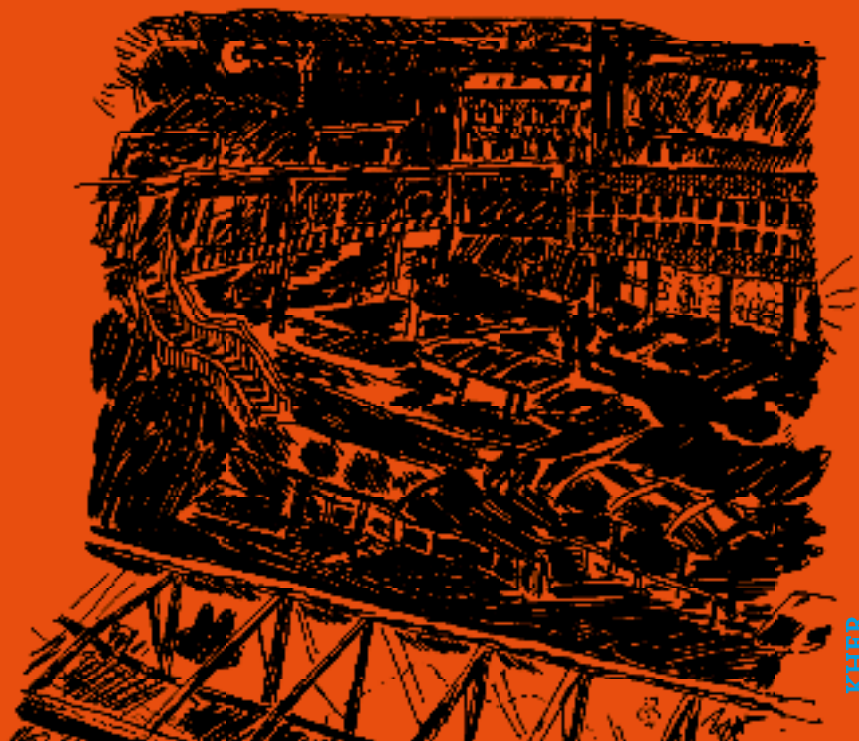


**THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
IN THE STORIES OF
CZECHOSLOVAK ROMA**

VELVET BLUES



**KHER
KAROLINUM PRESS**

Velvet Blues

Edited by Karolína Ryvolová

KHER, z. s.

Veverkova 1172/33, 170 00 Prague 7, Czech Republic

www.kher.cz, nakladatelstvi@kher.cz

Originally published in Czech as *Všude samá krása* (Nothing but Beauty Everywhere) and *Samet Blues* (Velvet Blues), Prague: Kher 2021

KAROLINUM PRESS is a publishing department of Charles University

Ovocný trh 560/5, 116 36 Praha 1, Czech Republic

www.karolinum.cz, redakcenk@ruk.cuni.cz

Texts © Patrik Banga, Emil Cina, Eva Danišová, Gejza Demeter,
Olga Fečová, Ilona Ferková, Věra Horváthová Duždová, Mária Hušová,
Martin Kanaloš, Stanislava Ondová, Květoslava Podhradská,
Zlatica Rusová, Maria Síváková, Michal Šamko, Markéta Šestáková, 2026
Afterword © Karolína Ryvolová, 2026

Translation © Alex Zucker, 2026

Cover image and illustrations © Tereza Šiklová, 2026

Edited by Karolína Ryvolová

Copyedited by Karolína Klibániová

Layout and set by Čumlivski&Horváth

First edition

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of the Czech Republic.

This publication was supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the foundation Bader Philanthropies, Inc.

ISBN 978-80-246-6268-8 (pdf)

ISBN 978-80-246-6269-5 (epub)

ISBN 978-80-246-6267-1 (Karolinum)

ISBN 978-80-87780-49-7 (Kher)



Charles University
Karolinum Press

www.karolinum.cz
ebooks@karolinum.cz

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 8

BRAVE ROMANI

WOMEN Zlatica Rusová **12**

ROMANE ROMŇA Zlatica Rusová **18**

RUN FOR IT, MARGITA! Květoslava Podhradská **24**

DENAŠ, MARGITKO! Květoslava Podhradská **34**

MY DEARS Eva Danišová **42**

MIRE KEDVEŠNE Eva Danišová **60**

GOING TO THE MOVIES Ilona Ferková **74**

SAR AMEN O ČHAVE PHIRAHAS

ANDRE MOZI Ilona Ferková **81**

OPEN-SKY FLAT Olga Fečová **88**

**MY WONDERFUL
FAMILY** Markéta Šestáková **94**

**THE WAY WE USED
TO LIVE** Michal Šamko **106**

ČIRLATUNO DŽIVIPEN Michal Šamko **118**

GOING TO GRANDPA'S Emil Cina **128**

DŽAS KO PAPUŠ Emil Cina **132**

**ČUKČA'S GREAT
MISFORTUNE** Gejza Demeter **136**

**LE ČUKČUSKERI BARI
BIBACHT** Gejza Demeter **142**

ŽIŽKOVITE Patrik Banga **148**

INSIDE THE BUBBLE Stanislava Ondová **156**

**THAT'S CAPITALISM
FOR YOU** Maria Siváková **172**

THE NINETIES Věra Horváthová Duždová **180**

WHERE TO NOW? Mária Hušová **187**

A FEW PRESENTS Eva Danišová **194**

**E KARAČOŇA IMAR
NADUR** Eva Danišová **202**

**THE HOUSE ON ŠTĚRKOVÁ
STREET** Květoslava
Podhradská **210**

YOU'RE LIKE ME Martin
Kanaloš **217**

AFTERWORD Karolína
Ryvolová **231**

**GLOSSARY OF CZECH,
ROMANI, AND SLOVAK
EXPRESSIONS
AND PHRASES 251**

INTRO- DUCTION

The volume in your hands is an anthology of contemporary short stories written mostly by Czech and several Slovak Roma from a region which was once Central European Czechoslovakia. It is a selection from two previous anthologies, *Všude samá krása* (Nothing but beauty everywhere, KHER 2021) and *Samet Blues* (Velvet blues, KHER 2021), which generated much interest upon their release and to this day rank among the publishing house's bestsellers.¹ The foundation of KHER, a press which caters exclusively for the needs of Romani writers, in 2012 was motivated by the belief that writers of Romani origin – due to their dramatic past linked especially but not exclusively to their merciless persecution during World War II, traditionally low social status and ongoing structural discrimination – enjoy a much harder position in the society to let their voices, stories, and grievances be heard.

