

*Edition*  
*“Hyperlink”*

Original title  
*Miodrag Kajtez*  
**IZLOŽBA**



Република Србија  
МИНИСТАРСТВО КУЛТУРЕ И ИНФОРМИСАЊА

*Овај пројекат је подржало Министарство културе  
и информисања Републике Србије.*

*This project was funded by Ministry of Culture and  
Information Republic of Serbia.*

Copyright © 2022 Miodrag Kajtez

Copyright © 2022 za Srbiju, AGORA

This publication in whole or in part may not be reproduced, reprinted or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission of the author or publisher, nor can it be in any form or by any other means, distributed or reproduced without permission of the publisher. All rights to publish these books retain the author and publisher according to the provisions of the copyright law.

MIODRAG KAJTEZ

# THE EXHIBITION

A novel

*Translated by  
Nikola M. Kajtez*





## PROLOGUE

*It wouldn't hurt to cross  
to the other side of the street!*

Above me, and I am the one from the second floor, apartment number four, and neighbor Vladica Perc, a widower, third floor, apartment number eight, a metal board hangs on a short rope, from the highly built awning, semi-threatening, like a crooked shop sign.

The rope is pulled through one of the screw holes at the corners and tied into a knot. It's the street name board. (The street consists of a pair of opposite and equal, three-story small buildings, *cadastrally problematic* - something they have had to deal with since the first formworks.) On the blue side of the board is the name, and on the rusty side is the oil-painted advice. It broke off from its ancient socket, ten feet away, recently, without witnesses, oiled up and hung there, with cement-dusty fingerprints still visible, to sway and twist under the blows, today of the wind, tomorrow perhaps of some jumpy adolescent.

The widowed neighbor holds me firmly under my arm, like he wouldn't even in the face of danger of being blown away by some strong gust of wind. He hung on and wouldn't budge. He just drove us in his forty-five horse power tiny car from the funeral of a *four-legged* neighbor, an old lady with a trademark protected life story, second floor, apartment number six, a faded rectangle instead of a name plate on the door, the fourth in a series of funerals for someone from *our* small building in the last two and a half months.

Not much longer has passed since the hospitable banquet of the city's urban planners and their dear guests, the municipal officials from the operational echelon, and the officer cadre, the banquet from which, covered in sweat, one of the most important secretaries of the hosts, was crucified between efforts to preserve the remains of her husband's (enr. Milenko) honor and pleasing the employer, barely made it out. She closed the double upholstered doors behind her and sat down at the computer. She started to unbutton the already unbuttoned top button of her latest fashion, firework-colored blazer (one out of the dozen she was proud of) and expeditiously typed out the *decision* brought to the banquet: to proceed with the demolition of the shitty small building (in order to build a modern military complex in its place), three months before the legal deadline! — such a possibility was allowed by the *secrecy* of the contract (full of clauses), signed less than five years ago between the former city fathers and Herr Živkovič from Berlin, a loaded gastarbeiter, a contract that intended the small building to have a different fate, but only in *case of Herr Živkovič's passing!* (obligatorily by natural causes) in the next three months, but before the expiration of the preclusive period. The cause of this haste lay in the disturbing news that had recently arrived from Berlin about the poor condition of Herr Živkovič's heart. That's why at the banquet you could mostly hear slogans like: *We can't wait! We can't risk it! No way! Decision! Decision! Demolition! Demolition!*

*What's this now?* a fellow attracted by the *new tendencies on the neighboring horizon*, putting down the thermos with coffee on the low perimeter wall, he curiously leans down from the roof of the small twin building. He has a long neck, but he does not surrender the small binoculars around his neck, although for now he only turns the tiny focus wheel between the eyepieces with his index finger. He licks his mustache, removes the bangs from his eyes, up there, where the wind is always stronger.

From the wind, however, Vladica Perc is not in danger. He's more likely underarming me because the *ride* has left a mark on his already discordant legs. (After all, Vladica himself began, there under the awning, picturesquely and confusingly, furiously and terribly, with his free hand to bleed his thighs with oblique karate strikes, although the question is whether he would approve of connecting the loosened wires to his lower extremities. Oh, Vladica pressed on, believe us, even though he could never in his life escape the impression that he had more than one head and that all those heads, irreconcilably quarreling, each pulled to their own side, he pressed on *quite nicely* from a young age on a pair of skinny walkers, and without any aids, and the skinny ones were even up to the point where, you'll hear more about it, you could lead a kolo<sup>1</sup> on them.)

