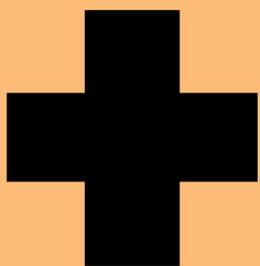


NEW HUNGARIAN  
YOUNG ADULT  
FICTION

THE



BOOKS

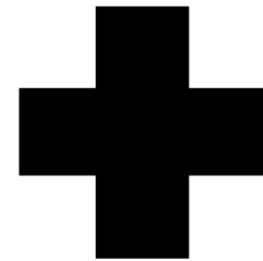
*Issues  
with Young  
Adults*

TWENTY TWENTY-TWO

Petőfi  
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**IN**



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Dániel Levente Pál

*editor*  
Margit Garajszki

*selected by*  
Dóra Péczely

*written by*  
Dóra Péczely

*graphic designer*  
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where you start from

doe s n t  
 where you  
 o s n c a  
 u b a

Danny Győri is 16 years old and lives alone with his mother. He is an average student in an average high school and a fan of the Barcelona football team. He plays guitar, and he is disabled, or as he puts it, a crip. After a school incident gone wrong and a massive argument at home, he has a crazy idea: he steals his mother's credit card, buys a plane ticket, and on Friday morning, he leaves for Munich

## *At Large*

instead of going to school. The main purpose of his trip is to meet his father, whose identity his mother has kept a secret, and who has contacted him via social media. Though they have corresponded, there is one thing that Danny has not revealed about himself: his disability. When he realizes what he has done, he decides not to go to the place where he and his father agreed to meet. Instead, he flees, and thus begin his adventures: in Paris, Amsterdam, and Barcelona, on a university campus, and a highway pull-off, in a Bavarian castle and a monastery.

His journey is shaped by a series of coincidences. For instance, when he plays his guitar in a park, a wealthy Bavarian family hires and pays him well to entertain them with his music during dinner. In France, a family with young children takes him into their home. But alas, his precious guitar is stolen on a train, and this proves to be a double loss. The guitar and his ability to play music are to Danny what the invisibility cloak is to Harry Potter: they open up a new dimension in his life. From the moment he starts plucking the strings, Danny Győri is no longer a kid in a wheelchair, he is a hip musician.

*On the Loose* is an utterly twenty-first-century school story.

This story could well have focused on how a boy in a wheelchair copes with everyday life, but Ágnes Mészöly chose a different path. At the airport in Munich, the school story turns into a road novel, in which the experience of the journey is every bit as important as the destination. *On the Loose* is at once a picaresque novel, a travelogue, and a Bildungsroman, and its hero is a true border-crosser in both the literal and figurative sense of the term.

*On the Loose* is one of the gems of Hungarian young adult literature, and its story will be engaging for young people the world over.

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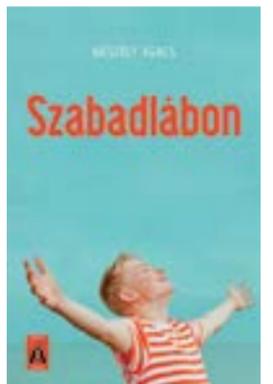
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rights@orchardglobal.eu





In the meantime, Danny had reached the dimly lit corridor. He lifted his hand from the wall he had been leaning against and grabbed one of the walking sticks he had been holding in his other hand. He took a few steps forward and reached Lilly, who was kicking a bit of crumbling plaster.

“You nervous?”

Danny didn’t say anything. He carefully leaned his walking sticks against the wall and started taking the guitar case off his back.

“No, not really,” he replied after a moment, but his voice was tense. He kept talking, possibly to convince himself.

“Sam said the rest of the contestants suck. I know all the Tube Rats’ songs, all eight. And like a hundred and fifty other tunes, give or take. The audition’s just a formality, right? Flox has some pal who might...”

“I’m going to kill those idiots if they don’t pick you. Starting with my brother. It was his idea for me to persuade you to try out, and now I feel like I dragged you into it...”

“Yup, you did. I sure as hell wouldn’t have tried out on my own,” Danny sighed, and he leaned against what had once been the clean, whitewashed wall.

“Doesn’t matter,” Lilly said, finally looking up at him, “you know you’re better than the rest of them. For one thing, you can actually play music, unlike them. Don’t worry, you’ve got it in the bag.”

“Right, as long as they don’t mind a guitarist who plays his solos sitting down,” Danny muttered. “But look, the last thing I want is for you to feel like shit if I screw this up. Or no wait, never mind. Yeah, you should feel like shit if I screw up. I almost forgot that this whole thing was your idea.”

“Right, because you just had to play the opening music by ear after hearing it once,” Lilly said in her own defense.

Danny grinned and leaned against the wall. Lilly had indeed been quite surprised, one afternoon a few months earlier, when he had

played the theme song to her favorite series. The whole thing had been a funny stroke of chance. They hadn’t even been friends at the time. Danny had been out of school for a week with some nasty bug, and their homeroom teacher, Mrs. Dóra Endrődi Zenta, or DEZ, as the students called her, had asked Lilly to drop in on him because she needed some paper signed for the school, and Dóra lived just a few stops down from Danny’s place. Dóra hadn’t exactly been thrilled about the whole thing. First of all, it was a little awkward to have to pay a visit on the wheelchair kid. Not like anybody actually made fun of him, but apart from Milan, the kid who sat next to him in homeroom, no one really talked to him much either. But second of all, the first episode of the new season of her favorite series was on that afternoon. Which ultimately she had ended up watching at Danny’s place, since she never would have made it home in time, or at least she would have had to start watching it twenty minutes later. Which would have been the real tragedy. And when

the episode ended, she asked Danny if he had liked it. He hadn’t dared admit that he hadn’t understood a word of the whole thing.

“It was pretty good,” he had said, not entirely convincingly. “Especially the music.”

And then he had grabbed his guitar and played the opening theme. He had just whistled the melody, since he sure as hell hadn’t been able to remember the Japanese words, but the chords weren’t complicated, G major, D major, E minor, and C major. With those chords, you could play half the history of pop music. Lilly didn’t know anything about chords, but she was blown away by his performance. And he was blown away by the fact that someone was listening to him play. So he ended up playing guitar for her for another hour and a half. And when Monday came and he was back in the classroom, everybody had already heard about how the wheelchair kid can totally tear it up on the guitar and that he has a real black acoustic fender that you can hook up to an amp. And suddenly the empty space around his wheelchair wasn’t so empty anymore.

A few weeks later, Ábel had snapped at him when he had rolled over his gym bag.

“Careful crip!” he said. “My fucking lunch is in there!”

The air in the room froze for a moment. Everyone was waiting to see how Danny would react.

“Sorry,” he said. “I was going in reverse, and I don’t have eyes in the back of my head.”

And that was that.

“Look,” Lilly was explaining to him, “I can’t just stand by and watch my brother’s band get another loser guitarist who can barely play a note. So don’t screw this up, ok?”

“Deal,” Danny replied. “And I’m not planning on screwing up, I just don’t want to get too excited about the whole thing, because I might fall flat on my face. Though that, at least, comes easy to me.”

He closed his eyes and tried not to think too much about what was waiting for him in the next few hours.

“Not like it’s a big deal anyway,” he told himself. “That Irish pirate punk stuff isn’t exactly my style. Though the guys can play, and they sometimes even perform live. Which would be pretty cool, I admit. But no big deal if they don’t want me. At least I gave it a shot.”

And it was true, he really didn’t have much to lose. His classmates had thought it was pretty damn cool that his name had even come up when they had learned that the senior class band was looking for a guitarist. So much so that they had had to be persuaded not to show up, in person, at the audition, the whole class, including DEZ.



a LITTLE  
**TEAMWORK**  
 a LOT of  
**DREAM WORK**

Laura Leiner is the perhaps most widely read Hungarian young adult novelist, and she has managed to surprise her readers again and again. Her eight-volume *Joan of Arc High School* series has been a favorite among young adult readers for more than a decade, withstanding the test of time. The secret of the series lies not only in the story, which is set in the halls of a high school, but also in the

## *Trust Me*

well-constructed characters and the entertaining humor. *Trust Me* is the first in the *National Schools Competition 2* trilogy, which holds its own as a standalone volume too, although it is hard to resist devouring the other two volumes, since the story is a bit like *Hunger Games*: fought in a realistic setting by real-life young people for goals of human dimensions.

A year has passed since the last National Schools Competition. After Szirtes High School's victory last year, the students have signed up for this year's competition. This time, the headmaster decides not to select the top performers in academic competitions. 17-year-old Sára Major is a talented dancer, but after a party gone wrong, she was kicked off her team and was ostracized at her school. She is therefore a bit surprised when Principal Kocsis gives her a chance and selects her for the team to compete along with three of her peers. The announcement of the four names causes surprise and even outrage among the students, but the principal trusts his instincts and his team, and despite all the negative reactions, he entrusts Sára Major, Vivien Felcser, Rajmund Fehér, and Dominik Pap with the task of representing the school at the competition. Their accompanying teacher, Mr. Tahí, who teaches physics, treats the competitors with uncompromising rigor, but in time, he is forced to realize that there is more to these students than he had expected. He also has to deal with the hostile atmosphere at the site of the competition, where the other competitors draw no distinction between being the defending team or the defending school. The team members have to show the home crowd and also themselves what they are made of. They need to make sure that no matter how they were labeled in the past, they have a fresh start in life at the end of the competition.

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After breakfast, the teams began to gather in front of the gate at 9.30. They were impatiently waiting for the race to start, as they were eager to know what the next challenge would be. We didn't really have much else to do, so after we'd eaten, we strolled down to the gate and sat down at one of the free tables. Then, from behind the lenses of our sunglasses, we watched the fluffy clouds drifting across the blue sky.

"What time is it?" I asked Viki, who checked her phone.

"Quarter till," she replied. I nodded, but then suddenly I remembered something, and I quickly pushed my sunglasses to the top of my head and looked towards the main building.

"What gives, Major?" Rajmund asked. He was the first person to realize that I had noticed something odd.

"That's strange," I said. "Where's Mr. Tahi? He isn't going to see us off like he usually does?"

"That is strange," Dominik said. "And hey," he continued, looking around, "where are the teachers who accompany the teams?"

At that, Vivi and Rajmund also started casting glances left and right, and they immediately realized that something was wrong. The other teams clearly had not yet noticed anything out of the ordinary. They were too preoccupied with what the two organizers were doing down by the gate.

