

MILORAD PAVIĆ

# SECOND BODY

*A Pious novel*

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To JASMINA MIHAJLOVIĆ

*The author of this book is imaginary; the rest of the characters mostly existed. The Spring of the Virgin Mary mentioned in these pages can be found near the house of the Holy Virgin Mary in the town of Ephesus, now Turkey. The ring in the tale also exists. We saw it at a friend of ours'. It changes color depending on the state of its bearer's body. The two authors talked of in this novel also lived – Gavril Stefanović Venclović (cca 1680-1749?) and Zaharija Orfelin (1726-1784). One lived in Sent Andrea, in Hungary, and the other for a while in Venice. Their works mentioned and quoted here can be read to this very day. In 1772 Venetian printer and publisher Teodosi published Orfelin's voluminous biography of the Russian Tsar Peter the Great, one of the most finely illustrated books of the time, today read as an exciting novel. Alexander Pushkin had it in his library and studied it carefully. 18<sup>th</sup> century Venice also had a famous orphanage for the incurable (Conservatorio degli incurabili). All in all, many of the people in this book really did live in their day, for example the musician Zabetta, or Cristofolo Cristofoli, Venetian inquisitor of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but their fates were lost in the darkness of time, and have been reformulated here.*

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## SECOND BODY

“Live slow, die fast,  
Live fast, die slow.”

*Words on a T-shirt*

## PART ONE





## 1.

### Three Wise Waters from Ephesus

In a handsome yellow bus circling the streets of Belgrade as a gift from the Japanese government came the sound of a mobile phone. Mozart. A middle-aged woman in a black astrakhan fur cap the tufts of which joined seamlessly with her raven hair began rummaging hastily through her purse and pockets. The mobile was nowhere to be found. It rang again. Again Mozart. The sound came from the pocket of a boy standing next to the woman.

– That’s my mobile ringing in your pocket – said Lisa Swift (for it was she) with a slight foreign accent.

– Tell me about it! – snapped the boy and at that very moment Mozart resounded from his pocket once more.

– Why doesn’t the gentleman answer the call if the phone is his? – asked Lisa ironically with the same strange accent.

The boy hesitated for a moment or two as though he were waiting for something. The bus was slowing down as it approached the stop at Terazije. When it came to a halt, the boy took the ladies’ *Nokia* from his pocket and answered it:

– Hello! Yes?

Then he got off the bus and handed the mobile to Lisa with the words:

– It’s for you. Your husband!

Lisa screamed, in a foreign language somehow, leapt from the carriage at the last moment, took the phone and yelled a frantic “Hello!” into the receiver. There was nobody at the other end.

Of course it could not have been me, her husband, on the phone, for I had been laid to rest forty days before at the Belgrade cemetery at 50 Roosevelt Street.



When the first weeks of mourning were over, Elisabeth Swift, my wife, or rather my widow, held a commemoration service and went off to the village of Babe at the foot of the Kosmaj mountain where I had a family house. There were some legal formalities about my estate there that she had to take care of. She was having breakfast on the porch covered in tiny windows of all colors. Memories of our life together were passing through her mind, first of all the unusual circumstances under which we had met and married.

This is how it all took place.

First I have to say that I had reached the age when we realize that we have our bad days every year. Mine flocked around my birthday. Then I would become a baby again, catching my thoughts like flies. On one of those days I opened my e-mail and found a letter of the kind written by women offering an erotic relationship. The letter-cliché was signed by a certain *Elisabeth Swift* whom I had never heard of before. She had added her e-mail address as well. Miss Swift wrote:

*Hi!*

*I think we corresponded a long time ago, if it was not you, I'm sorry. If indeed it was you, I could not answer you because my Mozilla mail manager was down for a long time and I none of my friends could help me fix it. Therefore I no longer had your address.*

*I hope that you, with whom I corresponded, are still interested, though a lot of time has passed since then.*

*I really don't know where to start.*

*Maybe, you could tell me a little about yourself in the meanwhile since I lost our previous letters, what you look like now, how old you are, your hobbies and are you still in the search?*

*If it was you whom I wrote to and you are interested in getting to know me better I have a profile at: <http://ermo.org>.*

*I don't really know what else to say for now, when I'm hoping this is the right address. Let me know if you are interested. And I hope you won't run when you see my picture.*

*Au revoir*

*your devoted reader  
Elisabeth Imola Swift*

I read and forgot the letter with a smile that authors reserve for their female readers. But Lisa Imola Swift did not. Soon after that she appeared in my life in person.

