue your conversation inside?”

“In a moment, comrade Chaika,” said Petrarch.

“We need you to be a referee here.”

“Oh, no, anything but that! I just remembered, this is a free country. If you want to get all wet, go ahead. It’s not harming anybody but you.”

“There’s a big tip for you if you help us out,” said Gravedigger.

The waiter hesitated. “Well, just out of curiosity, what are you arguing about?”

“This manuscript here,” said Petrarch, putting his hand on the manuscript that was already getting pretty wet. “Me and my

friend, comrade Gravedigger, were arguing about the point of view.”

“So what’s your question?” asked Chaika, while glancing towards the sky.

“Our question is,” Petrarch said, “is it better for a novel if the author writes about inner thoughts of his characters and uses descriptions, or if he tells the story only through dialogue?”

“And which one of you said what?”

“We can’t really tell you, because we know that you like comrade Gravedigger better than me,” said Petrarch.

“Well, it’s nothing personal, comrade Petrarch, but comrade Gravedigger tips much better.”

“Yes, but only because his parents are better off and he gets a much bigger allowance. And now, the verdict please! What’s it going to be: descriptions or dialogue?”

Chaika scratched his head. “Well, my favorite writer is Zane Grey. And he’s got some longer descriptions that I usually skip and go straight to the dialogue. So I am all for the dialogue myself.”

“Thank you, comrade Chaika. You did great,” said Petrarch.

“Oh, no,” said Chaika and grabbed his head.

Gravedigger got up and started walking down the street. Chaika ran after him. “Comrade Gravedigger, I did not mean it! I was positive that you were the one who likes dialogue. If only I knew! Please forgive me. You know me, I am not a man of letters. Never finished high school, you know how it is.”

Lightning struck somewhere nearby followed by loud thunder. Petrarch hurried inside the restaurant. A few seconds later Chaika and Gravedigger followed. Petrarch and Gravedigger made themselves comfortable at the table near the gas stove. Then they looked at each other.

“Hey, where is the manuscript?” asked Gravedigger. Petrarch pointed towards the outside. At that moment more lightning

struck, and the lights went out. “Well,” Gravedigger shrugged his shoulders, “let’s hope that the idiot did not give us his only copy.”

## 1.

“You idiot!”

“Mother!”

At the same time that comrades Petrarch and Gravedigger were having their conversation about fiction writing, in the living room of an apartment on the third floor of a solid building in Brankova Street, a man in his forties, with a carefully trimmed mustache, and a tall, silver-haired woman were engaged in a lively conversation.

“What is that in your hand?”

“A glass.”

“Don’t play dumb, what’s in the glass?”

“Lemonade.”

“Lemonade? It’s the most exciting summer storm of the season, a perfect time for brandy, and my son is drinking lemonade. And what about that woman who just left. Who was she?”

“A student of mine.”

“A Gypsy woman in her fifties is your student?”

“She is not a Gypsy. She only dresses that way. Fashion changes, in case you haven’t noticed.”

“I notice much more than you think. For example, it did not escape my attention that you held hands with her. Do you hold hands with all your students?”

“We did not hold hands! She... Oh, all right, she was reading my palm.”

“I see. So the parade of fortunetellers through our living room continues. What did she tell you?”

“She told me that I have a domineering and controlling mother, who is making my life miserable.”

“And you didn’t know that already?”

“Actually, the woman was a fake.”

“Just like the rest of them. You are wasting your time, you are wasting our money, and you will become an object of ridicule. Oops, you already are an object of ridicule.”

“Mother!”

“No wonder they call you Uncle. Everybody calls you Uncle! My son, the Uncle!”

“So what? Everybody calls you La Mama.”

“They do, but who started it? You. You had to try to be funny, while introducing me to famous theatre people. Uncle.”

“They call me Uncle Vanya, but Uncle is shorter and easier for everybody. And you know full well how that came about. It was at the reception after the opening night of *Uncle Vanya*, that I directed last season, remember?”

“And such a lovely show it was. On the other hand, you also directed O’Neil’s *The Hairy Ape*, but nobody picked up on that.”

“Yeah, but I also directed *Camille*, and I was lucky that, because of the flue epidemic, there was no reception after the opening night.”

“See, you directed all of those plays. Those were the days. And look at you now! I hate to see you like this. Worrying about nothing! If they don’t want to appoint you a full time professor, it’s their loss. Put your best clothes on, go to the dean’s office, and tell them what you think of that bunch of cowards they call the Theatre and Film Department Board of Directors.”

“Ah, and remind me again: what is that going to accomplish?”

“You’ll feel much better. Plus, with the bridges burned behind you, you can go and live with your sister in Chicago.”