"None of the teachers is here," Vivi said.

"When did you last see Mr. Tahi?" I asked.

"He checked on us once in the night, sometime around 12:30," Dominik said.

"So he was here in the night, just isn't here now," Vivi said.

"That doesn't bode well," I said. I was getting more and more nervous.

The kids from the beige team were ambling over to our table.

"You all ready?" Andi asked. She yanked a brown hairband from her wrist and tried to put her hair up, her thick, freshly washed, freshly dried hair.

"Has your teacher not showed up yet either?" Vivi asked without bothering to answer.

Andi and the other beige team members suddenly started looking around wide-eyed and then staring, bewildered, at one another.

"Damn, they're not here," Zétény finally said with a chuckle. "But you know what the weird thing is? We didn't even notice! Poor old Erika!" He heaved an amused sigh. "Where could she be?"

"No idea," I replied, "but we haven't seen any of the teachers."

"You think maybe they can't get out of their rooms?" Laci asked.

"Or maybe they're not even here at the camp," Rajmund suggested.

"And your version even makes sense," Laci said, raising his index finger and nodding, at which we all burst out laughing.

"Now I have no idea what's going to happen," Andi said, wringing her hands where she stood among her male teammates. Then, squinting, she cast a glance at the gate in the distance.

"They're starting," she said, and we all turned and looked.

And indeed, accompanied by a few organizers, Róbert had arrived at the area in front of the entrance where the competitors were gathered. Upon their arrival, the kids who had been lying in the grass and staring

at their phones climbed to their feet, and those who had been sitting at the tables got up, as they knew that we would soon start.

Together with the four other organizers, Róbert walked past the teams without saying a word and went up to the gate. I took my phone out of my pocket and checked the time. 9:58. Something was off. Only two minutes to go and still no word on the actual challenge. Or on anything. And the clock on the display now read 9:59.

"Alright, something's not right here," I said, shaking my head, and by this time, most of the competitors were standing and staring, a look of incomprehension in their eyes, at the main organizer and the other people garbed in orange vests in the hopes that one of them might speak up and explain what was going on.

But not a one of them said a thing. For when the clock struck 10:00, without uttering a word, Róbert threw open the gate and... nothing. Nothing.

"Alright, so now what?" Vivi asked, nervously chewing her bubblegum, and members of the teams standing at the front started besieging the main organizer with questions.

"What's going on?"

"What are we supposed to do?"

"Should we go out?"

"Where do we go for the first challenge?"

"What is the first challenge?"

"No one has any idea what's going on!"

"A little help, please!"

They bombarded the main organizer with these questions and others, but he just stepped back from the open gate, rubbed his palms together to shake the dirt loose from them, and turned around with an encouraging look on his face.

"Good luck everybody!" he shouted with a smile. "The last team to finish is eliminated from the competition."

Then he started ambling back towards the cafeteria.

"What the..." everyone started to mutter, and we stared at the main organizer with a look of bewilderment in our eyes, but he didn't say another word. He just continued on his way with an air of haughty complacency.

"Should we go outside, past the gate?" one of the boys in light green sweats shouted.

"No way," a girl in a pink jersey replied. "They'll lock us out. It's in the camp rulebook."

"Not exactly," one of the kids in light blue said. "The camp rulebook says they'll lock the gate if we go out on our own."

"And wouldn't we be going out on our own now?" somebody shouted. "How can you tell the difference?"

"It's a trick," a bunch of kids shouted at once. "Anyone who leaves gets locked out."



THE WORLD IS AS DIVINE

*as we choose to make it*

Norbi Szepes, the protagonist of the tale, was expelled in the last year of year of high school and forced to switch schools. Alas, he is at times a frustratingly irritating young man. He is not welcomed by the kids in his new class, for his bad reputation has followed him, and his tattoos of allegedly ancient Hungarian runic signs and his fascination with pagan belief systems don't help. He is clever and looks like a Norse god, and he even stands up for the helpless and the

## *The Wanderer*

defenseless, but he just can't keep his opinions to himself, and he rebels against everything, from homework to Sunday lunch with his parents. But when he does believe in something, like the Norse gods, he takes it all too seriously. If he had his way, he wouldn't go to school on Tuesdays. Instead, he would worship the god Tyr ("Say 'Tyr's day' in English very quickly! Tyr's day, Tyr's day...!"), and he would drink plenty of beer to honor the ancient deity. At the same time, Norbi Szepes knows his own mind. He's clever, he works hard on weekends, and he knows when he has made a mistake. His character is complicated and full of contradictions. He is different, but not in a way that can be easily pinned down, and not in a way that everyone can understand. One can be different in all kinds of different ways, after all.

Several of Norbi's classmates are very much against the new kid, in part because they are insecure about their own talents and their identities. One of them, however, a girl named Míra, is curious to learn a little more about this Norbi, because she can't seem to put him into any category. And what could be a stronger foundation for budding love than sincere curiosity about another person? Unlike the other kids in the class, Norbi seems to have a faith from which he draws strength. He takes the traditions of his faith seriously, and he regards his beliefs as the basis of a happy life. For him, the religion known as neopaganism, a belief in the Scandinavian gods, means being close to nature and respecting the body and other people. However, the fact that he is surrounded by a dark mystery does not make his life easy, nor does it make it easy for his peers to accept him.

Can Norbi grow? Can he learn how to find friends in those around him, and not just in Thor and the other pagan gods, without having to abandon who he is?

*The Wanderer* won the HUBBY Student Jury Award for "Best Young Adult Novel" in 2019.

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gabo@gabo.hu





There are moments in life when it really is impossible to hold back a triumphant smile.

Like when a girl chooses you over her girlfriends. That is precisely one such moment.

I had just taken out one earphone and there she was, standing right in front of me and holding onto the edge of the seat. She stared at me with her blue eyes.

“So how bad was the injury that you got kicked out for? Did it heal in eight days? Doesn’t seem likely if the injured party ended up in the hospital. And you had turned eighteen by then, but they still treated you as a minor? Did I hear right? Did you have to go before a judge?”

I thought my ears were playing tricks on me. I took out the other earphone. And then gradually I understood what she was saying and why she was looking at me so sternly.

“Yes, I had to go before a judge,” I replied.

“And?” she asked, raising her eyebrow.

I just returned her stare for a moment. My chest was feeling more and more empty.

“He took a few mitigating circumstances into account, and the psychiatrist’s evaluation. He and my father spoke about how I would have to do everything to ensure that I would mature in the right direction, since they were having me expelled.”

And then suddenly I had had enough of her haughty gaze.

“So your dad and the judge worked something out? All on the sly? Yeah, I bet they did. That’s why I want to be a lawyer! But nothing like that’s going to happen with me! I’m not going to let...”

“My dear Míra, if you want to work in the justice system, you should keep in mind that you won’t be working with objects that can be described in black and white. You’ll be working with people. And if you want to do that, you’d better grow a heart.”

She was so shocked by what I had said that she took a step or two backwards. She stared at me. The bus turned hard to one side, but she wasn’t holding on as tightly anymore, so I quickly pulled her towards me to keep her from falling on her face. And she let me. When we had straightened up again, I let her go, and she looked at me.

“I’m sorry.”

“Me too,” I said quietly.

“What happened to your face?”

I shrugged. “It was one of my friends.”

She lowered her gaze. I looked out the window. I watched as we passed my stop. Several minutes passed, but I didn’t say a word. Soon, we had reached the western edge of the city, the oak forest. Míra was standing in front of me, silent.

The bus hissed loudly at the rundown bus stop at the edge of the city, and at that moment, our gazes met. I looked at her feet. She wasn’t wearing boots. She would sink into the ground in the forest. Assuming she came with me.

The driver opened the back door to the bus, so I went around her to get off. A moment later, she was at my side again. The door closed, and the bus clamored on, puffing and grunting, but I wasn’t paying attention to it anymore. Míra tromped up the weedy walkway to the trailhead, pushed her way through the tall grass and wildflowers, and when she was some thirty meters from me, she stopped, turned back, and stretched out her arms. My chest filled with warmth again, and suddenly this warmth seemed to flow through me.

“Let’s stay on the path,” I said when I had caught up to her. “It’s a bit drier here.”

“Music from the Faroe Islands, the Norwegian language, and Viking mania. Help me put the picture together. I can see the main nodes, but otherwise the whole thing eludes me, and that’s irritating.”

I laughed.

“I can’t believe you confessed that I irritate you!”

“You irritate everyone in our class, Norbi. Nobody knows what to do with you.”

“But this is when you compliment me for the little card trick I did today.”

She smiled and looked at me.

“You’ve got a big enough ego as is, you stupid Viking.”

“So it’s my ego that’s big,” I said, grinning.

The sun had dried one side of the wet land, and we were able to stroll there in peace. At the edge of the forest, in the endless distance you could see the green autumn barley, which was just beginning to bud. A cool October breeze blew across the open fields. I was hoping that Míra wasn’t cold in her light jacket.

“The link is the culture of the northern peoples and paganism, but you know that.”

“But why the northern peoples,” she asked.

“If you’re such a big fan of barbarians, why not follow the religion of the ancient Hungarians?”

I nodded.

“Yeah, that’s pretty cool too. The shamans, the spirits, the strange animals, the tree that stretches to the sky. There are overlaps. Mikkó’s got the stories from the Kalevala, but he loves Odin too. And why not? When I was a little kid I fell in love with the stories about Thor, and...”

“Oh no!” Míra stopped in her tracks. “I knew it! The whole thing is just Marvel mania!”

I continued onward with a satisfied grin on my face. We were surrounded by a greenish-brown canopy of acacias, oaks, and lindens, with tiny beetles buzzing everywhere. There was a scent of earth and water and the rustle of birds fluttering their wings far and near.

“I liked their culture, so I read up on it.

A lot. A lot a lot. And after a while, I realized that there was something unusual up there in

northern Europe. I don’t know exactly what.

Something in their language, their history, their relationship to nature. Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland are somehow always up there among the happiest countries. So there you have it, dear Míra, a fact backed up with statistics and everything!”

“Really?”

“Really! Maybe they know the secret.

They’re happy.”

I looked at her.

“And do you think we are happy?”

She twisted her mouth in a bitter smile.

“Don’t make me laugh. We’re either winging and whining all the time or bickering with each other. Or maybe we’re just cursed, plain and simple.”

“And you think there’s nothing we can do about it?” I asked her quietly. “Maybe the solution is right in front of us, we just don’t want to see it because it’s easier to slip back into whatever”







We kept packing our bags without saying a word. We had started to enjoy it, but now our moods were starting to sour.