If you're an author, you will probably have women who enjoyed the love you described in a tale or men whom you let stay in your novel for a month for a mere several hundred dinars decide to send you a small present. All these gifts are of insignificant face value, but of immense virtual weight. And so over the years I came to possess all sorts of things: a Russian house ghost of painted stone, Greek rosary beads, a glass saber full of Georgian cognac, a folding

effigy, the pipe of some reader from France (which I didn't use for other people's pipes are not to be smoked), a fine box of Havana cigars that I smoked with gusto even though I knew that the tobacco was shaped by South American women rolling it across their ample thighs.

Six months after I received the letter and forgot about it Miss Swift contacted me once more and asked if we could meet, for she had a gift for me. She was in town. We met at the *Que Passa?* café in Kralja Petra Street. Lisa Imola Swift turned out to be younger than I expected, very businesslike and successful in her profession, and from an equally successful family. Her eyes were lined in black and looked as though they were encrusted in white quartz, crystal and resin. They resembled the makeup of the famous Egyptian statues from the 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty, which was no coincidence, given her profession. Her real name could barely be pronounced: Amava Arzuaga Eulohia Ihar-Swift. Imola was her nickname, and Elisabeth her name. Her mother originated from the noble Ihar family of Aragon, and Lisa inherited from her the habit of falling asleep with a book in her hands, and her paternal grandfather was from England, where in a moment of revelation he bought a theater box next to that of the royal family and made a fortune leasing out the seats to anyone who wanted to be seen beside royalty at performances. From her male ancestors Lisa learned that she could arrange her life, her actions and relationships like a garden: like an orchard she planted and watered it by design. And grafted...

When I first learned of all that, and knowing that she was an archaeologist, I thought she was interested in my work as a historian. But no, she dumped a bunch of my novels onto the table asking me to sign them. That was the reason she had come.

From Turkey, where she occasionally worked on the excavation of ancient cities, she had brought me a present of a tiny bottle that I first thought held some scented oil from Asia Minor. I opened it and took a sniff. It had no smell. My reader laughed.

– It’s water – she said – you’re supposed to drink it.

The vial really did contain water, I drank it and then heard the tale that goes with it and is well worth listening to.

– Ephesus is an ancient town in Asia Minor on the shore of the Aegean Sea – Elisabeth told me – and is famous as a port where caravan goods were unloaded for centuries to continue their journey across the vastness of the sea. The town was also long known as the cult place of “great mothers”. First it held the temple of Kybele, Phrygian mother of the gods and nature. When it was destroyed, the same stone was used to build the temple of the Greek goddess Artemis, eternal virgin and protector of nature and children. Here, in Ephesus, the Virgin Mother ended her life in this world. The “Gospel according to John” (19:25-27) says:

*“Standing beside the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother's sister, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. And When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, "Mother, there is your son!" Then He said to His disciple, "There is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”*

And that is how it took place. After the death and resurrection of Christ, his mother, the Virgin Mary and Saint apostle John, the one testifying to all this, went to Ephesus together and took up residence there. And there they ended their lives in this world. Then on the foundations and

from the material of Artemis's temple in Ephesus a church was raised, and then a basilisk, the remains of which can be seen to this day. Moslems built a mosque on that same spot, one of the few mosques in the world with no minaret. It too has been left only with "female" markings, for a minaret resembles the male energy reaching for the sky, and the dome a breast offering itself to the stars and the Moon. And so the "great virgin mothers" passed on their stone to one another through the centuries and the millennia.

However, Lisa's story did not end there. Some time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a German nun, a certain Anna Katharina Emmerick, dreamed of Ephesus and in this town that she had never seen the exact spot in which, under a layer of soil, the house that the Virgin Mary had spent her last year on Earth stood. The nun published this dream in a book based on which Lazarene priests dug up the house on the designated spot. This building is believed to be the one in which the Mother of God lived and presented herself to Ephesus. Her house has a kitchen and behind it a bedroom, and beside the house is a medicinal spring. They call it the "Spring of the Virgin Mary". It has three finely walled-in streams of water, each of which has a separate stone niche. And a secret. Namely, one stream bestows *health* upon those that drink, the second *happiness*, and the third *love*. The legend does not say exactly which of the three streams is the one to bring happiness, which grants health and which bears the gift of love. And it would do no good to taste of each of the waters, for medicinal is only the one to quench the first thirst.