“May I remind you that Dara and I are not on speaking terms?”

“You spoke to her only yesterday.”

“I had to, because I picked up the phone, and you were not here. Anyway, she isn’t in Chicago.”

“She will be, by the end of the year.”

“Good for her. Munich I would consider. As a last resort, of course. It’s Germany, they love theater over there. They believe in its role, and it’s not primarily commercial. And their philosophy is based on idealism. Not on pragmatism and individualism as in...”

“They have good theater in Chicago.”

“Good for them. Mom, we’ve discussed this before. It’s a different lifestyle. Fast-paced. And you know that I love Belgrade. It’s dirty, it’s noisy, people are immature, services are inefficient. But once you get used to those few minor deficiencies, you can live among the artists like nowhere else in the world. Imagine me leaving now when there is a growing audience for the theatre, and some shows are even developing a cult following. People are starting to take theater seriously. Theater is becoming important. That’s why I have to stay here!”

“As a mother I may be gentle with you and call you an extreme idealist, but all of my friends think that you are insane.”

“I guess the feeling is mutual. Wait, be honest, what is the real reason you want me to go?”

Mother bowed her head.

“You want this whole apartment only for yourself, don’t you?”

Mother nodded without lifting her head.

“You’d like to finally be able to throw some wild parties for your friends without me running around reminding everyone to watch the floors, the carpets, and the furniture.”

“It’s your emptying of the ashtrays every five minutes that really bugs everybody,” La Mama said.

Uncle looked at his mother for a few seconds. Because her head was still lowered, it took him a while to realize that the trembling of her shoulders meant that she was laughing. He went to her and hugged her.

“Oh, mom, you are such a goofball.”

Mother hugged him back. “Maybe you should take a vacation. As soon as this is over, go to some fun place, Rovinj, Poreč... From there it is only a short distance to Trieste and Venice.”

“I was thinking of going to that mud spa near Negotin, they say it’s good for the joints.”

La Mama sighed again and the smile disappeared from her face.

“That’s my son. Instead of sipping cappuccino in Venice, he prefers to roll in some Serbian mud. Now, Uncle, I am going to ask this only once. Did Dara leave her new telephone number with you yesterday?”

“Well...”

“Where is it?”

“To tell you the truth, I have no idea. I don’t even think that I bothered to write it down...”

At that moment the weak sound of the door buzzer was heard. It lasted some three seconds, before the mechanism stalled.

“Another psychic?”

“No, I’m not expecting anyone.”

“Where’s Dara’s number?”

Uncle sighed. “*Shakespeare’s Collected Works*, where else?”

“I looked there already.”

Uncle sighed again. “English edition.”

“Oh!” exclaimed La Mama, slapped her forehead, and rushed out of the room.

When Uncle looked through the peephole, all he could see in the dark lobby was the silhouette of a tall young man, with

long hair and a beard, who had obviously been caught in the rain. Uncle left the chain on, while opening the door just a crack.

“Can I help you?”

“Uncle, it’s me,” said the young man.

“Me who?”

“Nostradamus.”

“Who?”

“Dragan. Dragan the Hippie.”

“Oh, all right. I’m sorry.”

Uncle unlocked the door, and moved to the side so that Nostradamus, or Dragan the Hippie, could come in.

\*

Fifteen minutes later in Uncle Vanya’s study, Dragan the Hippie was holding an empty coffee cup and studying it intensely. Uncle Vanya was looking at Dragan expectantly.

“Is it dry?”

Dragan the Hippie raised his free hand. “I see a bird.”

“That means news of some kind?”

“Maybe, maybe not. Oh, look at the bottle turned upside down. Did you quit drinking?”

“Temporarily. Only until this is all over. One way or the other.”

“Well, let’s see. Here, the bird will give you a sign. Afterwards, things will start--”

“What kind of a sign?”

“I don’t know. But you will know when it happens. On that day something will happen that will start the process of helping you. A drop of blood.”

“Blood?!”

“Your blood. Someone who’s your blood. Your relative, see here, someone connected to you.”

“Where?”

“Right here, see this shape, and this link towards you?”

“Where am I?”

“You are the handle. You cannot be seen. And this link goes right to the handle. Very clear. But wait.”

“What now?”

“There is another link, from the other side. Left side. Goes to the same shape. Oh, this is neat!”

“What?! What is it?!”

“First you have to help that blood relative of yours. Then the relative will help you. The bird will give you a sign. It will set things in motion. On that day things will start happening, see this mess here?”

“A mess will happen?”