Mom was making spaghetti in the kitchen.

“Dinner’s ready, girls,” she shouted when it was done.

I helped Borka climb down from the bed. Poor thing was pretty clumsy with the big cast on her leg. I helped her get to the kitchen, where mom had already pulled out one of the chairs for her to put her leg on.

Mom immediately realized that something was wrong.

“What’s up, girls?” she asked. “Why are you suddenly so downcast? A minute ago, you were in perfectly high spirits!”

“The doorframe,” Bori muttered. “With the measuring tape on it that always showed how much we’d grown. We’ll have to leave it here.”

And suddenly we were in tears, all three of us. Mom wrapped her arms around us and caressed our backs. And then she had an idea.

“I’ll take care of it!” she said. “We’ll take it with us. We certainly won’t leave it here.”

She wiped the tears from her eyes and called the carpenter

“Feri, I’ve got a little work for you.”

She explained everything to Feri and then turned towards us.

“Don’t worry, girls! But where will we put it in the new house?”

“I say we nail it to the wall on the terrace next to the front door,” Bori said.

“Or let’s chop it up and use it as kindling,” I said, shooting them a dark glance, but then I laughed. “Just kidding! I think we should put

it by the door to Bori’s room. Just like it was here. At least we’ll have something that reminds us of the old room.”

Slowly, we all calmed down. I watched my mother, my strong, smart mother, for whom nothing was impossible, and I knew I loved her very much.

My sister’s room looked like a war zone, but we’d managed to pack up a fair amount of stuff. Mr. Roosevelt, the teddy bear, was perched atop the pile of boxes as if sitting on a throne. A spot had already been set aside for him in the new house. Borka would not have left him behind for all the money in the world.

In the end, dinner was downright cheerful. Mom said that we had made a lot of progress that day. The painting was done, and the new appliances had arrived. They had all been put in the living room, waiting to be put in place when the furniture arrived the next day.

“Only three days before we move, girls!”

I could tell that she was both happy and excited, and though I did not share her joy, I did not want to spoil her good mood. And I also saw a sparkle in Borka’s eyes. She was looking forward to moving into her new room and really making it hers. Seems I was the only one who would have preferred to stay...

One of the reasons I was happy to help Borka pack up her things was that then I didn’t have to deal with my own stuff. I didn’t really have any idea just how I was going to go about clearing out my room. It was just the last thing in the world I wanted to do, so I kept putting it off. All the way up to Sunday afternoon, at which point I couldn’t put it off any longer, because mom had said that anything that hadn’t been packed up by 6:00 AM was just going to have to stay put. This delightful proclamation gave me the initial impetus. I got super mad and started furiously throwing my stuff into the cardboard boxes. I tore my drawings and candlewax pictures from the walls, ripped them into tiny little pieces, and stuffed them into a big, gray trash bag. I worked quite methodically, and the storm in my soul raged ever louder as I destroyed anything and everything that might have bound me to this place. Every little memento from school, the little tackboard when I had kept my old movie and theater tickets, my clay sculptures, my report cards... everything in the trash. By the time I’d calmed down, I had filled four bags with the trappings of my life so far. All that was left on the shelves were my books and three photos: one of me and Ági having ice cream on Almásy Square, one of us running hand in hand with the Four on Wesselényi Street, and one of me and Borka sticking out our tongues while mom and dad made faces at us. This third picture had been saved at the last

moment from the trash. My hand had been hovering dangerously close to the sack when I had reconsidered and put the picture back on the shelf. I just didn’t have the heart to throw it away. Keep at least this one, I had thought. We were having so much fun in it.

I just sat on the floor, panting with frustration, and I couldn’t feel a thing. I was as empty as my room. I lay down on my back and stared at the ceiling even well after it had gotten dark. But I didn’t move. I didn’t turn on the light. I just lay there. Feeling like shit.

What an injustice. You’re a child, and your parents screw up, and then in the space of a single moment your life is turned upside down and there’s nothing you can do about it. Did anyone ask me or Bori what we want? Did anyone care about how much this was going to hurt us? No. Nobody. Because when this shit happens, all the adults are busy focusing on themselves. Making sure they survive it somehow. And that their lives are better somehow. Alright, mom’s trying real hard, but she can’t undo what’s been done. And dad, dad’s just strolling off perfectly happily to his new life with his new woman. He sure as hell doesn’t give a shit about how I feel. Or how Bori feels. “They’re still children. They’ll forget it all pretty quickly, and then they’ll adapt to the new situation.” That sentence drifted out from the living room one night when mom and dad were trying to get along a little better with each other. Sure. We adapt. But at what cost? I don’t want to be some miserable loser whose parents drag her to the psychologist’s office and who’s always struggling with some disorder. What can’t things just be the way they were? Why can’t I just keep living my life as it was? Why did dad have to screw everything up?

And that’s where I always wound up in the end. Dad. That he was to blame for all this. God, how I loathe him!

And in my anger and grief, I fell asleep.

I woke up because the floor was so damn uncomfortable that every inch of my body was aching. It was completely dark outside, so I got up and tromped to the kitchen, which mom had pretty much emptied, to see if I could hunt down something to eat in the fridge. I found some ham and some cheese and a little bit of bread from the day before. I munched on a few bites and went back to my room to continue packing. All I had left were my books, my notebooks, and my clothes. I packed it all up in just under two hours. Eight boxes and four bags of clothes total. That was it. That’s what one person comes to. A few boxes, a few bags, and some sacks full of trash. Eszter Temesi from 68 Wesselényi Street. The end. Tomorrow, another Eszter Temesi will be lying in another house, in another room, in another rotten life that was forced on her by a rotten world.

the  
**SECRETS**  
 of the **PAST**  
 and a  
**COMPASS**  
 for the **PRESENT**

What happens when time, history, and even the future of humankind end up in the hands of a few teenagers? Or, from their point of view, why has the task of saving the world fallen on their shoulders when they have enough trouble just grappling with the everyday work of school and dealing with their teachers, their classmates, and their parents?

*The Secret of the Compass*  
*Time Travelers series vol. 1*

As her father is often changing jobs, Hanna and her family move frequently, and at the beginning of this story, they have just moved from a small town to the big city of Budapest. Hanna finds herself cut off from her previous life. She has trouble communicating with her parents, and she can only stay in touch with her one friend virtually. In her first few days in the big city, she finds a rusted compass—the kind you use to draw circles in geometry class—which she takes home. She then repeatedly bumps into a strange old man. She soon finds new friends in her new home: the taciturn Tibi, who is “not known for his sharp wit” but who is as kind as kind can be; Szabika, the class clown; Ervin, the class geek; and Bulcsú, the boy who thinks he’s an alien. Of the adults, Sándor, a strange old man from the past, speaks as if he were living in the eighteenth century, and he knows the secrets of the compass.

The compass gives whoever wields it incredible power, and Sándor knows what will happen if it falls into the wrong hands. Evil forces long to acquire the compass. The old man tries to protect Hanna and the others, but he soon realizes that only together can they save the world.

*The Secret of the Compass* is a captivatingly written fantasy, an alternative historical novel, and a fast-paced tale of adventure. The different genres of the book brilliantly incorporate cultural and scientific knowledge into the text, and literature, history, music, and physics become an integral part of the story. The book deals with the questions faced by the individual and by society, as well as the problems of growing up, the challenges of knowing oneself, the complexities of love, parent-child and student-teacher relationships, and even our relationships to power.

The *Time Travelers* series has been called the *Harry Potter* of Hungarian youth literature. It has found eager audiences not only among young readers but also among adults thanks to the exciting plots, the engaging and often clever prose, the complexity of the characters, and the wonderful moments of humor.

author / illustrator  
 Dóra Gimesi  
 Viktória Jeli  
 István Tasnádi

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 Yvette Nánási  
 Orchard Literary Agency  
 rights@orchardglobal.eu



## 2. The Bleeding Monitor

Hey Sofe!

*I see you haven't replied to the email I wrote last night yet. Okay, so I did send it pretty late. But I just can't wait for you to reply! Anyway, I had to come into my new school today. I'm in I.T. class right now, and pretending I'm editing an Excel spreadsheet. Today in one word: somewhere between nearly horrendous and horrendous, but I'll start from the beginning. This morning, Mum came in with me so she could talk to the school principal, but we only got as far as the deputy. God, that woman is awful! Picture drooling Mrs. Gál with blonde hair in a butter-coloured little suit, and multiply by three. This one is your original smiling serial killer, and she's got the eyes of a snake. Oh yeah, and she's called Mrs. Bujdosó*

In her stiletto heels, the deputy principal was more than a head taller than Mum. Hanna felt that if they had to spend another minute talking to her, their necks would never be the same again.

"Thanks again, Mrs. Bujdosó. We're enormously grateful to you for taking in Hanna," said Mum.



Mrs. Bujdosó made a sour face.

"Don't thank me, thank the principal. I myself am a believer in the entrance exam, and I don't hold with exceptions being made like this half-way through the school year, not one little bit. But the child's academic results *are* satisfactory, I suppose."

Mrs. Bujdosó looked down at her visitors with distaste.

"And who am I to override a decision made by the principal, after all?" "Please give the principal my regards," said Mum with a smile.

Hanna was glad people in Budapest weren't yet familiar with this tone of her mother's. She herself couldn't help but grin at it though.

"I shall certainly do that," said Mrs. Bujdosó tonelessly, and pressing her thin lips together, she looked Hanna up and down. Hanna sobered up instantly.

"The child will now come with me. I'll show her where her new class is."

Walking down the tiled corridor beside Mrs. Bujdosó, Hanna felt like she had stumbled into a period drama set in World War Two and dubbed into Hungarian. Every tap of the deputy principal's stiletto heels was the equivalent of a shot to the chest.

"How can it be that even her shoes are so crazily strict?" wondered Hanna.

The machine-gun fire suddenly stopped. Mrs. Bujdosó had come to a halt in front of a door, but was blocking Hanna's way in.

"Now then. Before you go through that door to your class, I would like to make a couple of things clear. This here is the Jakab Sigray Grammar School, not a primary school in Makó."

"Szeged," Hanna said, hastily correcting her.

"I beg your pardon?" Mrs. Bujdosó raised her eyebrows. She looked as if she had never heard such cheek in all her born days.