The stories in the above-mentioned volumes are primarily dedicated to the writers' loved ones and their shared past in the pre-war ethnic settlements of Eastern Slovakia, their new homes in post-war Czech towns, and the surprising reality of post-1989 transition with its opportunities, but more importantly challenges and disillusionment. In the telling of these deeply personal stories these writers inadvertently convey a much more general picture of the Roma's twentieth century history.

The rise in neo-Nazism, which swept through the former Eastern Bloc countries following the fall of the Iron Curtain with its street violence, pogroms, and deaths, resulted in mass migration of the Roma to the West, where they would become an invisible minority, safe from physical threats and open to the advantages of equal rights. It is impossible to ascertain how many Czech Roma have left the Czech Republic since 1997, when the first wave of Romani migration hit primarily the UK and Canada, but to a lesser extent also the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and others. What we do know from eyewitnesses and authority reports is that these families

¹ Alex Zucker's English translation of Patrik Banga's "Žižkovite" previously appeared in *The Book of Prague* (Comma Press, 2023). Mária Hušová's "Where to Now?" is published in this volume for the first time and did not appear in the original Czech-language anthologies.

have blended into their host countries with remarkable ease, adopting their language, joining the job market, and entering children into the local schools, where they go on to become brilliant students, proving the Czech education system with its badly concealed practice of segregation discriminatory and ultimately crippling.

This new generation of Western Roma have partly lost their Czech and Slovak, which have been replaced by the local majority languages, but have retained their Romani as the language of the home and community. The chief intention of the present collection is to provide these Roma with their own ethnic literature which has flourished in their homeland in their absence and thus help them cherish and sustain their cultural background. To this end, all stories written originally in the so-called Slovak Romani are printed in Romani with an accompanying translation in English. English as the lingua franca of the world has been chosen as the main language of this anthology to make the literature of the Roma most accessible to audiences around the world.

Mainstream populations across the globe are the second envisaged readership of this book. It aims to provide them with the fact of the very existence of Romani letters and aid the development of an understanding for, and a sensitivity to a people scattered around the world but bound by a common Indian origin.

Velvet Blues has been chosen as the volume's title despite the collected works speaking of a whole array of topics and periods. The editors felt that it best describes the Czechoslovak Roma's hope that their destiny is following a positive trajectory with a natural climax in the post-Velvet Revolution freedom of the new democratic country. That this has failed to happen is a tragic paradox and a source of ongoing sadness for the local Romani communities.

The selection of the seventeen stories is the result of a long chain of debates between KHER editors and the Czech-to-English translator Alex Zucker, whose job in this book stretched far beyond the usual transposition of

one language code to another. Not only did he offer his expertise as to what Western audiences might be interested in and able to relate to, he also tirelessly battled on, trying to capture culturally specific terms and situations pertaining to the Roma. For his devotion to the project and willingness to deliver at any cost, KHER editors would like to express their heartfelt thanks.

The afterword entitled “The Untold Stories of Czechoslovak Roma” provides the factual and historical background to the development of a minority literature in an oral language. It is a case study of how the Roma began to write in the Czech Republic but will suitably serve as an illustration of similar processes in other countries with a significant Romani minority around the world.

BRAVE ROMANI WOMEN



BY ZLATICA RUŠOVÁ



When I first started writing this war story, I wondered if it was the right thing to do. Should I or shouldn't I tell these Roma's stories? Shouldn't the suffering these people went through remain hidden away in the heart and memory of my mom? But then I found out that young Roma nowadays know hardly anything about World War II. I found it heart-wrenching, given how much the Roma suffered. Young people have no idea how many of us died in the concentration camps. Some were shot in front of their families, many were dragged away and never came home again, and no one even knows where they're buried.

What I want to write about now, though, is Romani women and children. I want to tell you about the people my mom grew up with. She started talking about them one day when two young people came to see me, wanting to know more about Romanes, the Romani language. As we got to talking, the conversation turned to World War II. And with tears in her eyes, my mom began telling the story I'm going to share with you now. It was the first time my sister and I ever heard it from her.

One night the mayor of the gadjo village woke them up: "Roma, as you know, there's a war on. The Germans are coming, you need to hide. Find yourselves a hiding place and don't come out until they're gone. Only God knows what will happen next."

"All right, but where? There's too many of us. I don't know any place where all of us would fit," replied the vajda, our Romani mayor.

"You'll have to find it yourselves. We can't hide you in the village. The farmers are saving the cellars for themselves," said the mayor, and with that he walked away. Everyone was anxious. They were very afraid for their children and families. Feverishly they pondered where they might hide.

That afternoon some young boys went to tell the vajda they had found a hiding place.

"Where?"

"In a cave. We used to go there to roast stolen hens, geese and ducks. We can hide there. There's plenty of room, the whole settlement can fit."

"All right, boys. Let's pack up everything we're going to need. People, take all the food from your house, duvets,

warm covers, and proper clothing. Make sure to bring warm layers for the children, they're going to need them. The cave is made of stone and we're in the middle of winter."