“No! It’s hard to tell what will happen. A meeting of some sort or something, there is a crowd there. Also here, another crowd, when the relative helps you. Everything is going to be fine. I can see you drinking again. Actually, the sooner you start, the better. To sum it up: You help your blood, your blood helps you, your rival meets the material world.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s one of those things that will be clear when it happens. Right now, I have no idea what it means.”

“But he meets the *material world*?”

“He does. See this here, this is material, and this is spiritual, and this creature that looks like some wild animal gets very close to the material world. And it is not at all pleasant for him or her. That’s about it.”

And Dragan the Hippie or Nostradamus put the cup on the table. But before leaving it there, he took another look, and picked up the cup again, bringing it closer to his eyes.

“How did I miss this?”

“What?!”

“Right here, at the very beginning. There are numbers. A date? Someone’s birthday? Or maybe a telephone number? Yes, there is a line, like from the phone. It all starts with the telephone number.” And saying this, Nostradamus put the cup on the table and this time left it there.

“Telephone number?” said Uncle and glanced towards the door. Than he jumped, ran to the door, opened it and saw his mother sitting on the bed. She had a receiver in her hand, and was listening for a few seconds before responding.

“Nothing to worry about, honey, I’ll talk to him immediately. As a matter of fact, he’s right here.”

“Mother,” started Uncle, but she gestured to him to be quiet.

“Yes, I’ll talk to him right now. Yes, yes, don’t worry. He’ll do it. I know that he may not like it, but he’ll do it. Say hi to Bosco. You too. All right. Bye, bye, baby.” And Mother hung up the phone.

“Do what?!” asked Uncle, agitated. Mother smiled broadly.

“Go and finish with your visitor, honey, and then we’ll talk. And please try to calm down. There’s that vein on your temple again!”

## 2.

“You’re an idiot!”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

On the same day, one hour after Uncle Vanya caught his mother having the phone conversation that got him so upset, two young men were enjoying a pleasant afternoon at the Englischer Garten in Munich. They happened to be on the western slope of the hill in the middle of the park. Around them a couple of dozen young people were sitting in small groups. And almost all the members of all the groups were either sharing a joint, or smoking from an oriental pipe better known as ‘chilam.’ As a matter of fact, the young man who called his friend an idiot was busy rolling a joint himself, one of those five cigarette-paper monstrosities that require extra careful handling. The other young man was observing this activity for a while.

“Richard, I appreciate that you are the one who volunteered for this tedious task.”

“It is tedious, but it is so rewarding, too. Anyway, don’t change the subject: What are you going to do next?”

“Kill myself.”

“Wouldn’t you like to smoke your share of this joint first?”

“Well, maybe. I don’t know.”

Richard sighed. “You know, somebody should kick you around for your own good, until you snap out of it. But,” he waived his hand to point to the people around them, “most of us here are against violence. Now, for the last time, this is what

you should do: Go to Mia right now. When you meet with her, grab her and firmly hold her in your arms. Pull her close to you. Look her straight in the eye and announce: Mia, I am an idiot! True, I did say that I wanted to only be friends with you. But the fact is I am madly in love with you. So forget the friendship, and let's just jump each other's bones. Let's make out, until we pass out. Let's roll in the hay, and do the hanky panky. Let's try to fulfill all of our immature sexual fantasies before we get too old."

"And you call me an idiot! If I do that, she'll turn around, walk away, and never speak to me again."

"All right, you don't have to repeat what I just said. Say it in your own words, but say it. Say something to let her know that you feel more than just friendship for her. And, if she walks away, at least you'll know where you stand. This way you're tormenting yourself. Which would be fine, but you're tormenting all your friends. And since I happen to be almost the only friend that you have..."

Richard was finished with his tedious but rewarding task, and was now admiring the product of his labor.

"Pretty soon it will be exactly six months since it happened," lamented Richard's young friend, while trying to break a small stick that he picked up from the grass. "It was during the *Fasching*."

"You don't say? During the *Fasching*? Tell me more! Please!"

"I will. As a punishment for your apparent sarcasm. We went to the party at the *Comedia*, and I bought some expensive champagne," continued Richard's friend. "And afterwards we went to her place. Her parents were not home, so we ended up on this huge sofa in the living room."

"Oh, you animals!"

"And somehow we started kissing."

"I knew it!"

"Those were the kisses, my friend!"

“They were?”

“Oh, yes! Those lips, so sweet, and wet.”

“And soft?”

“Yes, that too. I kissed her neck a few times.... And just when...”

“All right,” Richard protested, “stop right there. This is disgusting. I think it’s more than I can bear.”

“And just when I felt as I never felt before or after in my life, you know, I opened my mouth and I heard my own voice. Only, my voice was not saying the things I wanted it to say.”