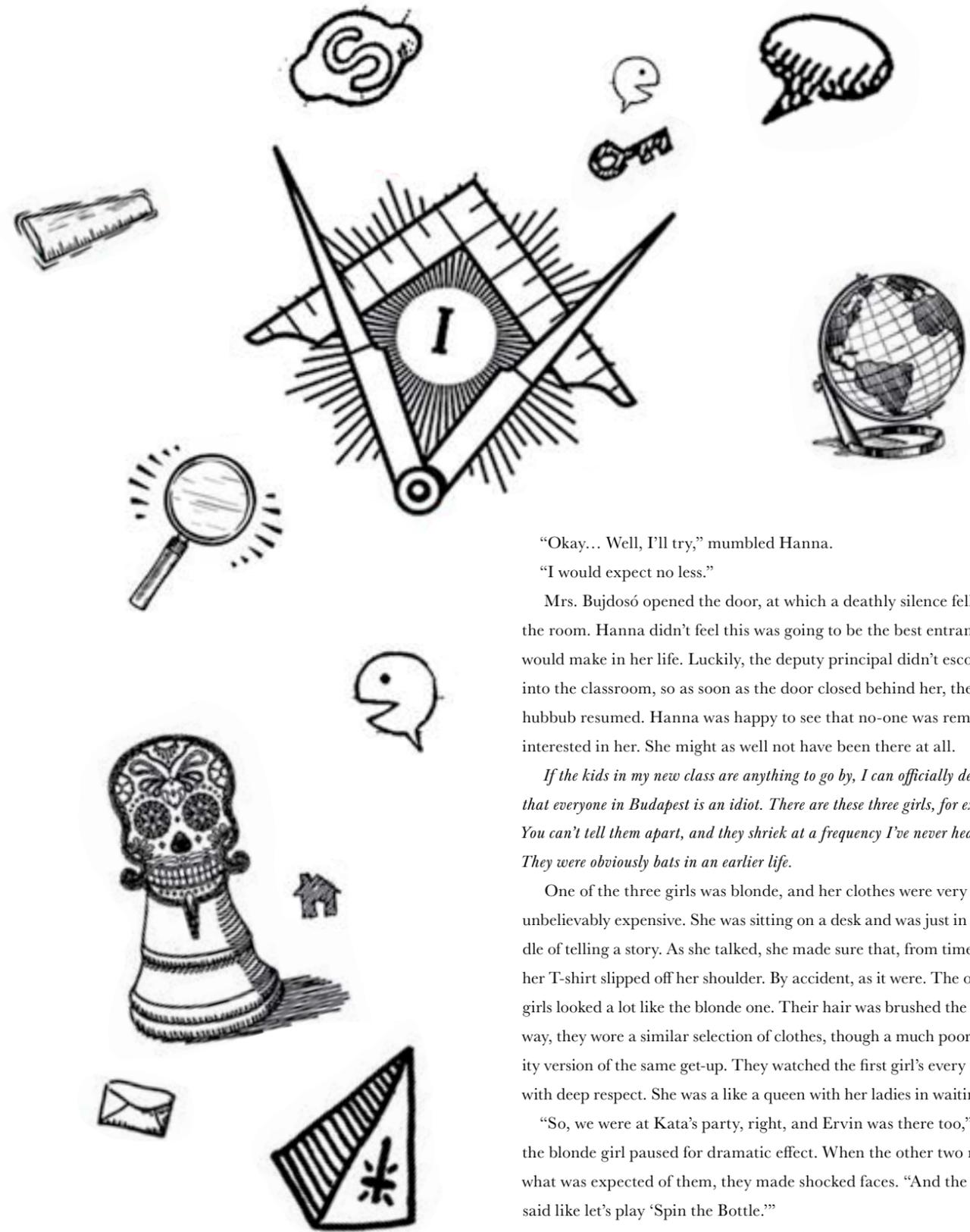
"We came from Szeged, not Makó. And I wasn't going to a primary school there. I was at the Gyula Juhász School, one of the city's best..."

The deputy principal stopped the new girl with a single raised finger.

"That's immaterial. This is an institution with a great past. Year after year, our students achieve outstanding results in a range of academic competitions, our student theatre performs at prestigious festivals and our school newspaper is best in the country. Many of our old students have gone on to become famous actors or politicians."

Hanna suddenly wondered why the school had condescended to give her a place at all. She looked down at her shoes while Mrs. Bujdosó continued to hold forth.

"So, we expect you to set your sights high, study hard and behave well. And do not forget even for a moment that if you don't come up to the mark, this school can expel you just as easily as it enrolled you."



"Okay... Well, I'll try," mumbled Hanna.

"I would expect no less."

Mrs. Bujdosó opened the door, at which a deathly silence fell on the room. Hanna didn't feel this was going to be the best entrance she would make in her life. Luckily, the deputy principal didn't escort her into the classroom, so as soon as the door closed behind her, the usual hubbub resumed. Hanna was happy to see that no-one was remotely interested in her. She might as well not have been there at all.

*If the kids in my new class are anything to go by, I can officially declare that everyone in Budapest is an idiot. There are these three girls, for example. You can't tell them apart, and they shriek at a frequency I've never heard before. They were obviously bats in an earlier life.*

One of the three girls was blonde, and her clothes were very clearly unbelievably expensive. She was sitting on a desk and was just in the middle of telling a story. As she talked, she made sure that, from time to time, her T-shirt slipped off her shoulder. By accident, as it were. The other two girls looked a lot like the blonde one. Their hair was brushed the same way, they wore a similar selection of clothes, though a much poorer quality version of the same get-up. They watched the first girl's every move with deep respect. She was a like a queen with her ladies in waiting.

"So, we were at Kata's party, right, and Ervin was there too," – here the blonde girl paused for dramatic effect. When the other two realised what was expected of them, they made shocked faces. "And the others said like let's play 'Spin the Bottle.'"

The ladies in waiting went wide-eyed.



BEING PRETTY  
**DIFFERENT**  
*ain't* ALWAYS PRETTY

Patrik Ráber is just an ordinary kid. Fourteen years old, with a perfectly normal family and a few (less than) normal friends. He has blond hair and blue eyes. The girls in high school hardly notice him. Or at least most of them don't.

But Patrik Ráber is different from the other kids. He wants to be an actor, and in his spare time, he learns poems. His family doesn't really understand him, and neither do his classmates.

## *Mass*

"Patrik Ráber is a moron." "Patrik Ráber is a loser." "The world don't need no Patrik Rábbers."

At least according to those who harass him.

Éva Kalapos' novel *Mass* is primarily a story about online and offline bullying in school and the consequences of bullying, but it's much more than that. It raises psychological and philosophical questions that affect everyone, directly or indirectly: what does it mean to be different from others? Why do some people enjoy intimidating others? Are people sometimes mean for no reason at all?

As Patrik Ráber slowly becomes aware of his own uniqueness, he comes to know himself better and better. But as the people around him begin to see how different he is, they start bullying him, and Patrik begins to lose his sense of who he is again. His thoughts, doubts, and sufferings keep the reader constantly searching for new perspectives from which to understand his plight.

Because of Patrick's passion for the stage, literature and, above all, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* are given a prominent place in the novel, and we gradually see how love, fear, and the desire for revenge are things a twenty-first-century high school student and Frankenstein's monster might well have in common.

In the novel, the web of relationships among the characters, both those who are kind and those who are less endearing, is constantly changing, as in real life. The language of the book, which is close to the language of teenagers, offers some counterpoint to the at times bleak events, as does the humor, and the witty turns of phrase in the monologues and dialogues give the narrative a brisk pace.

Although the story is fiction, the issues with which it grapples are very real, and at the end of the book, the reader will find a discussion of various misconceptions concerning bullying, as well as advice and tips for children, parents, and pedagogues and some information concerning the legislation on bullying, all of which was collected by the Foundation for a Responsible Society.

*author*  
Éva Kalapos

*title*  
Massza

*cover*  
Patricia Toth

*publisher*  
Menő Könyvek

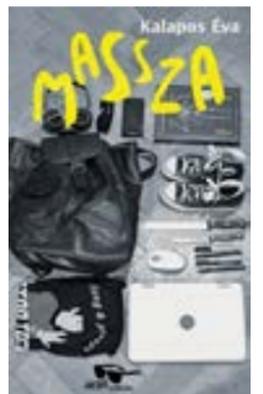
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*rights contact*  
Kinga Csapody  
rights.manokonyvek@lira.hu





doesn't have any siblings. So they can't really be the same just for that reason alone, but they also look completely different. Győző's a big guy, all muscle, and Subi is as skinny as a rail. But they're still best friends, and don't go telling me it's because of Warcraft. I like role-playing games too, but still, they never once thought of hanging out with me.

So what makes me so different? But for real! Klau had hit the nail on the head. All the way home from school I couldn't stop thinking about it. Since mom had a long shift that day (she works four days a week in a shoe store), I had to take the bus, and it only comes once every fifteen minutes, and of course it was just driving off when I got out of school. Bence had vanished as soon as they rang the bell—I figured he was still pretty mad—and Klau had gone off with her friends, so I was just leaning on the lamppost by the bus stop all on my own. I tried to recite the Bukowski poem to myself from the beginning, but Klau's stupid remark kept messing me up. Pretty different. Different. Because of how I look? Some of the kids in my previous school had called me a fag a few times, well before any of us had even known what that word was supposed to mean, but no one had said anything like that here. One thing's for sure, I definitely don't look anything like Győző or Bence, who are about as big as a wardrobe, have spiky-cut hair, and wear tight T-shirts, but I don't look anything like Subi either, who would look downright stupid in a tight T-shirt, so he wears a plain shirt, though he has short hair too. Is that it? That my hair is a little longer? I remembered what Margó had said about my "dramatic" face, and suddenly I was in a foul mood. Okay, well, my head really is pretty bad. I've got big eyes, like a girl, and they're blue too, and dark eyelashes, thick lips... I'm telling you, pure girl. Maybe I should cut my hair after all, make myself look tougher. Nobody knows about the poems, so that can't be it. It's just the way I look. Or is it something else, something I don't even notice?

The bus still hadn't come rolling around the bend in the road. The more I thought about it, the more nervous I got. So what if I am

different? Klau said it as if it were a sin. Or maybe that's just how I had heard it. One way or the other, I couldn't just stand there brooding over it and getting more and more nervous. I tugged the strap on my bag to tighten it and started walking. Sure, I knew I would only have to wait a few more minutes for the bus, and it would take me at least a half an hour to pick up my sister if I went on foot (when mom was at work, I had to pick her up). Sometimes you know perfectly well that there is no point in what you are doing, but you do it anyway.