The women gathered up all the essentials and set out. The whole way they wept: "What's going to become of us? We'll freeze to death in this cold! And when the Germans find us, they'll shoot us!"

When they came to the cave, they were amazed at how big it was. Then the older Roma remembered they used to slake lime there. The vajda ordered the people: "Women and children to one side, men and young boys to the other. In the middle we'll make a firepit so we don't freeze to death here."

Winter that year was harsh, although it didn't snow. The Roma survived in the cave as best they could. The grown-ups ate as little as possible to leave enough for the children, and saved as much water as they could. They had hardly any, in the woods there was none. They would have had to fetch it from the village, but they couldn't go there. It was just as the mayor said, that same day the Germans arrived. Toward evening, the Roma spotted them by the woods, but the Germans didn't dare enter the forest—they were afraid. The Roma were lucky.

During the day, some women cooked and some women helped, they shared the work as best they could. It all had to be done without a word, and even the children knew they had to be quiet while they played. When evening came and it was clear the Germans weren't patrolling the woods anymore, the Roma traded stories about all they had been through and how the musicians used to play at weddings and dances. But they laughed only under their breath, the fear was stronger. When Maña told her story, though, they couldn't hold back anymore and howled with laughter.

Maña was a bit slow. Cracked in the head as folks used to say. Didn't have all her marbles. She didn't speak too well, granted, but she was very cleanly and loved children. She could easily play with them all day long, so children adored her. She was fairly chubby, but had a charming face and skin like porcelain. They had lots of fun with her, but she was also trouble, since even her own mother didn't

know how to explain to her that she wasn't allowed to leave the cave during the day.

One evening, once the children were asleep, the women were trying to figure out what to do, since they had a shortage of flour, potatoes and fat, and no bread left at all. The children were pleading for bread. But worst of all, they had run out of water. There was enough left for maybe two days. The men debated what to do: "Someone has to go down to the village and find out what's going on. Maybe there's a way to bring some water back." The vajda sent a few young men to scout it out. But it wasn't long before they were back.

"It won't work. There are soldiers everywhere, patrolling in pairs."

"If it won't work, it won't work. If only it would snow tonight. If it doesn't snow, I don't know what we'll do."

There was also one sickly little boy among the children. A Romani woman had taken him in from the orphanage in the hope that he would recover with her. But the cold cave and the hunger weren't doing him any good, in fact he was worse.

"What are we going to do with him if he dies?"

"We'll bury him somewhere around here, and after the war we can move him to the settlement."

The women pondered how to help the boy. They started cutting back on their food rations and giving him more of theirs. But with drinking water the situation was worse. They had run out and it still hadn't snowed. The children wanted to drink and there was nothing to give them. The women were at a loss. "What are we going to do?" they said. "The children won't make it without any water. They're going to die!" When the children went outside to pee during the day, by the next day it was frozen. Then the children broke the frozen pee into pieces with a spoon and ate it. They didn't realize where they had gone to pee, they thought they were just eating ice. Their parents didn't tell them what it was or the children wouldn't have had anything to drink. They knew it was the only way for the children to survive. The grown-ups went to a hole where their predecessors used to slake lime. There was frozen water on the surface and lime underneath. They divided it up so there was enough for everyone.

One evening some of the young boys came running into the cave and warned everyone to be quiet, they'd seen soldiers coming into the woods. "What kind of soldiers?" the vajda asked. Some said it was Germans, others said they'd heard Russian. So the vajda made a decision: "We're all going to lie down and no one say a word. Then we'll see what's going on."

After three hours, they heard someone outside speaking Russian. Then came the deafening sound of gunfire. The Russians had set up a Katyusha rocket launcher on top of the cave. Whoever had pillows and duvets covered their heads with them, to keep from going deaf. The soldiers were firing down on the village of Šivetice. As soon as they realized the shooting had stopped, the women wiped soot on the young girls' cheeks, to make them unattractive, and wrapped their heads in rags, for fear the soldiers might take them away and rape them. Everyone knew the Russians did that. Then the women and young girls hid. They even rubbed Maňa's cheeks with soot and hid her. After about an hour, someone lifted up the rug hiding the entrance to the cave and a Russian soldier walked in. He announced something in Russian and after a moment it dawned on them what he had said: "The Germans are gone, don't be afraid, they ran away."

Then some other Russian soldiers came in and started looking for something. When they found the girls hidden beneath the blankets, they took them away, soot-faced and all. As the mothers wept, the soldiers tried to reassure them, gesturing to indicate they were only taking the girls to help them peel potatoes. They took Maňa, too. Her mother tried to communicate that Maňa was sick, that she wasn't right in the head. But it didn't do any good. They took almost all the girls, leaving only the little ones.

When the Roma came out of the cave, they saw dead soldiers, wounded horses and discarded rifles. The women sat down on the cold ground and started weeping. So much sorrow and suffering, so many dead young people!

"Come on, folks, let's see what's going on with our girls!"

The whole way no one said a word. They were all afraid what they might find. What they saw horrified them. The girls were in shocking condition. They had been raped, every last one. Maňa was worse off than any of them.

When she heard the people from the settlement coming back to the village, she crawled out of her hiding place and wailed at the top of her lungs: "Mommy, mommy, they gave me a boo-boo!" Her mother collapsed on the ground beside her, hugged her to her chest, and burst into tears. All of the Romani people wept, they had never seen something so awful.

The first one to come to his senses was the vajda. "All right, Roma, time to stop moaning! We need to do something about it, we can't just leave them like this! Men, we'll divide up the work. Some of you go back to the cave, there are wounded horses there, the rest of you go find wood. We need to heat some water and give the girls a bath, then we can clean up too. But first we've got to fix them up." He walked away with tears in his eyes.