Satisfied after everything, the secretary ventured to send, to her fraternal twin sister, also a secretary, but in a contractor company with *reference experience in the construction of military infrastructure*, the long-awaited news by email:

We did it! We know how keen you are on this gig, that for you it's to be or not to be, and how much we all started to trigger at the possibility that Herr Živković's ticker could give out and ruin everything we've done so far. Now that we have the decision, we're in business. Honey, just so you know, hell awaits us. The tenants of the shitty building should be displaced immediately and without much commotion (we have provided them with the necessary accommodation), so that it does not turn out that couriers and paper forests were flying in vain, that there was vain stapling in the night shifts, stamping in the corridors, that vainly the temples were red from saluting. I'm also in some kind of working body tasked with monitoring the situation on the field (and in Berlin), taking into account all aspects with the aim of preventing negative

---

1 Serbian folk dance (T/N)

publicity, being in constant contact with important factors, and finally giving the green light to you and you to your sisterly Demolition Inc. Personally, I'm an optimist. From today, practically, we are all daring the shitty small building to try and block the view of the beautifully prepared construction site to the anyone from our visionary fraternity, even if some of our noses, while inspecting the field, in understandable rapture, were stuck, somewhere, in the shitty sprayed<sup>2</sup> front.

And the secretary then, half-squinting, stared from the fourth floor through the window of the air-conditioned office at the main street. She stroked her curls and shoulders. A new, red *Mini Morris* stopped at the traffic light.

---

2 A technique used in the 1960s for building facades (T/N)



The widower Vladica left his *four-wheeler* in the improvised, gravel parking lot in the back yard.

For too long, they kept the tiny car at the overhaul, breathed new life into it, and returned it to Vladica only this morning. Convenient timing. Vladica was thrilled with it (oh, he was friends with that car for 28 years, although you wouldn't be able to tell from the mileage of 000280), he felt like, even if he wouldn't see the sun or the moon afterwards, sharing the joy with any kind of creature, which meant that he would drive the creature in his overhauled tiny car. Otherwise, if he didn't share the joy, if he didn't drive the creature, his widowed heart would break, like even the glass on his glasses wouldn't. And there is no creature, by now you would agree with us — not even for a moment, let alone eleven and a half years, the creature did not live door to door with a neighbor like Vladica Perc — there is no one (and not only amaxophobics) who wouldn't get a flash before their eyes of what they were exposed to, already at the first curve with such a chauffeur.

A good two hours ago, neighbor Vladica picked a spot on my neck to address, under this same awning, just as I, returning from a walk on the *unfinished expanses* on the other side of the dry canal, through which our little alley, on the east side, having nowhere to go, ended, just as I was on my way to change my clothes for the funeral (least worrying about transportation). I didn't even get to scratch my head, unlike the prey of a certain carnivorous plant, after all, a Venus flytrap, prey driven to the final hour by its role in nature — a seeker of the sweet nectar of the gods — which would certainly get to, while already a part of the digestive process, even before it has been thoroughly digested, scratch itself with its little leg and think if it really had to charge in so recklessly, as if blind,

even at such an irresistible beauty, failing only to realize the fatal causality between its tiny legs touching the fine hairs of the flytrap's stomach twice within twenty seconds, and the silent (rather than jarring) folding of the jagged petals over him, and the slight twitch, when, oh, in a heartbeat, it couldn't have been more amazed, the sky disappeared, which it did not regret much because, brother, it was sick of looking at it, and how it found itself in the darkness again, unimaginably fast compared to all eternity, how long it had been frolicking in darkness until it was tricked out of it, wondering is it possible that it, an insect, relying on other senses, much more reliable than sight, a bug, though from the most competitive animal class on the globe, it turned out to be the fool of the day, wondering, too, whether now, exposed to the process of the flytrap's digestion and faced with inevitable doom, it could be sufficiently compensated by the irresistible, soothing smell of the delicious juices that would soon decompose it and with which will, in ecstasy, while reliving the metamorphoses and larva stages, pupa, mix and fuse, so that everything starts from the beginning.