“Wow, that’s interesting! And what was your voice saying?”

“Horrible things. You know, like we shouldn’t be doing what we were doing.”

“Meaning kissing?”

“Yes.”

“You said that in spite of the fact that those were the kisses. Wet and sweet.”

“And soft! Yes. But it was as if I was listening to someone else’s voice. And, to my horror, the voice said that we should stay friends and not ruin our friendship by getting involved. Can you imagine?! I was probably expecting her to say stop being an idiot, just shut up and continue kissing me, you big fool!”

“And did she?”

“No! Instead she quickly agreed!”

“Ha, so it is her fault after all!”

“Definitely! So we stopped kissing, we got up and started this discussion about philosophy. And poetry. And music. And movies. And pretty soon it was morning and she said she was tired. And I said I was tired too.”

“Were you tired?”

“No! I was not tired at all.”

“So, basically, you lied to the poor girl?”

“I have this weird impression that you’re making fun of me?”

“Yes. Approximately from that moment when you said ‘Fasching.’ But listen,” Richard said, while trying to pass the joint to his friend, “I wish I could say that your story gets better each time you tell it. Unfortunately, and for your own good I’ll be cruelly honest, that’s just not the case at all.”

“Well, you asked for it.”

“No, you insisted on telling it again. Anyway, there are times, like now, for example, when I think that maybe people who behave like fools should be left to suffer the consequences. Why is everybody trying to help young people in love? In movies and in real life, everyone is trying to bring the young fools together. Why? Darwin said survival of the fittest, not the cutest. If your brain freezes when you are with a girl, if your tongue is tied, maybe that is the way nature is sending you a signal that you should not pass your genes on, that you shouldn’t reproduce. Just as Nietzsche so nicely said—“

“Alfa! Alfa! Alfa!” shouted a voice from the top of the hill. Richard and his friend couldn’t see who shouted those three words, but in a matter of seconds they were left alone on the slope. Everyone else jumped and ran to the other side. And then all those young people dispersed and disappeared.

“Why the alarm?” Richard’s friend asked.

Richard pulled his friend’s arm. “Must be that old guy who’s coming this way. Looks like a cop.”

Richard’s friend looked in the direction of the old guy and smiled. “False alarm, believe me.”

“He’s a cop. I have a radar for cops. A sixth sense if you will.”

“I believe you, but this time you and your radar are a little off.”

“You are right: I am off, right in the direction of that tree. You can stay here and test your theory.”

“I think I will. Besides, he’s faster than me.”

Forget all the preconceptions of what a book by an eastern European author is like – this one does not feature anybody standing in line to buy a potato, mumbling of their cruel fate with a grudging acceptance of same fate. Nobody throws roubles, dinars or indeed any other currency around in a drunken stupor fueled by self-loathing. It is also not a thousand pages long and full of introspective characters making long speeches about every conceivable subject.

Branko Dimitrijevic has, instead, written a Wodehouse style romantic comedy, a pure entertainment set mainly in Belgrade's art world. Here you will find dissertations on smuggling jeans from Trieste, disco queens, made up letters to magazines detailing sexual encounters, forty somethings who still live with their parents, and, naturally, a lot more besides.

All I can say is that I found this book hugely entertaining,  
and what higher praise can a book receive?

– Fedor Šili

I've met Branko when I was the editor of the *San Francisco Review of Books*. He contributed a short piece on *Belgrade School of Life*. It came out in that famous issue with Sam Shepard on the cover. There was a party at my place to celebrate the issue, which happened to be the last one, only we didn't know it at the time, otherwise we would probably try to drink even more wine. As Branko was opening the bottle, and he is very good at it, and I was standing beside him with an empty glass in my hand, I remarked that I liked his article and that the subject deserves to be expanded, maybe even as a novel. I wish people would not take my advice seriously. I mean, graveyards, prisons, and cheap bars are filled with people who either followed my advices directly or by the art of imitation. But in this case I am almost glad I spoke my mind. I also introduced Branko to the Prime Minister of Ireland and he introduced me to his mother... Or was it the other way round? And did I mention that he can open any bottle with a help of any object that happens to be around? In any case, enjoy the book. I know I did.

– Elgy Gillespie

BRANKO DIMITRIJEVIC writes novels and plays. Among his plays are *Frank Zappa and the Prague underground*, *The magnificent Soviet Robinson*, *Who Killed captain Cook*, *Godot on a hot tin roof*... He has written three novels in Serbian that were published: *Let's go have a drink*, *Oktoberfest* and *Enough about politics!* Serbian *Poet's dream* is his first novel in English.