The women, weeping, attended to the girls, doing what had to be done. Only afterwards did they see to their own needs. What had happened could never be forgotten. The girls stripped off their clothes and the women burned them. They were so ridden with lice that when you put your hand down their bosom, you came out with a fistful of lice.

Once they had cleaned themselves up, they sat down to a meal the women had cooked for them. Their plates were piled high, but even though everyone was famished, the food stuck in their throat.

It took a long time for the girls to get well again. Some of them became pregnant. They not very nicely nicknamed the children "Russkies." You can still sometimes hear Roma say it to this day. But Maña had it worst of all. Three months later, she died in great pain.

The story I told you today is one that actually happened. I intentionally left out the name of the village. Why? Because some of those women are still alive. My hope is that this might move some of you young people to think about what Romani women suffered through during World War II for the sake of their children and families.

ROMANE ROMŇA



ZLATICA RUSOVÁ

Kanak kezdiŋdom te írinen pal akala Roma,
gondolinkerás, či kerav láche. Gondolinkerás, sjom
te írinen, vaj na sjom te írinen pal akala Roma?
Gondoliŋdom mange, n'élas akale Romengero pháripén,
so préko džidíle, te áchen míra dajorake čak andre
lakero jílo te godí? Pandik ájom pr'odá, hoj o terne
manuša románe na džanen pal o dúto máriben, majna
ništa. Olestar mange jumind'a andro pháripén o jílo.
Mer o Roma báre but préko ligene. Hoj but lendar múle
andro lágri, but lendar múle khére angil o fajti, mer sle
livinkerde, hoj buten ligene, u frima lendar ále khére, vaj
na džanen, kaj hine párunde.

Musaj te phenav, hoj akána kamav te írinen pal o romane
romňa, ta pal o romane čhavóre. Kamav tumenge akána
te vakeren pal o Roma, maškar save ávri barija míri daj.
Kanak vakerlas pal akala Roma, avka čak vaš odá, hoj ále
ke ma dúj terne manuša, so kamle te džanen buter pal
amári romaŋi čhib. Sar vakerahas, avka peja lav pal o dúto
máriben. U avka kezdiŋd'a míri daj te vakeren, jasvenca
andro jákha, pal akadá, so tumenge kamav te vakeren. Adá
šund'am míra pheňaha angutno.

Jekfar rataha len uštaďa o starosta andal o gav: „Romale,
džanen, hoj hin máriben. Kampil pe te garuven, aven
k'amáro gav o Ňemci. Rakhen tumenge than kaj tumen
garuvena. U na sikaven tumen, kím adaj éna. So éla
dureder, odá džanel čak o Del.“

„Láche, čak kaj? Sjam báre but. Na džanav, kaj amen sjam
te garuven, na džanav ase thanestar, kaj restamas savóre,“
phend'a amáro vajda.

„Odá tumenge musaj te rakhen korkóre. Andro gav
tumen na sjam, kaj te garuven. O pinci pumenge o chulaja
mukenkeren vaš pumenge.“ Odá phend'a u geja het.
Pharone lenge sja, i dar sja bári vaš o čhavóre te vaš o fajto.
O Roma savóre gondolinkernas, kaj pumen garuvna.

Pal o dílo ále o terne čháve pal o vajda, hoj rakhle than,
kaj pumen savóre garuvena.

„Kaj?“

„Andro barlango. Phírahas odoj le kachňen, le papiňen,
te le kačken te pekenkeren, so čorahas. Odoj amen
garuvaha. Hin odá báro, resaha odoj savóre Roma.“

„Láche, čhavale, javas amenge te keden, so amenge

kampola. Romale, keden upre savóro: o cháben, so hin tumen khére, keden tumenge o duchni, o pokróci táte, te o táte gada. Keden upre le čhavórenge o táte gada, mer odá lenge kampola, o barlango hin baruno, u hin jevend.“

O Romňa kene upre savóro so kampija, u mukle pumen pro drom. O Romňa cele dromeha rovenas: „So amenca éla? Andr'akaso jevend fadínaha! U te amen o Němci rakhena, livinkerna amen!“

Sar ále ko barlango, amulinde, savo hin odá barlango báro. Akor ále pr'odá o phúre Roma, hoj jon odoj valekana téle čhorkernas o vapno. O vajda phendá le Romenge: „O romňa le čhavórenca džana pro jek ódalo, o murša le terne chávenca pro áver ódalo. Maškare le barlangoske, keraha jag, te na adaj fadínas.“

Odá berš sja o jevend báro. Čak o jiv na sja. Avkake o Roma dživenas andro barlango, sar pe delas. Chanas so jekfrimeder, čak le čhavóren t'ovel buter, te le pániha cidenas te ikrel so jekdureder. Mer te o páni sja len frima u andro veš páni na sja. Musaj te gelehas andro gav, u odoj naštik džanas. O starosta sar phendá, avka sja, mek odá d'ives ále andro gav o Němci, mer kijaráti dikhle le Němcen pašal o veš. Andro veš andre n'ále, mer daranas. Adá sja le romengeri bach.

Préko d'ives o Romňa tavenas, valesave šegitinenas, ulavkernas sar pe delas. Musaj te sle bilaveskero, u džanenas odá, te o čhavóre kanak pumenge khelenas, te na len šundol. Kijaráti kanak džanenas, hoj paš o veš náne o lukeste, pumenge o Roma vakerenas, so préko džidile, kanak phírnas te bašavkeren, o bijava, o bále. No t'avka hasanas polóke, mer i dar sja bareder. No kanak vakereleas i Maňa, odá ávri na ikrenas o Roma, u hasanas avka, hoj o ódala len dukhanas.