Although you could say there was a point, because I ended up seeing the flier. It was stuck on a post opposite the school. I probably wouldn't have noticed it from the bus. It was pretty small, and I wouldn't have been able to read it from a distance. "Interested in acting? Are you an amateur, or have you already been on stage? Want to give it a try (again)? We look forward to seeing you!J" That was what was written on it. In pretty ugly handwriting. And a call for actors for a play. I didn't even look at the title, the letters suddenly blurred together in front of me. A play. A play!

Texts, a lot of texts, a play. The stage, the sets. Fuck.

I couldn't move. I just stood there. I remembered a time when I was a kid, on vacation with mom and dad in Croatia, Panka hadn't been born yet, and we had gotten all friendly with this other family. They had a daughter who was a little older than me, and the parents just assumed we'd hit it off, of course, two kids, so they kind of pushed us on each other so that they could knock back beers and munch on seafood at the stands. For a while, we didn't really know what to do, and then this girl, whose name I still don't remember (and my parents don't remember it either) took my coolest matchbox car and hid it because she thought it would be funny. Which it wasn't. First, I begged her to give it back, then I shouted, then I had no choice but to hit her, at which she burst into tears and told me that she'd hidden my stupid little car somewhere where I would never find it. I spent half the afternoon looking for the damn thing, it was a Chrysler

PT Cruiser, and I was the only kid in my class who had one, and in the end, I found it in this cave-like spot. What I felt at that moment was very much like what I was feeling now. That I had found something important, something that was all mine.

I tore a telephone number off the bottom of the flier and put it in my pocket. Strange way of advertising an audition. Why not just make it an event? I took out my phone, typed Dead Poets Society into Facebook search (wow, someone had been very creative), and their page immediately came up with a bunch of pics, contact info, and everything.

**Y**ou're pretty different.

I never really thought of myself like that. I didn't even know what it was that everyone else had in common that made me different. Is it possible that there's just a bunch of people who all sort of work the same, and compared to them you're considered unusual? I can't quite wrap my head around it.

I'm quite certain, for example, that Győző is not the same as Subi. Győző and his family live in a huge two-story house in the suburbs. I've only been there once, when his mom grilled a bunch of food for our class. He has two brothers, and his parents are still together. Subi lives with his mom in the center of the city, near Octagon. He

KIDS TODAY

*the* **ADULTS**

ALL SAY *but* THEY WERE

**KIDS**

*just* **YESTERDAY**

In 2017, the publishing house Tilos az Á Könyvek launched an anthology series of contemporary literature for teenagers. Editor Dóra Péczely's felt that young readers would be able to relate to contemporary literature more easily if they were exposed to texts with themes and language close to their everyday lives.

## *Hello*

The first two volumes in the series, *Heart Shovel* and *I Could Be Anyone*, were illustrated collections of poems, and they were hugely successful among young readers.

The anthology entitled *Hello* includes short stories by 25 contemporary Hungarian authors. Several of these authors have been publishing fiction for decades, though some had not even been born when others were already publishing their first works. Many of the authors in the anthology, including Ádám Bodor, György Dragomán, and Krisztina Tóth, have already had spectacular international careers. The anthology offers a selection of previously published short stories that were not originally intended to appeal specifically to adolescent readers.

The selection offers a rich sample of the variety of themes (love, family, faith, art, history, etc.) one finds in stories and the variety of ways in which these themes can be approached in narrative. The first thematic cycle is about love and eroticism. The second focuses on the family, especially the complex relationships between parents and siblings. The short stories in the third cycle show how the traditions of Christianity continue to influence literature today. The fourth cycle contains short stories about "art in art," while the last cycle presents historical and patriotic short stories in the broadest senses of the terms. Most of the narratives raise serious issues with which young people are often confronted, such as physical disabilities, dysfunctional families, rape, alcoholism, and the difficulties of life in rural areas.

The artwork and cover of *Hello*, created by illustrator Dániel Szinvai, give the anthology a visually arresting appearance and make it even more inviting for young readers.

*author*  
Dóra Péczely (editor)  
György Dragomán  
Krisztián Grecsó  
etc.

*illustrator*  
Szinvai Dániel

*title*  
Szevasz

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Yvette Nánási  
Orchard Literary Agency  
rights@orchardglobal.eu





Réka Mán-Várhegyi  
*So Long, Teenage Years! (excerpt)*

"Perfect weather for the lake this weekend," mom mewled. "Get your bathing suits out, we'll go to the lake. Pop, check the batteries in the cooler. Do they still work? Don't want to have to buy new ones. We don't have any money to waste."

Panni just stared at her plate, and I continued counting the stripes on the paneling that was rotting on the kitchen wall. We didn't bother saying that we didn't want to go, though we didn't, and they knew it. We had no desire whatsoever to lie in the sun in our bathing suits, soak our bodies in



the water, or watch people riding back and forth on jet skis all day. When summer came, they would race up and down the lake for two months, with girls and boys perched on them who looked like they belonged in porn films. They were just our classmates from school, but at least in school they didn't shriek and giggle all day.

I was born into a fat family with varicose veins, the younger of a pair of fraternal twins. By the time we were teenagers, Panni and I had grown into bulging potato sacks, basically our parents but one size smaller. As later became clear, our facial features were not terribly similar, but the extra fat covered the differences between us, much as it did in the case of our parents. When I was sixteen, though, it wasn't the extra pounds that bothered me the most, but rather the fact that I didn't have any distinguishing features, no birthmark or anything like that. After school, Panni and I would often go into the woods, sit at the base of a tree on our jackets, and between two cigarettes, we would scratch up our faces with thorns. She wanted a decent little cut or scar too. But the marks would heal within a half-day, like the hair-thin scratches left by a kitten. After I'd wiped the blood off, you couldn't see a thing, especially on my skin, which was brown, unlike Panni's pale hide.

The real test of our courage, we would say to each other, will come when we put out a cigarette by pressing the tip into our bare skin. That will leave a real battle scar, I would say. It'll be a seal, Panni said. I wanted to try it on my forearm. She wanted to use her face.

I had realized very clearly by then that we were living on a trash pile. I looked with the deepest disdain on the girl I had been a few months earlier, who had thought that this was a perfectly normal place with normal people and everything was just fine. I had finally started having thoughts about the world. And Panni too. For instance, that our parents had never really wanted children, they just hadn't realized that in time. If they had really had a choice, Panni asked, if someone had asked them which they would prefer, but to think it through carefully, a child or a potted plant, which do you think they would have chosen?

"The blue razor's in the lower drawer," mom continued her pronouncement while sucking on a chicken bone. "Girls, shave your legs and your underarms, and don't forget your bikini areas. Let's try to look decent."

"I'll shave my bikini area, if you want," Dad said with a grin, and they both started giggling as if someone had pressed a button somewhere on them. Their laughter had long been something pushy, even aggressive. They were trying to charm us into laughing with them. Isn't that funny, their glances asked. But by then we didn't give in. Panni just sat with her face stiff and motionless above her plate, and I stood up

with a dramatic abruptness, at least to the extent that the narrow space and my own portly frame allowed.

"I'm going to vomit," I said. Recently, I had taken started enjoying being tough, pretending that I was a character in a film, though I was squeezing my cumbersome body around against the backdrop of our kitchen with its tacky panels, and not any kind of lavish movie sets. In order for me to get out, Panni and mom had to stand up. I had to push the table up against dad a little, who was just sitting there staring at me as a troubled look gradually came to his face. He was a weak-willed man, a martyr type who heard voices in his head at moments like this. The voices were telling him that he had never treated his parents like this, that he had given us everything that we ever could have wanted, and that he couldn't fathom what he had done to deserve this.

There wasn't much space around the table, so it's not surprising that we could hear one another's thoughts. The apartments in our building had been designed to maximize the use of space. Even the smaller rooms were right next to each other, the bathroom right next to the kitchen, for instance. Our parents, with their concern for discretion, had put foam padding on the wall of the bathroom, but that was only enough to prevent you from hearing the toilet flush if you were in the most distant corner of the apartment. We all knew that when the family was eating, no one was allowed to go number two.

Though mom pretty much broke this adherence to discretion when, a minute or two later, she shouted from the kitchen.

"I don't hear anything!"

But I could clearly hear the ill-willed affectation in her voice even through the foam padding. I wanted to smack someone. I jammed my finger down my throat, taking care to ensure that when I vomited up my dinner, it would be plenty loud. It wasn't the first time I had done it. I stepped forth from the bathroom quite satisfied with myself. Mom looked at me with a glint of horror in her eyes, and that gave me a feeling of triumph, like a warrior who had been victorious in battle. I knew that it pained her to see the food she had paid good money for going down the toilet.

"Seriously, there's something wrong with you," she said with a sigh.

My sister replied on my behalf.

"If there's something wrong with her, then there's definitely something wrong with me."

"Ok, then there's something wrong with you too."

Mom usually looked on us with a suspicious gaze. She may well have wondered whether we perhaps had started conspiring against her while still in the womb.



# Life

## in a WORLD

GONE



## Drought

What happens if one day the water in the tap stops running, although the pipe has not burst? Tamás Rojik's 2020 novel *Drought* borrows from the tradition of the dystopic narrative while also incorporating aspects of climate catastrophe fiction and adding new elements to the genre.

His novel is not set in the distant future, but only in 2052, when people who are teenagers today have grown to become the adult members of

society. It depicts a brave new world which has emerged not in the aftermath of a world war, but rather as a consequence of climate change.

The protagonist of the novel, 16-year-old Danny, is in some ways an anti-hero, a boy who is introverted in no small part because of his mild autism and who can only communicate in simple utterances, one word at a time. His single passion is drawing comic strips with his classmate Anikó, who plays an increasingly important role in his life. Danny makes up the stories and draws the outlines, while Anikó brings the pictures to life with color. They are both from privileged backgrounds: they attend a high school in Budapest which is dedicated to environmental protection, and they have all the best gadgets of their time. One of the advantages they enjoy is that in their home and in Anikó's dormitory, water consumption, though not unlimited, is not strictly restricted.

In a broader context, their country is a member of the European Environmental Union, which creates a world characterized by rules, restrictions, and uniformity. The illusion of the security of life can only be maintained through strong centralization, which is reflected in the introductions at the beginning of each chapter, written in the style of different text types. In their fictitious world of images, the two teenagers create an alternative reality which, for a while, protects them from an increasingly harsh reality. This is why they perceive the change around them as so powerful, the change that shatters the protective shell in which they have lived and confronts them with situations characteristic of the genre: the compulsion to flee, to search and investigate, and to resolve conflicts which have arisen as the lies told by those in power have come to light. And as global social and environmental problems shape their lives, the two young people's unconventional love takes new twists and turns.

