

Extract from *Yllka's coffee*

Emina corrects, crosses. Adds a word, a sentence. Marks it with drawings, signs...

*Was it in the same year? I remember the smell of leaves. The earth waiting for the rain. The shower pattering on the ground... I can hear thunder somewhere at the horizon. Nothing more.*

Emina goes over the word « nothing » with a highlighter. Two fluorescent yellow patches on the page of her spiral notebook.

*The smell of dry, dusty earth pervades the afternoon. As rain begins to fall, for a few moments.*

Emina vaguely pays attention to her parents' silences, their promptness at turning off television, when the news comes. They listen to the radio late at night, when Alija and she are in bed. Through the half-open door, a shaft of light bathes the end of her bed, soft and warm like Yllka's hands. A few murmurs... Broken sentences... Stories of what she is too young to understand. Zoran would be an enemy, him she loves and admires. He who occupies all her thoughts. No, this is not because she is too young, this is simply absurd, beyond understanding. She closes her eyelids and thinks she is walking by Zoran. With interlocked fingers...

How strange the roar that is about to devastate everything. It announces itself almost mutely, in whispers. Introducing itself in between hours. Like a thunderstorm rumbling and spluttering out ink in the clouds over there, in the distance. They know it is coming; it is about to break out. It is already raging, nearby, just across the horizon. Rumours are spreading around her, outside, at the school where her parents teach. Even eyes now meet without seeing each other, at the dinner table, in the street. And then everything accelerates... Classes are suspended. How can she live without even catching sight of Zoran? And who would understand her? Who would pay attention to the grief of a kid like her? Would the world change just so that Emina's grief could go? What is Emina's grief when everything is already ablaze?

Landmarks are muddled up in her memory. Jumbled up among them, she recalls the mourning of a neighbour, tearing the May sky apart, as a street in Sarajevo has been hit by a shell. Her sister was there. A beautiful young woman. She loved wearing patent leather stilettos. And they had fascinated Emina. She had wished she could wear them too. Until that afternoon. From that day, the clicking of stilettos against the asphalt has only reminded her of their neighbour's sister. Her legs blown off in a street of Sarajevo. No, she does not want to die like this. So she will not wear stilettos. Never. Emina did not know grown-ups also cried. She did not know the change awaited in her for long months would come from outside. Nor that it would be that violent. Neither did her parents.

*And nothing will ever be the same. Neither the sun setting, nor the flowers or the trees above the houses.*

*Air-raid sirens go on blaring at night, year after year. And they will never stop, and nor will absence. It is the whole earth that is quaking and collapsing in front of our home. It is foundering in a deluge of fire that is throwing white and red lights in the gaps of the door Mum has caulked as well as she could.*

Emina takes crayons, colours in yellow and orange tongues in the margin of the page of her

notebook. The flames are long and they lick at her sentences. They look like snakes. They are poisoned.

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