I Maňa, odá sja terňi čhaj, so sja nasváji. Avka, sar pe phenel romane, nasváji sja pro šéro. Na sja lake andro šéro savóro avka, sar élas t'oven. Na džanelas láche te vakeren, so pe musaj te phenen, sja báre žúži, u kamlas báre le čhavóren. Le čhavórenca peske khelelas te celo d'ives. U o čhavóre la báre kamenas. Sja báre thúji, no o muj la sja báre šukár. O tešto sja la parno sar porceláno. Avkake préko laha džidile but hasaviben, no te bríga, kanak lake i daj na džanlas te den andri godi, hoj ávri naštik džal préko d'ives.

Jekfar kijaráti, o čhavóre má sovenas, u o romňa pumenge vakerenas, so te keren, má sja frima járo, krumpji, žíro u so na sja, avka máro. U odá mangel o čhavóre. Ále te pr'odá, hoj frima hin o páni. Šaj ovel, hoj hin pre dúje dīvesende. So te keren, vakernas pumenge o murša: „Élas te džan valeko andro gav. Élas te džan te dikhen, so pe odoj kerel. Šaj ovel, hoj pe delas te páni te anen.“ O vajda bičhaďa le terne čháven andro gav, či te del te anel páni. No báre sik ále pale.

„Na del pe, o lukeste hine vígik, phíren po dúj džéne.“

„Te pe na del, ávka pe na del. Lošalo újomas, te aja rat pejas jiv. Te na perla, na džanav, so keraha.“

Maškar o čhavóre sja jek cikno čhavóro, so sja nasválo. Lija peske le jek romňi andal o lelenco. Lija peske le, hoj paš late pe dela pro than. No o barlango leske láčhipen na kerlas, aňi i bok. U sja pr'odá na láche.

„So leha keraha, te merla?“

„Párunaha le valeka adaj, te éla pal o máriben, thovaha le préko andro gav,“ phendá o vajda.

O romňa gondolinkernas, sar te šegitinen le nasvále čhavóreske. Kezdinde pumenge te devkeren frimeder cháben. U devkernas le nasvále čhavóreske. No goreder odá sja le pániha. Má o páni na sja. O jiv na peja. O čhavóre mangelas páni u páni má na sja. Má na džanenas, so te keren. So keraha, phenenas pumenge o romňa, bijo páni o čhavóre ávri na ikrena. Merna! O čhavóre, so ávri mutrenas préko dīves, odá fadīnlas, u o áver dīves le rojenca phagernas u chanas o fadīndo muter. O čhavóre na džanenas, kaj mutrenas, gondolinenas, hoj chan jégo. O daja te o dada le čhavórenge na phenenas, so chan, čak te na mangel páni. U džanenas, hoj čak avka šaj préko dživen. O romňa te o murša phírenas andri chev, kaj o phúre Roma čhorkernas o vapno. Upral sja o fadīndo páni, u telal sja o vapno. Chanas avka, te áchel sakoneske.

Jekfar kijaráti našle o terne čháve andro barlango, hoj t'ovas bilavengero, mer dikhle, hoj andro veš aven o lukeste. O vajda phučja: „Save lukeste?“ Jek phende, hoj dikhle Němcen, ávera, hoj šunde te vakeren Rusika. Vaš odá phendá o vajda: „Savóre amenge džaha te pašjon u ovaha bilaveskero. Dikhaha, so pe kerla.“

Pal o trin ori šunde te vakeren Rusika. Pandik báro

livišágo. Pro barlango o Rusi thode i Katuša. Savóre amenge thod'am keril o šére o perñici, o duchni, kas so sja čak t'ovel amenge o šéro andreučardo. Te na ovas kašuke. O lukeste livinkernas téle pro šivetovo. Sar o romña dikhle, hoj o lukeste má na livinkeren, kormoha lenge andre kerde o muja, t'oven džungale. Devkerde lenge pro šére kendova, mer daranas, te na len keden o lukeste, mer odá kerenas. Le terne čhajan, romñen téle chudkernas. Te la Maña andre kerde kormoha u garude. Vaj pali jek óra valeko vazdña o pokróco, so sja andreučardo o barlango, andre ája jek Rusiko lukesto. Valeso vakerlas u pandik ájam pr'odá, hoj phenda: „Má o Němci adaj náne, ma daran, ništa.“

Pandik ále te ávera Rusika lukeste, u kezdinde valeso te roden. Te rakhle le čhajan, rakhle tel o duchni, te melalen len kene. O daja rovenas, sar dikhle o lukeste, hoj roven, sikavkernas, hoj džan te kušen o krumpji. Lile te la Maña. I daj sikavkerlas, hoj hin nasváji, sikavkerlas hoj hiñi diliñi. No na šegitind'a. Lile majna savóre čhajan. Mukle čak ole ciknen.

O Roma, kanak ávri ále andal o barlango, dikhle le bute múle lukesten, livinde grasten, dikhle but puški. O romña bešte pri šudri phuv u kezdinde te roven. Aci bríga, aci pháripena, aci múle terne manuša.

„Romale, javas te dikhen, so hin amáre čhajenca!“

Savóre cele dromeha khére džanas bilaveskero. Daranas, so dikhena khére. So dikhle, sja valeso báro. Le čhajan rakhle báre erđavone. Savóre sle téle chudkerde. I Maña sja pr'odá jekgoreder. Sar šund'a, hoj o Roma aven khére, cidlas pe pal i phuv andal o khér ávri. Rovlas pro celo kirlo: „Mamo, mamo, kerde mange bibi!“ Lakeri daj peske bešta ke late pri phuv, ciña peske la pro kojín u kezdind'a te joj te roven. Savóre Roma rovenas, asi bríga mek na dikhle.