*Betrayal*, a sequel to *Drought*, was published in 2021.

*author*  
Tamás Rojik

*title*  
Szárzóság

*cover*  
Gabriella Kelényi

*publisher*  
Tilos az Á könyvek

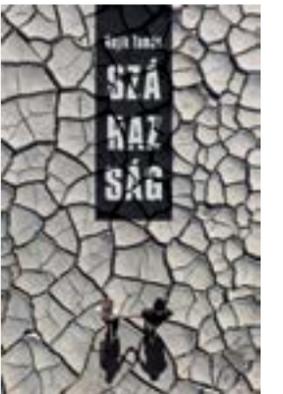
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Yvette Nánási  
Orchard Literary Agency  
rights@orchardglobal.eu





"My dad told me about how when he was a kid there were still spiders and bugs, and people were either afraid of them or disgusted by them. I'm not surprised, based on the pictures. Unfortunately, when they did the big extermination, all the bees died too."

"Yeah, we learned all about it in school."

"I know, but it's still sad. I drew a picture of a swallow once for my mom, like the ones she saw when she was a kid, and she burst out crying."

"Tears of joy?"

"I don't know. Maybe. She was definitely crying tears of joy that time dad got her a jar of real honey for her name day. Not that fake stuff they sell in the store. I still don't know where he got it. Maybe from somewhere in Asia. It must have cost a fortune."

"At least there are no viruses."

"Yeah, I know it's a good thing that they exterminated all the ticks and mosquitoes when they started spreading tropical viruses."

They fell silent. Danny let Anika focus on her drawing. He leaned back in his chair. He was exhausted from all the drawing and all the talk. When they had finished, he went down to get his father, who was sitting in the kitchen in front of his workstation, typing intently.

"We're done," he said. "She wants to go home."

"Alright, we can leave in a sec," his father replied, turning off the workstation. Though there was room for five in the car, Danny never went with them. Anika didn't mind. It was always Danny's father who made some remark.

"So I suppose you'll shut yourself up in your room?" he asked with a slightly more scornful tone than usual.

"I don't like goodbyes," Danny replied testily, and he immediately regretted it. He cast a hasty glance at the stairs. He was hoping Anika was still getting her things together, but she was already standing behind him, blushing and keeping her gaze fixed on the floor.

"No worries," she said. "See you tomorrow."

She went to the hall to get her coat, and they each gave a feeble wave as she stepped out the door.

The dormitory wasn't far away by car. Forty minutes later, Danny's father was already back. Danny could hear him as he tromped up the stairs. Danny's dad knew his son didn't like to be bothered in the evenings, but he wanted to speak to him.

"Can I come in?" he asked after knocking gently on the door.

"If you insist," Danny replied. His father opened the door.

"You could drive your girlfriend home yourself, you know?"

"She's not my girlfriend, she's just a friend."

"Alright, you could drive your friend home. You turned sixteen a long time ago. You could take the self-driver."

"Haven't done the exam."

"You could pass the exam after a few weeks of prep. It doesn't take much. You just have to do the driver's ed classes, then one day for the exam, you could practice the emergency shutdown here at home, mom and I will give you a hand. You'd pass that too, then you just have to do the first-aid training and you could take Anika home."

"Not interested."

"Right, but I don't want to spend the rest of my life ferrying your girlfriends or, sorry, friends back and forth. When I was a kid, it took a year to get your driver's license, sometimes longer."

Danny's father was himself shocked by what he had said. The words had just slipped out. He had sworn he would never talk about his childhood.

"I'll start next week," Danny muttered with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Alright, find a school, we'll pay for it."

Danny's father was, frankly, surprised. As it was clear that the conversation had come to an end, he stepped back into the hallway and quietly closed the door.

Danny flung himself onto the bed, exhausted. He could smell Anika's scent on the blanket. Before, he probably would have swapped it for another one, but for a while now he hadn't really minded feeling as if she were still close to him. Actually, he liked it. But he didn't like having to face grown-up stuff. He'd always feared that, sooner or later, he'd have to confront all the grown-up stuff, but rather than deal with it now, he fled back into the comic book panels. They had managed to fill a whole notebook's worth of paper, and he noted with a sense of accomplishment that what they had created would definitely hold its own against the stuff he liked to read.

He turned off the workstation and hastily put on his pajamas. He wanted to get to bed sooner than his parents so that they wouldn't nag him about how late it was and how early he had to get up in the morning. Getting up early had never been a problem for him, and it annoyed him that they were always pestering him about something that was hard for them but not for him. He turned off the beside lamp, so now there was no light coming from under the door to his room. He could relax, knowing that no one would bother him until morning, not even to say goodnight.



PAST  
 was the  
 once upon a time there

Nominated for the Children's Book of the Year Award, *Once Upon a House* is the debut novel for young children by author Orsolya Ruff. "I wanted to write about a house, a house with stories. I wanted to create a portrait of a little girl who is in the middle of a grieving process, and

## *Once Upon a House*

who discovers the secrets of the house and the layers of the past." Just like the house, which is the central motif of the book, the novel itself is full of secrets and symbols to be deciphered.

When twelve-year-old Emma moves into her grandmother's childhood home with her father and her two siblings, she immediately develops an attachment to every nook and cranny. Charmed by its mystery, she is determined to uncover the secrets of the house, which has become a bit dilapidated over the decades, and unravel the mysteries of her family's past. She must cross paths with obnoxious aunts, one-eyed gardeners, and know-it-all boys, and ultimately, she must confront the disquieting fact that she does not know who she can trust. In her quest, Emma is given help by the boy next door, Sy, and Uncle Vince the Pirate, who she slowly discovers is not at all unkind.

The book is as much about the day-to-day hardships of life as it is about the problems of fitting in and financial difficulties, but grief over the death of Emma's mother also permeates the tale. The differences and similarities between generations are illustrated with evocative humor and heartfelt dialogue. The horrors of the Second World War, especially the impact of the Holocaust on families, children, parents, and grandparents, and thus the development of transgenerational trauma, play a significant role in the story. As past and present constantly collide in the novel, Emma sheds light on her family's history, and as she reads letters, documents, and diaries found in the house, she gets to know the era when millions of people were persecuted, stigmatized, and murdered because of their ancestry and their religion.

With its twists and turns, its suspense and unpredictability, and its emotional appeal to the reader, the story is sure to be a hit among young audiences.

*author*  
Orsolya Ruff

*illustrator*  
Anna Láng

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csapody.kinga@lira.hu





(A diary, written in a little girl's handwriting.)

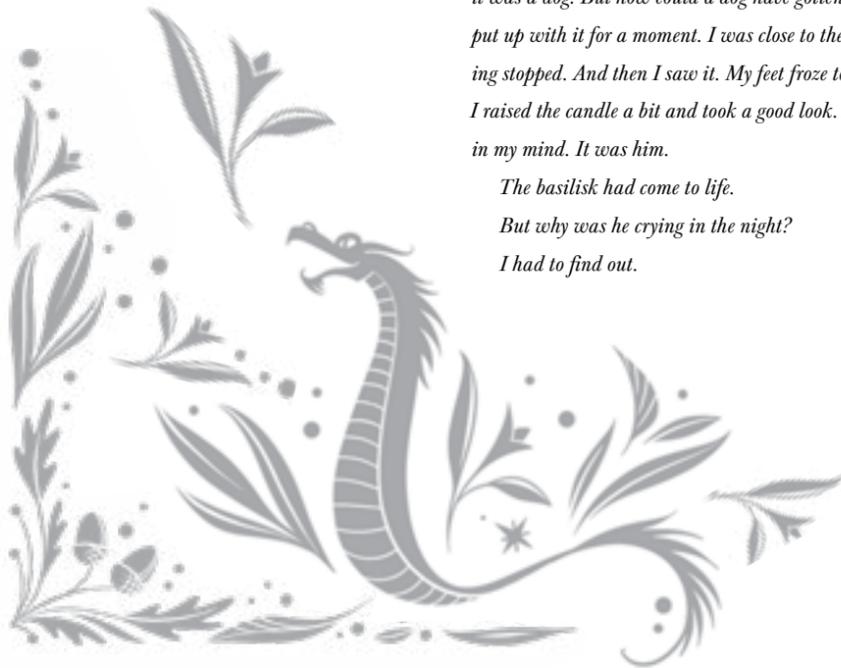


I heard it again last night. When the planes were roaring overhead. Dad says it's safe where we are, there's no reason to fear, no bombs will fall here, we're far from the center. I want to believe him. There's a war going on, but otherwise everything's the same as usual. I'm going to school, every morning I suffer through algebra, and every afternoon I try to give mom a hand. Máli says war is cool. He saw a film in which the handsome hero signed up to become a soldier, and his true love waited for him. There was a lot of other stuff too, but everything turned out ok in the end and everybody lived happily ever after. That's what Máli says war is like. I think Máli's a moron who has no idea what he's talking about. I'm afraid, very afraid. I wake up over and over again in the night. That's how I heard it again. At first, I thought it was just Whiskers whimpering, but then I realized that she's usually off hunting mice in the night, and she never stays inside. I lay in bed listening for a long time, but after a while, I couldn't take it any longer. I grabbed my robe and took a few cautious steps into the hallway without putting on my slippers. (Mom would give me hell if she knew I had gone out without putting on my slippers! But it wasn't my fault. Whiskers had made off with one of them, and I'm not going to go sneaking around in the hallway wearing one slipper in the middle of the night.) Fortunately, I found a candle in my drawer and some matches. I lit the candle and took several quiet steps out into the hallway. It was very cold, so I quickened my pace. The candle was casting ghostly shadows on the wall. But I could no longer go back. I followed the sound of the whimpering. It wasn't loud. It resembled the mewling of a small child or an orphaned pup or cub. Perhaps it was a dog. But how could a dog have gotten into the house? Mom wouldn't have put up with it for a moment. I was close to the stairs when suddenly the whimpering stopped. And then I saw it. My feet froze to the ground. Was this possible? I raised the candle a bit and took a good look. And suddenly there was no doubt in my mind. It was him.

*The basilisk had come to life.*

*But why was he crying in the night?*

*I had to find out.*



That confounded sign again!