*You're coming with me*, neighbor Vladica insisted like crazy to honor his reasons. He was picking the height, the most suitable place on my neck to address, anesthetize it, for starters, with his breath, hit my carotid arteries, click with his dentures (and already his cheeks were somewhat rosier and rounder). His left eye was twitching, now he was about to blink with it, but, suddenly, he turned on the right blinker, *You're coming with me, I insist, you're coming with me*, and he was already in *drive mode*, sharing his joy with me even before he crammed me into the tiny car, even before he tenaciously gripped the steering wheel, while the slam of the driver's door echoed like the painful echo of the passenger's door.

To the fellow from the roof of the twin building, *then* it might have seemed that I honored neighbor Vladica's reasons without

asking too many questions, just as I *now* honored his reasons and his need to grab me under the arm as soon as we — after returning from the funeral and by a set of circumstances keeping our heads on our shoulders — got out of the tiny car.

*There are people who spend their whole lives trying to get around even the most feeble lion in a wide arc but still go to its den, the same way as they would go and get potatoes at the market, and maybe depending only on the height of the sun in the sky, the step of a beaten cat or the marching step, in the latter case often exhibiting some kind of post-traumatic syndrome,* neighbor Raja, first floor, apartment number two, skilled in calligraphy and tattooing, master of detail, *paid portraitist*, did not hesitate to spew what he had to say directly to the interlocutor's ear, if previously the wind took his words away.

Two years ago, neighbor Raja and I were sitting on a *tiny bench* without a backrest, ten steps from the entrance of our small building, on the flattened and stretched Cyrillic letter Ī, a former standard concrete element intended for stable bases of communal bins: with two 20 inch holes, at a distance of also 20 inches. For a long time, the element no longer served its original purpose, because in the meantime the role of the bin was taken over by a container, placed fifty yards down toward the mini flea market, where we all got our supplies — some got chicken necks, some potatoes, some celery — and to which our alley with its western end came out correlatively. Nevertheless, the element stood strong, and it held up very well, except for the tip of the rebar sticking out of one chipped corner. And so we sat under an old tree. (*Having given up on life, the tree still made shadows only as a hobby.*) The dead silence that surrounded us was occasionally interrupted by young neighbor Bobby puffing a cigarette on a cigarette holder and flicking the ashes from his first floor window, apartment number three, *the greaser* (as neighbor Raja liked to call him), an undergraduate

part-time student of Italian literature, an occasional correspondent to a newspaper from the interior, on the topics of *how to survive (rents, stock market, traffic, soul mate, fraternity) in a big city*. And then out of nowhere appeared, silently stepping, with a chess set for the blind under his arm, neighbor Octavian, a visually impaired old man, third floor, apartment number nine, walked toward us, *as if there was an empty space in front of him*.

*That's how it is, it has always been clear to the born warrior that the last image that sees him out of this configurative world on a journey into the unknown will be the image of that unknown, and that is why the warrior dreams of dying in battle, that is why the poor couple poisons themselves with joint forces, and the lovers hold hands, and they keep their eyes on each other, leaving nothing to chance, waiting from the threshold of eternal happiness for their assigned gondola,* neighbor Raja combed his thick and curly hair with his fingers. But grandpa Octavian kept moving toward us. *I'm sure it's for the same reasons that the master of the game of games spends sleepless nights walking until he goes crazy on the black and white board of knights with the aim of perfect positioning. How about it, neighbor?* neighbor Raja warned grandpa Octavian that in front of him there is no empty space. And, finally, as if he had been struck by a bolt of lightning out of the blue and singed both him and his rosewood figures, the grandpa froze in place. And he stood frozen like that for two tense minutes. On the window, neighbor Bobby's shoulders, while puffing on the cigarette holder, shook from silent giggling. It was obvious that grandpa Octavian had given up looking for someone with whom he would for the who knows what time discuss an intermediate move knight to f3 (in a subvariant of the Italian opening), which from that square both threatens and at the same time removes all the opponent's counter-threats. Then he rattled the set, turned around and started disappearing for the next half hour toward the entrance. Basically, he left us enough

time (neighbor Bobby hesitated to flick the butt somewhere because under a gust of wind it could hit the grandpa in the forehead) to observe him closely in case he never came down to the yard again, as it so happened. The medicine men who started visiting him complained that they had never had a more demanding patient. Grandpa kept forcing them, and that wasn't their job, to look under the bed where he shoved some kind of chess set. *That's where it belongs.* The medicine men also complained about the building with no elevators.