Angutno ája ke peste o vajda. „Romale, ma roven má! Kampel lenca te keren valeso, naštik avka oven! Muršale, ulavas amenge i búfi. Valesave džana ko barlango, odoj sle livinde grasta, ávera džana kaštenge. Kampel te tatarkeren páña, kampel le čhajan te nand'arkeren, te amen musaj te nand'ugas. Angutno kampel te den le čhajan pro than.“ Jasvenca andro jákha geja het.

O romňa rovibnaha dine le čhajan pro than, kerde keril lende, so kampija. Pandik kerde keril pumende. Sja odá valeso aso, so pe na dela te biskeren šoha. O gada, so téle hajinde pal pumende, labarkerde. Sja andre lende aci džuva, hoj kanak denas o vast pal i brek, lenas ávri džuva.

Sar pumen žužarde, bešte ko cháben, so o romňa táde. Savórenge sja keno, no o cháben na kamlas téle te džan le kirloha, u ája sako bokhalo.

Žibut pumen o čhaja sastarnas. Valesave áchile khabne. Lengere čhavóren džungalone vičinenas „Ruso“. Te akána maškar o Roma šundol, hoj valesave manuša pumen vičinen Ruso. No jekgoreder sja pr'odá i Maňa. I Maňa pro trinto čhon báre dukhende múja.

Akadá, so tumenge akána gend'om, vaj írind'om, hin čáčo. O gav na kamav te írinen naveha. Soske? Mer valesave romňa mek dživen. Vaš odá tumen terne manuša gondolinkeren, so sle o romane romňa andro dúto máríben vaš o čhavóre te vaš o fajto.

RUN FOR IT, MARGITA!



BY KVĚTOSLAVA
PODHRADSKÁ

MARGITA

“Run for it, Margita! Quick, run!” my sister Olga whispered urgently into my ear, dragging me deeper into the woods so we could hide in the thicket.

“What for?” I asked, surprised.

“Stop asking questions and run!” Branches and tall grass whipped at our skin, but we didn’t let them slow us down. “I saw Germans on the road. If we run this way, we’ll make it home before them,” my sister explained after catching her breath a little.

As we crashed through the door of our wooden cottage, the terrified look on our faces made it clear to our mother that danger was on the way.

“Upstairs, quick, under the hay, and be quiet!” We lay down by the rafter where there was the most hay, hearts pounding in our throats. Hugging each other helped us calm down a bit. Soon we heard a banging on the door and our mother’s voice.

“I’m afr—,” I whispered, and Olga covered my mouth with her palm.

“Are you alone? Where is your husband, your family? Have you seen any partisans?” the soldiers bellowed at my mother.

“I’m here alone, my husband went to burn lime. Partisans? Here? What would they be doing here? No one comes here all year long,” said Mr. Trnka, the teacher from our primary school in Matysová, interpreting my mother’s answer for the Germans. We heard one of the guards walk to the stove and lift the lid on one of the pots. Potatoes bubbled away inside. The guards scanned the room.

“Where do those stairs go?” one of the soldiers asked. “Hello, did you hear what I said? What’s up there?” he asked again, pointing to the opening in the ceiling and placing his tall boot on the first step.

“Nothing, just the attic, hay, the gate’s outside, on the other side of the house.”

“Then why do you have stairs in here?” the soldier asked.

"When I make mattresses, I fill the canvas with hay. This way I have it handy, so I don't have to go outside at night," our mom responded calmly. The teacher translated, making sure the Germans understood.

"Let's go," the commander suddenly ordered. He was probably hot from standing by the stove.

"You can come down, girls. They're past the roadside cross now," our mom called up to us, and we came down the stairs, still trembling with fear.

"I spotted those Germans at the crossroads, and we ran for it right away. We don't have any wood," Olga informed our mom.

"Never mind, the main thing is you made it home in time. If they had seen you in the woods, they might have picked you up, and God knows what might have happened. They're still searching for partisans."

"We do have mushrooms, though," said Olga, proudly pointing to our basket, and she began to clean them to put in the soup. My mom sat down on the bench by the stove and you could see there was something on her mind.

"When will this all be over? When will they leave us in peace so we can live without fear again? Come here, Margita, my precious child."

"I'll be twelve soon," I proudly declared, kneeling at her feet. But my mother gave a worried sigh. "You two are all I have left." Our older sister Anna had moved away the year before to live with her husband in Legnava.

"You know, a few girls have gone missing, and those German officers hurt them. I have to keep you hidden so they can't do anything bad to you. You mustn't go into the woods by yourselves. Tomorrow the two of you will go with your grandma to clean at the church, maybe you'll get some cheese curds in return," our mom said, wiping her tears on her apron.

The wooden Greek Orthodox church meant everything to our grandma, she believed that as long as we kept praying, we would make it through these hard times. Sometimes, when the wooden stairs needed scrubbing, she would take us granddaughters with her, and in return we would get some food to take home with us. Olga preferred going to work for the Ruthenian farmers in Stará Ľubovňa,

but I liked it in the church. When we were lucky, we came home with enough flour to bake bread for two weeks, then we got eggs and vegetables for helping out on some other farm—there were several of them around Matysová. But most of all, I would have liked to go back to school. When would our lives go back to the way they were before?

OLGA

“You hear that? Someone’s knocking at the door. Who could it be at this hour?” wondered our mom.

“Don’t go anywhere, stay in bed!” our dad ordered us in a hushed voice.

“It isn’t the Germans, they wouldn’t have knocked,” I whispered to Margita.

“Who is it?” my father asked in a firm voice.

“Atkroy dver, pazhalusta, ya ranyenyi.”

“It must be a Russian,” my mom said to my dad. “Be careful!” My father picked up a wooden cane and slowly opened the door. A young man fell straight onto our floor.