Lisa drank from the middle stream, and caught some of the water from the stream on the left into a small vial to bring me as a gift. But this was still not the end of the story.

As she was filling the vial she noticed a note lodged between two stones. In the hope of learning more about the secrets of the spring, she pulled it out and read it. The note contained a number and something resembling a code:

Sorriso di Cibele: 1266

Slightly disappointed, she wrapped the bottle in the note and moved on.

Her work took her through Munich and she spent a few nights at the hotel *Kempinski – The Four Seasons*. She decided to enjoy herself for a while. For breakfast she had champagne and strawberries, and ate lunch at an inn full of Russian ladies and couples, with the inscription:

*BREAKFAST IS SERVED UNTIL 4 PM*

*DAS FRÜHSTÜCK BIS ZUM 16 UHR WIER SERVEN!*

After lunch she went to the Pinakothek to see the earliest computers and collection of chairs, bought a mixture of tea named “Snowy Waltz” at *Dallmayer’s* and had a meal of oysters. She bought two teacups for her future marriage. They were large, of light material and transparent. She returned to the hotel tired but happy, swam four-five lengths in the rooftop pool at the *Kempinski* and went down to her room. On the table she found a hotel business card with an indication of the weather that awaited her the next day, and the other side of the card had an offer for pleasant dreams: a full half dozen of pillows that the guests could order and receive the same evening. They had at their

disposal ordinary pillows filled with wool, anti-allergy masterpieces of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as those filled with horsehair, additional down pillows, some decorative tubular models and cushions stuffed with bore bristles. At the “Four Seasons” hotel the guests could chose their “good night” pillows and in them different dreams. You could almost order a French, Russian, English, Arabic or Greek dream. My lady friend chose one of the cushions filled with bristles, since she liked her pillows firm. Whether the pillow was the cause, or because of the memory of her trip to Ephesus so recently, she dreamt the Aegean Sea full of cold yesterday’s rain, and then dreamed of drinking water from the Spring of the Virgin Mary, from the faucet at the right. When she woke up she had the idea that she might, if she tasted water from all three of the streams in her sleep, be able to discern which would bring happiness, which love, and which health. In the hope of dreaming of the Ephesus Spring of the Virgin Mary once more, she ordered a new pillow the following evening, this time stuffed with horsehair. But nothing happened. She didn’t dream of the waters in Ephesus that or the following night, although she had changed her pillow yet again. And so her pilgrimage ended somewhere in Germany on a heavy woolen cushion.

Before she moved on, Lisa decided to pass through Belgrade and bring me her gift – the vial of water from Ephesus. She gave it to me with the caution that the streams of the Virgin Mother’s wondrous spring bring not only good, but a message as well.

– The great Mother Nature reveals one of her secrets to us through the water. Water is eternal and wise – Lisa concluded her tale – it tells us the truth that we are as loathe to accept as all other wisdom:

*Your happiness need not always accompany your health,  
nor your love.*

And that is how this matter began. We had a fine laugh over the letter that she had slipped me through the Internet and not half a year had gone by when we were married. Although I had the feeling that she was more in love with my books than with myself.

On our first evening together she sang me her favorite song: *Let's go straight to number One...* kissed me on the neck and asked:

– Can you read kisses? Kisses are like love letters. They can be read, and they can be tossed away unopened. A kiss can mean hello! Or good night, farewell or good morning! It means goodbye, brings betrayal and death, or illness, extends a welcome, remember me or bon voyage! The harbinger of joy or misfortune. Through a kiss one of our bodies passes into the other.

I replied that I had read the letter she had written on my neck, though it was written in English, and took her to bed.

## POST SCRIPT



Now it is time for the reader to pose the inevitable question that comes at the end of a book such as this:

– If you are dead, like you say you are, who wrote this book?

The reply is quite simple:

– Is your library not full of books the authors of which are dead? And that you don't mind, yet here, suddenly... who wrote it?

– It's not the same – you will rightfully say – they wrote their books while they were alive, and died afterwards. And you are not dead if you are writing novels.

– What did you say? That I'm not dead? Well that's what this book has been telling you all along. That I'm not dead. That somewhere none of us are dead. But since I believe that the reader is always right, because literature is lead into the future by its readers, not its writers, I will add one more explanation.

Of course this book could not have been written by myself for the very reason that you have said. The readers are not that dumb not to realize who the author of this novel is. This book was written after my death, in her native English language, by my wife. The author of this book is Elisabeth Amava Arzuaga Eulohia Ihar-Swift. Nicknamed Imola.