**N**

First on the fence, then at the bus stop, and now on the trunk of the walnut tree. Emma ran her finger over it. Her fingertip brushed against the sharp edge of the sideways letter N. Someone must have cut it into the tree with a knife. But who? And how had he gotten into the garden without anyone noticing?

Was it the Pirate?

Emma turned back, and she immediately caught a glance of the old man leaning to one side in the bushes. Old Vince saw her too, and he gave her a polite tip of his hat, but Emma quickly looked away. She had no desire to make friends with the Pirate, though she had to concede that the old man loved plants far too much ever to harm them deliberately.

She leaned against the tree, lost in thought. But a moment later, she almost jumped out of her skin. A sharp object had struck her head.

"Ow!" she said, rubbing her head. She looked at the grass at her feet.

There, among the leaves and the clumps of dried grass, lay a pen. A brand-new red pen. It still had the price tag on it.

Emma turned around quickly and looked among the tangled branches. From behind the thick trunk of the tree, a grinning face was looking back at her. The boy to whom this face belonged was sitting proudly on the barren branches at the crown of the tree, like a satisfied bird that had grown into a giant. He had brown hair, and his skin was covered with freckles. The most striking thing about him, however, was his enormous pair of glasses: round and shimmering, as if someone had stuck the lens from a magnifying glass on his nose. Two lenses. The gigantic spectacles almost covered his face.

Emma gazed on this stranger with a look of astonishment in her eyes. The boy, however, seemed unperturbed. He hopped down to the ground, rubbed his palms against his pants a few times, and then extended his hand.

"Hello, neighbor. I'm glad I finally have a chance to meet you!"

Emma ignored his dirty extended hand and pointed at the sign that had been carved into the flesh of the tree.

"Is this your work?"

The boy smiled and nodded.

"It's my calling card. I know, I know, it's daft. A bad habit. I assure you, I am doing my utmost to quit."

Emma shot the boy a puzzled glance. Why was he talking as if he had stepped out of some history book from the nineteenth century?

She'd never heard anyone talk like that before, and she certainly didn't know anyone with a calling card.

She began kicking a clump of dry grass as these unsettling thoughts raced through her head.

"And what is that sign supposed to be anyway? A rubbish bin someone kicked over?"

The boy looked at her wide-eyed with astonishment and then burst out laughing.

"Oh no! Not at all! It's just what it appears to be. My name, Sy Dwaysen."

Emma paused for a moment to ponder this, and suddenly she realized that she was very impressed by the kid's inventiveness. The boys in her school talked about nothing but soccer and video games, and not one of them would have bothered trying to use his name to come up with a clever riddle. And she was also quite certain that none of them had calling cards.

"My name is Emma," she said, finally extending her hand. "We recently moved..."

"I know," he said, interrupting her.

"And what else do you know?" Emma asked, folding her arms sternly but hardly able to suppress a smile.

"I know that you have two younger siblings, a boy and a girl, and they're very loud, and I know your father spends all day sending workers all over the place. I know that you have a grandmother who cooks delectable meals. Sometimes I can even smell the scents of your meals in my room. And then there's your grandfather, of course, who works dawn till dusk in the garden."



REALMS SOAKED  
**BLOOD**  
*in the*  
*of*  
**VENGEANCE**

In the valley of the Ladann River, peace has reigned for some time, but beneath the surface, decades of conflict, the lust for power, and the thirst for revenge are woven into everyday life. At the time of our story, Kawal Iobredān II, the fifth king of the House of Iobredān, rules the valley. He has learned of mysterious deaths in the villages to the south, and he also hears news that the water has vanished from

## *The Book of Ladann*

the riverbed of a famous and wealthy shipbuilding city. And all the while, the mysterious constructions of the indigenous Hurrogóns fill him with increasing concern.

The seaport, known as Estuary City, had been ruled by two feuding families until the Olmarogs had seized power by slaughtering the Lasnarogs. Chancellor Aldemur Pasenord arrives here with his little boy to receive a ship as a gift for the king, but their host, the city's High Sword, Zorm Olmarog, is murdered. The chancellor hurries back to the king to inform him of the tragedy. Back in the capital, the chancellor manages to prevent the emperor from sending an army to Lasnapol, but in doing so, he incites the anger of another powerful nobleman, Inak Reddepeno, who is calling for immediate retribution. In a celebration called the Night of the Wakeful the River, the chancellor's ship, with the king's children aboard, sinks. The young heirs to the throne are swallowed by the sea, and Pasenord is thrown into prison. The ship's helmsman and his family can only escape the queen's vengeance with secret help from the king.

How many families will be destroyed by a queen eager to avenge a personal tragedy? And can one believe a single word of the ballads that nourish the hope that the not every descendant of the Lasnarog family, which was always faithful to the king, died on the Night of the Bloody Crags? The questions continue to mount, and uncertainty hangs over the realm like an ominous cloud...

*The Wrath of the Great Rivers* trilogy follows the intertwining tales of several families over decades in an imaginary medieval kingdom. The magical realm is brought even closer to the reader by a meticulously drawn map of the empire with stunning drawings of cities and complex family trees. The trilogy is a gateway which leads from young adult books to more serious, darker fantasies. The second volume of the trilogy was published in 2022 and the final book is due in 2023.

*author & illustrator*  
Róza Schmal

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Eszter Anna Balázs  
eszter.balazs@centralmediacsoport.hu





Rõna Lasnarog was finally alone with her husband. One more time, and for the last time. There before her lay the man with whom she should have lived her life, the man whom she had born a son, the man who had slaughtered her family. How many times had she wished to see him like this, stretched out on his back, under a black shroud. She had loathed him for so many years, but now she felt nothing but fatigue. She wanted only one thing, for the many ceremonies finally to come to an end, the funeral, her son's induction, so that she could finally retreat to her lonely quarters in the back tower of the palace, the Servant of the Sea, from where you could not see the city, the fortress, the houses cluttering the islands in the Ladann estuary. Nothing but the water, the endless water. She had lived there ever since the task of raising Hur had been taken out of her hands, ever since the Monster had had no need of her, not even as a mother.

That is what she had called him in her thoughts for a long time. The Monster.

And yet at first, she had not minded that her father had sought to give her, as wife, to the Sword of the Sea. Goldan Lasnarog would never have forced his daughter to do anything she very much did not want to do. He had been cautious, had striven to learn the Sword's disposition on the matter. The Sword had been quite taken aback, for no one had ever dared so much as dream of uniting the two families. But as he conjured the image of Zorm Olmarog in his silver armor and riding on his soot-black horse, the Sword had blushed, and with his head bowed, he had breathed a barely audible reply. He was not disposed against the girl. On the contrary, the father had thought, letting his lips curl into a sly smile as he noticed the blush.

But how could the girl have been disposed either for or against this man whom she did not know, of whom she knew only that he was the descendant of the legendary if also infamous Calldar, that he was tall, slender, with a commanding mien, and that the only thing darker than his shoulder-length black hair were the two eyes above his eagle's nose? Even a few days later, she knew only that his gaze changed when he looked at her. For a moment, the smoldering coals in his eyes would glow. No one else could see it, but this moment was enough for her to care nothing for the hordes of worrisome counselors, for her to want nothing other than to be the mate to this captivating, terrifying figure, together with whom she would be an emblem and harbinger of peace, the founders of the Alliance of Lasnarog and Olmarog. The first woman and the first man of what would surely be a long, peaceful golden age, on which their people and their countless great-grandchildren would look back with gratitude and thanks.

It was a beautiful vision, and no one would have dared contend that it would not soon be a reality when, at the wedding ceremony, all of Lasnapol was dressed in finery, millions of flower petals were floating on the waters of the river, and the train of her embroidered dress was so long that the little girls who were holding it were still at the middle of the bridge when she crossed over to the Isle of Celebrations. Her grey eyes shone with joy, her blonde hair, which had been unbound, hung down to her ankles, with hundreds of pins in her locks.

Even now her hair was very long, and the passing of time had hardly left any mark on her face: her milky white skin was still smooth, her freckles softened her angular face, her mourning gown accentuated the color of her tresses.

Only from up close could one see that most of the strands were grey, not blonde. They had turned grey the morning her husband had come striding into their bedroom garbed in armor and with a weapon in hand.

Back then, they had still been living in the fortress, in the private quarters for the Olmarogs. Rõna had not heard the news of her father's death, nor had she heard the screams of her relatives as they had met their deaths, but as she had sat up in bed, disheveled, still in the otherworld of dreams, a single look at Zorm Olmaraog had sufficed for her to know that something had changed between them, something that could never be undone. Not because he stood before her in iron from head to toe, and not because the blood that had spattered from his victims had dried to his face, but rather because the glow that so many times had lit up his dark eyes when his gaze had fallen on her now flared again, one last time,

brighter than ever, only then to dim and go out once and for all.

For a moment, she had thought he was going to kill her.

But a moment later, she saw resignation and sorrow flicker across his face. Zorm put down his sword and sat down next to her on the bed. He took her wrists in his hands and, as if talking to a child fallen ill, slowly and calmly explained what had happened. Everything. Even that he had ordered his soldiers to finish off the family members who had gathered at the news of Lord Goldan's death, and that he was not a man who would leave the dirty work to his subjects, and that he did not regret and never would regret what he had done.

He had done it for Lasnapol, for the city that needed something other than what the Lasnarogs had given it.

They had stared at each other. Rõna had not yet understood the meaning of the words, and her husband had seemed for a moment to hesitate. Then, in a voice more strained, less

measured, he had added: the only thing that pained him was her pain.