“Pomoshch, pomoshch,” he begged, and in the light we saw that his whole body was covered in mud and blood.

“Come, get up.” My dad lifted the man by his right arm, since his left side was wounded, and hauled him up to the attic.

“What happened? Who are you?” From downstairs we heard our mom asking the soldier questions in Ruthenian. In between moans of pain, he answered that he was Russian and had been separated from his unit during an air drop.

“Vodu, vody dai piit, pazhalusta.” I leaped out of bed for a tin mug and was up in the attic quick as a flash. My dad had taken off the soldier’s coat and was inspecting his bleeding wound.

“He probably stabbed himself on a branch. We need to stop the bleeding. Bring me a cloth and some water,” my dad said, looking at me. Once I had delivered them, he sent me back downstairs and my mom tended to the Russian’s wound.

“Now listen carefully. We’ve got a Russian soldier here.

You know what the Germans would do to us for sheltering the enemy and lying to them." My dad gave us a deadly serious look to make sure we grasped how dangerous this was for all of us. "We can either throw him out, or keep him for a couple days, till his wound heals up and he gets some strength back. Which will it be?" My dad gave us an inquiring look. We exchanged glances without a word. We were all well aware what awaited us if the Germans were to find him here.

"We would all have to act exactly the same as we did before he burst in here," my mom decided.

"All right then, he stays, and we all keep our mouths shut, not a peep from anyone, hear that, girls?" said my dad. He instructed us that no one but him was to go up to the attic.

"Good thing we're the last cottage in the village and no one has to walk past us on their way home, right, Olga?"

"Right, Margita, we know, but still we have to be careful," I reminded my sister, just to be sure, before we both fell asleep.

Apart from my dad, no one went up to the attic. Mornings, before he went off to the woods, where the men logged timber for the Nazis, he tended to Sergei, and evenings he checked to see if his wound was healing up. My grandma got her hands on a little bottle of yellow powder, luckily we had plenty of sheets to make bandages with. The whole week, we all acted the same as always.

"Today in the woods I found out the Nazis are looking for a Russian lieutenant," my dad said, and we all perked up our ears.

"That's our Sergei, right, Dad?"

"Yes, Olga, that's him. I'll go and have a look at him, you girls go lie down," he said, but this time he stayed up in the attic longer than usual.

"Sergei wants to leave the day after tomorrow, in the evening," my dad announced to my mom when he came back downstairs. "I'll deliver him to the partisans and they'll take him to his unit."

"But Gabo," my mom asked, "do you even know how to find the partisans?"

"Every man that works in the woods knows that, honey.

Now go to sleep,” my dad smiled at her.

Early the next morning he went off into the woods, and came back before the German patrol that supervised the men working in the woods. My mom spent the day kneading dough for bread. We didn’t have much flour left, but she knew Sergei was going to need some food for the trip.

“I spoke with Matuš. The partisans know where Sergei’s unit is,” my dad informed my mom when he came home from work. “Tomorrow, once it gets dark, Matuš will be waiting at the agreed location.”

“It’s awfully dangerous, do you have to go with him?” I heard my mom say anxiously.

“I do. Sergei doesn’t know his way around here. If the Germans got hold of him, it would be bad for us too,” my father said, thinking out loud.

“Spasiba. Balshoye spasiba.” Sergei emotionally thanked my mom, telling me and my sister goodbye with his eyes. As he walked off into the dark with my dad, I felt like I was going to cry. I imagined them cautiously treading their way through the darkened woods, and meeting up with the brave Matuš at the arranged location. Sergei shook hands with my dad, and the two of them wordlessly hugged farewell.

“Why has Dad been gone so long? He should have been back ages ago.”

“He’ll come, don’t worry. They have to be careful, you know,” said my mom, reassuring both me and herself. She was too worried to fall asleep. She prayed for my dad to return, and I prayed silently along with her, next to my sleeping sister.

When my dad still hadn’t returned by morning, we were sure something had gone wrong. We set out for Matysová to ask my uncle Ďula if he knew anything. The Germans were chasing each other around the village square on motorbikes, they even had a dog sitting in one of the sidecars.

“What are you doing here, woman? Run along home! They took your Gabo away! The men were talking about it this morning when they went logging. They said they

caught him outside last night. What was he thinking, going outside so late like that? You know we aren't allowed out of the house after dark," my uncle said. My mom burst into tears.

"Where did they take him to, Ďula, where?" She hid her face in her hands.

"I don't know exactly, but they said to a work camp. Run along home and don't go asking around anywhere, you'll only make more problems for yourself. What if they take you in too?" my uncle Ďula said.

Our grandma, who lived with my uncle, found out from him what had happened and came to see us. "The nearest work camp is in Hanušovce, here in the Prešov region. They've got men locked up there building train tracks and dams. The parish priest told me, and he knows everything."

"Auschwitz is a long way away, isn't it?" my mom asked my grandma.

"That's in Poland, hopefully Gabo is still here somewhere, we just have to pray for him and trust that he'll come back to us," my grandma said, her eyes overflowing with tears.

MOM

I didn't lose faith that Gabo would come back to me, that we would all live together again like before. Early the next morning, the girls and I went into the woods to gather firewood, we were running out. I hadn't had any news of him, none of the men from the woods knew a thing. Every second or two, my eyes kept wandering to the path leading home, just in case my husband returned. We had a frugal Christmas as usual, but on top of everything else, it was also unbearably painful, every time I thought about the fact that he wasn't with us.

It was awful when the Germans drove all the men, women, and children from the village into the woods to make round logs for trenches. The Germans stood over us, weapons in hand, shouting and pointing machine guns at us. The Roma were beside themselves with fear. I was scared to death they would shoot us, you could hear the

weeping from all sides. Finally, after seven days, they told us we didn't have to go into the woods anymore. The men could begin to dig trenches. The ground was frozen solid, they had to burn firewood to loosen up the soil.