The next day, neighbor Raja and I each sat in their own hole again (and the green concrete paint was still sticking to the bench), under the tree with a hobby, *and the shadow was like the hobby*, it was a scorcher, and neighbor Raja put down a tiny plastic plate with a snack on the end of the tiny bench. As soon as he started combing his curls with his fingers, I immediately started looking around in search of an image that would see me out of this world if I were to be struck by lightning out of the blue. *The matter is not to be fucked with, remember, my dear*, neighbor Raja lectured me and grabbed the snack. After that, he was silent until he polished off the last piece of feta cheese sprinkled with curry off the tiny plate. In the end, neighbor Raja, for a change, shook the curls *from his neck.*

Since the *matter is not to be fucked with*, it could be said that I skated by divinely, considering that a new container intended for recycling waste, placed right next to the aforementioned one, near the mini-market, a container that could not be denied a certain Arcadian softness of lines and the blueness and yellowness of the little stars, the beauty and the content, nearly at the last moment (since neighbor Vladica and I went to the local cemetery for the funeral of an old lady with a trademark protected life story) and without many questions, cut into my soul and occupied, so to speak, an honorary place. I weathered neighbor Vladica's gear

shifting and stomping on the gas, such cranking of the steering wheel that couldn't be performed without faith in a higher power, curbs, a dog with a tail between its legs, cute noses, poles, slamming on the brake, a child crying in a stroller. Oh, what little arm would not, after all, feel goosebumps from the roughest grabbing as if it was from the gentlest caress, if only neighbor Vladica's tiny legs did not continue to break and bend with some inexplicable conditionality, if the fumbling around the pedals of the tiny car did not transfer to the dirt road (on one part of the road, over time, finer gravel from the parking lot settled on it), which neighbor Vladica would not have stepped on and slammed like that, even if clutches and brakes continuously sprouted from it, and not dandelions and buckthorns. He was cranking, clutching my hand as if my hand were a steering wheel, back and forth. We even had to go in reverse to the tiny car from the middle of the road. He forgot to turn on the alarm. *Fuck it*, he said, *I forgot*. His tiny car alarm consisted of two wires and a mechanism ripped from the bowels of his daughter's crying doll. *Fuck her*. He got fucked over because of that mechanism, he suffered at the hands of his own daughter. The very procedure of turning on the handmade alarm, the neighbor always approached with the same strictness, sternly, frowning. Firstly, after warming up the machine, he would ride the tiny car from behind, put his palms on the trunk, and push himself off the ground, because something on that side had to be shaken well for about half a minute to activate the alarm. Regularly, while doing this, neighbor Vladica would gaze somewhere at the celestial spheres. Signaling that it is activated, the alarm would sound, once. The neighbor, this time, for the end, once again turned to the celestial spheres, stretched out his hands toward them, so that he rolled his eyes from the whole stunt, and then he squinted at the car with one eye, over the glasses, as sternly as he could, although in his look at that moment, there was more *showmanship* than se-

verity, because at the same time, he kept watch over me with the other eye, scoping me out, only to — after fumbling with the wind for about five feet to the place where he left me – grab me again. *My tiny car is hanging in there, and I am, as you can see, taking care of it as much as I can.*

I am also hanging in there, in a sense that I don't need an exoskeleton. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to determine, if neighbor Vladica doesn't cool his jets soon, which part of my arm and by how much will it turn white compared to my white shirt, which part will turn white and which blue. I looked everywhere to see if I could discover whether the neighbor through the sleeve of his old-fashioned coat, out of which he didn't come out of whether it be summer or winter (the coat seemed to be made according to climate technology, so it was cool in the summer and warm in the winter), had secretly pulled out some kind of tube or whatever, and he connected with me, let's say, intravenously, so from afar he sucked on me without intending to stop, equally cranking.

*Just like that, just like that, just a little more*, patronizingly and mysteriously neighbor Vladica tapped me on *that* arm (it turned blue in the meantime?), on the spot where it made a ninety degree angle. Tap, tap, tap. He wouldn't have tapped me like that even if the sucker detached itself by any chance, so he had to *find my veins*, and again, secretly, attach to them (the veins) and continue where he left off. *Tap, tap, tap*. Now and forever!