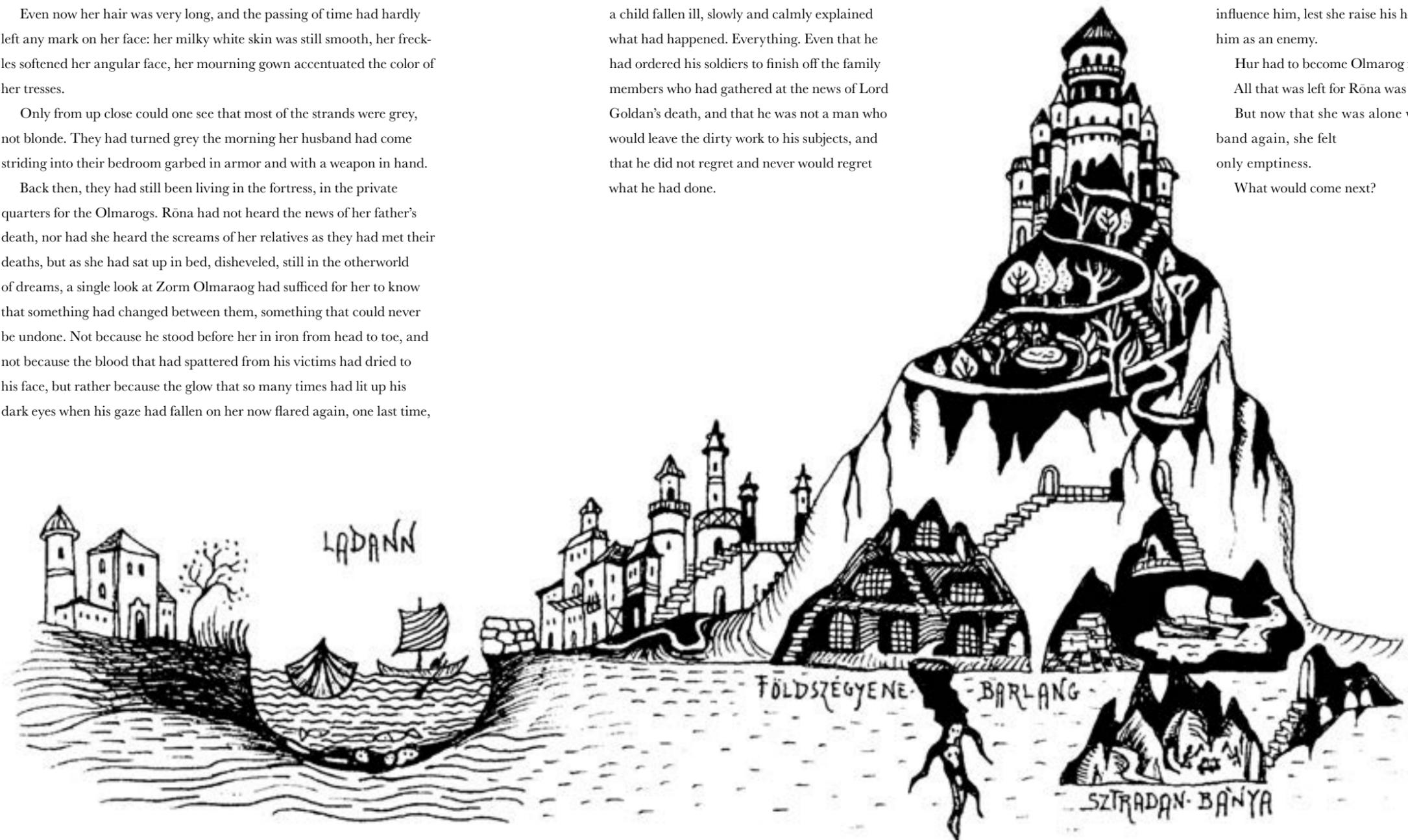
From then on, he had not sought her out. He had never tried to soothe her. He had known perfectly well that any attempt would have been in vain. Their son could remain with her for a time. The Monster did not have the heart to take him from her too. But later, he could not let her influence him, lest she raise his heir to look on him as an enemy.

Hur had to become Olmarog in body and soul.

All that was left for Rõna was hatred.

But now that she was alone with her husband again, she felt only emptiness.

What would come next?



## AT LARGE



**ÁGNES MÉSZÖLY** was born in 1971. She completed a degree as a pedagogue and tutor for special needs children, a profession she still pursues today in short-term international projects. Over the course of the past fifteen years, she has published more than thirty books for children, teenagers, and adults with publishers such as Cerkabella, Móra, Pagony, and Prae. In 2018, she won the HUBBY “Author of the Year” award.

## TRUST ME

**LAURA LEINER** is a bestselling author of YA fiction. She was born in Budapest in 1985. She wrote her first novel, *Remek!* [Awesome!], at the age of 18, and it was published in 2005. The first volume of her novel series *Joan of Arc High School* was published in 2010 and has been the most popular YA series among readers in Hungary ever since. Since then, she has authored several successful new books and book series.



## THE WANDERER



**DÓRA PAPP** was born in 1992 in Baja. She completed a degree at ELTE in American Studies. She was voted the best youth writer by HUBBY’s student jury in 2019. Her young adult fiction focuses on the problems teenagers face, including bullying, prejudice, and body image issues. She is also interested in climate change and social media as a tool and platform with which to promote reading.

## ROLLERCOASTER

Actor, voice actor, and writer **ÉVA MADARÁSZ** was born in 1970 in Budapest. She was a student at the National Studio in 1988–90 and at the Mária Górnagy Theater School in 1990–92. In addition to her roles in television and theater, she regularly does Hungarian voices for dubbed works for the screen. *Hullámvásút* [Roller Coaster], her first novel, made a startling debut on the state of Hungarian youth literature.



## THE SECRET OF THE COMPASS



**VIKTÓRIA JELI** is a writer and dramaturg with a degree in theater studies from the University of Theater and Film Arts. She has worked as a dramaturg and a coauthor of puppet and children’s plays since 2005. She is the coauthor and co-creator of the radio youth series *The Time Travelers* and the book series which grew out of it. She is also co-scriptwriter for the HBO series *Board Game and Therapy*.



**DÓRA GIMESI** is a writer and dramaturg who graduated from the University of Theater and Film Arts, where she did a degree in theater studies. She is one of the creators of the radio youth series *The Time Travelers* and the book series which grew out of it.



**ISTVÁN TASNÁDI** is an Attila József and Béla Balázs Prize-winning writer and playwright. In 1997, he graduated from the University of Pannonia with a degree in the history of the theater. His 36 plays and stage adaptations have had 88 premieres on Hungarian stages, and many of his works have been performed on stages the world over. He is also one of the creators and writers of the radio youth series *The Time Travelers* and the book series which grew out of it, and he is the lead writer of the HBO series *Board Game and Therapy*.

## MASS

**ÉVA VERONIKA KALAIPOS** is a writer and literary translator who was born in 1983 in Nyíregyháza. She began her career with youth novels. The first volume of the D.A.C. series was published in 2013 by Manó Könyvek Kiadón, followed by five more volumes in this series. *Mass*, her book on cyberbullying, was published in 2016, and her novel *Must I?!* in 2017. *F As In*, her first book for adults, was published in 2019, followed by *They Were the Fathers* in 2021. *Must I?!* was nominated for the Children’s Book of the Year Award in 2017.



## HELLO



**DÓRA PÉCZELY** was born in 1968 in Gyöngyös. She completed degrees at the Departments of Aesthetics and Hungarian Literature at ELTE. She is an editor, critic, literary organizer, and bibliotherapist. As an editor, she has worked for the biggest publishers of Hungarian literature (Palatinus, Magvető, Helikon), and she was the founding editor-in-chief of Tilos az Á Books, which publishes the books for children and young adults by the Pagony Publishing House. In 2017, her poetry anthology *Szívlapát* (Heart Shovel) won the HUB-BY Most Innovative Book of the Year Award, and in 2022, the short story anthology *Szevasz* won the Student Jury Award.



**DÁNIEL SZINVAI** is a Hungarian illustrator and graphic designer. Born in Budapest in 1995, Szinvai graduated from the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in 2019. In 2021, he won the Best Newcomer and Silent Book award at the Budapest Illustration Festival. He works as a freelancer, more recently primarily as an illustrator, and he also teaches graphic design. He illustrates books for children and adults and also does cover designs and magazine illustrations.

## DROUGHT

**TAMÁS ROJIK** was born in 1988 in Kecskemét, Hungary. He graduated from ELTE with a Master's in Hungarian Literature and Language pedagogy and History. In 2021, he was shortlisted for the HUBBY "YA Author of the Year" Award. His young adult novels focus on the threats of climate change, the difficulties adolescents face in their efforts to integrate and find their paths in life, and the tensions caused by social differences. *Drought* has been adapted by the Hungarian Theater of Pest as a TIE production to help young people cope with anxieties over climate change.



## ONCE UPON A HOUSE



**ORSOLYA RUFF** was born in 1977 in Mór. She studied communications, international studies, and English studies. She works as a cultural journalist and has been writing mainly about books for the Könyves Magazin for the past ten years. She takes a particular interest in contemporary children's literature. Her first children's novel, *A zöld macska titka* (The Secret of the Green Cat), which is the first part of a trilogy, was published in 2018. Her book *Volt egy ház* (Once Upon a House) was published in 2021. She is currently working on an adventure novel for children. She translates from English and has translated works by authors such as Lucy Strange and Tania del Rio.



**ANNA LÁNG** is an illustrator and graphic designer who graduated from the Hungarian University of Fine Arts in 2011. In 2013, she won a prize at the National Graphic Design Biennale with her poster series. In 2015, she illustrated her first book, and she also moved to Milan, Italy to work as a graphic designer. She continued her career as an illustrator, working for Italian and then French and Hungarian publishing houses. Since 2018, she has lived in Sardinia, where she works as a freelance illustrator.

## THE BOOK OF LADDAN

**RÓZA SCHMAL** was born in Budapest in 1979. She completed a degree in painting at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, where she also received her DLA degree. She works as an illustrator. In 2017, she won the Szép Magyar Könyv Prize (together with József Pintér). Her short stories and reviews have appeared in various journals. Her first novel, *A Ladann könyve* (The Book of Ladann), was the first part of the trilogy *Nagy folyók haragja* (The Wrath of Great Rivers), the second book of which, *A Varad könyve* (The Book of Varad), was published in 2022 by Lampion Publishing House.



# PETŐFI LITERARY FUND

THE AIM OF THE PETŐFI LITERARY FUND IS TO PROMOTE CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN AUTHORS' WORKS ABROAD AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE PUBLISHING OF HUNGARIAN LITERATURE.

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Hungary

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## INFORMATION CENTRE

- \* Contacts of authors, translators, publishers and agencies
- \* Information concerning authors, books, rights

## CONTACT

**DÁNIEL LEVENTE PÁL**  
GENERAL DIRECTOR –  
DIRECTORATE OF LITERATURE  
[daniel.pal@plf.hu](mailto:daniel.pal@plf.hu)

**ZOLTÁN JENEY**  
PROJECT COORDINATOR  
[zoltan.jeney@plf.hu](mailto:zoltan.jeney@plf.hu)

**MÁRIA HAJBA**  
APPLICATION COORDINATOR  
[maria.hajba@plf.hu](mailto:maria.hajba@plf.hu)

### more info

[applications@plf.hu](mailto:applications@plf.hu)

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*Bold stories are  
visions of the impossible.  
& of the possible.*

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