We took work wherever we could find it. For a little flour, potatoes, and lard, we would work all day if we had to.

After mass one day, I went to my mother's. "People are saying the fighting between the partisans and the Russian units is getting closer," my brother Ďula remarked.

"You don't see the Germans in the area so much anymore, and some of them are leaving, the parish priest said," my mother added. For the first time in ages, I felt a flicker of hope in my heart that Gabo might return, but then panicked that I might have jinxed it.

"Mommy, Mom!" Olga shouted, bursting into the kitchen one day with the news she had heard on the farm that Soviet rifle corps units had broken through to Hanušovce.

"Hanušovce? Our daddy might be there!" Margita cried in excitement.

On January 24, the Soviets liberated Matysová.

I was out in front of the house with my daughters stacking wood when someone shouted to us from the cross at the crossroads: "Girls! My girls!"

He had returned! I sank to my knees and burst into tears.

"Dad, Daddy, Dad!" My daughters ran over to him and gave him a hug. I thanked God he'd heard our prayers and our family was together again.

"At long last, I'm here with you," said my husband, clutching me in his arms. He was nothing but skin and bones. We wept with joy.

"Were you in Hanušovce, Daddy?" Margita asked.

"Yes, my dear Margita, but in my heart, I was here at home with all of you."

We piled a plate with as much food as we could, but after going hungry for so long, Gabo couldn't eat it all, he had to take it slow and in small portions. He told us that on his way back from the partisans, after bringing Sergei to them, he was stopped by the Germans. They didn't believe that the only reason he was walking around the woods in the middle of the night was because he'd had a quarrel with his wife. They took him to Hanušovce, and he was this close to being sent to Auschwitz like the others before him.

A little while later, Olga suddenly said, "There's a car pulling up to our place."

"Our place?" I said in surprise. My husband was asleep, still recovering.

"Soldiers, but not Germans, their uniforms are different," she said, reporting what she could tell from a distance.

The car came to a stop in front of our door and out jumped a group of noisy Russian soldiers. "Zdrastvuyte, Gabo, mamó!"

"Sergei, is that you?" I said.

"Da, eto ya, Sergei Vladymyrich Gorki, sto syedmy strelkovy batalion Gordeeva. My Ganushovice i Matysova asvabadili," he said with a salute. I translated for my family: "Yes, it is I, Sergei Vladymyrich Gorki, of the 107th Rifle Corps, Commanding Officer Gordeev. We liberated Hanušovce and Matysová."

"Gabo, we brought food for your family," I translated what Sergei had said as the soldiers carried sacks of flour, potatoes, and preserves into the kitchen, along with other provisions the Germans had taken from the farmers for themselves.

At long last, we could look forward to some much-deserved peace and quiet.

*This story is dedicated to my
parents, Margita and Gabriel
Dužda, who, unlike many millions
of others, survived the Second
World War.*



DENAŠ, MARGITKO!



**KVĚTOSLAVA
PODHRADSKÁ**

E MARGITKA

„Denaš, Margitko! Sig denaš!“ zoraleder mange nisostar nič phendas e pheñ u cirdla man andro bareder veš, te pen te garuvas andro bare kraki.

„Soske, Olgo?“ phučav latar u čudalīnav man.

„Ma phuč u denaš!“ O kraki the e uči čar amen labarel, aļe na denašas polokeder. „Dikhľom pro drom le Němcen, sar denašaha kadarig, avaha khere sigeder sar jon,“ phenel mange godaħa, sar čino chudľa o dichos.

Fejs rozrugindam o vudar la drevnicatar u amare muja la dake phende, hoj pes vareso kerel.

„Upre, sig andro phus u čiten!“ Pašľuvas peske paš o tramos, kaj hino o phus nekučeder, o jila amenge maren dži andro kirlo. Jekhetano obchudľipen amenge čino šegetinda. Takoj šunas durkiben pro vudar the la dakero hangos.

„Darav m-,“ cichones phenav u e Olga mange thoda e burňik pro vušta.

„Sal korkori? Kaj tiro rom? Kaj e famelija, dikhľal le partizanen?“ vičinen pre daj.

„Som kadaj korkori, o rom geľa te labarel o vapnos. O partizana? Kadaj? So bi kadaj kerenas, űiko kadaj na avel, sar hino o berš baro,“ prethovel o sikhľardo o Trnkas andal e obecno sikhadi Matisovatar le němciķe slugadźenge la dakero vakeriben. Šunas sar jekh slugadźis geľa ke špareta, hazdľa upre e chip. Andre piri tadon o gruli. Rozdikhel pes pal e kuchňa.

„Kaj džan kale garadiči?“ phučel o dujto slugadźis, „Hej, šunes, so hin kodoj upre?“ u sikhavel pre chev andro plafonos the uštarda uča cirachaha pro peršo garadičis.

„Nič, oda ča o pados, o phus, o vudaroro avral, pal oki sera le kherestar.“

„Soske tut hin o garadiči kadaj?“ kamel te džanel.

„Sar kerav o štroki, rakinav andre cacha o phusa. Paš o vasta hine, kaj na mušīnav te phirel rači avri,“ phenel amari daj, sar te nisostar na daralas. O sikhľardo prethovel the dikhel pre lende, či lesķe achaľuven.

„Džas het,“ rozkazinda nisostar nič o velitelis. Šaj les has kerado, sar terdol paš e špareta.

Vážení čtenáři, právě jste dočetli ukázkou z knihy ***Velvet Blues***.

Pokud se Vám ukázka líbila, na našem webu si můžete zakoupit celou knihu.