

SAMPLE  
TRANSLATION

FERI LAINŠČEK  
DON'T TELL ME WHAT  
YOU DREAMED

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## Feri Lainšček: Don't Tell Me What You Dreamed

*An excerpt from the novel that was first published in 2009 by the Tuma publishing house. In 2010, it was published as an audio-book by Študentska založba.*

Ignacija J. Fridel, literary critic and connoisseur of Feri Lainšček's opus, wrote this about Don't Tell Me What You Dreamed: As a baby, Edi was abandoned in a shopping cart. For years he wandered from foster homes to the streets until, after he unsuccessfully tried to jump from a church bell, he found himself in the closed ward of a psychiatric hospital where he meets a woman who enchants him with her voice. Edi's first-person narrative describes it this way: "It was very different from all other human voices that I have ever heard. It was similar to the sound of the night birds that I sometimes hear at the tram depot but have never seen." (p. 46). The comparison of women and birds continues throughout the narrative. It recurs in the patient Galina who remembers her dreams of flying, and in the romantic love scene in which Lainšček uses word similar to those in previous works that played on the emotions of female readers in particular. Love is presented as "the flight of two small bird above the abyss of madness." The image, used in such a context, already offers a premonition of the final slide of the main characters into the blackness of their emotions, the abyss of quotidian life. It becomes clear in the course of the story that Edi's friend, Daks, wants to use his retreat behind the walls of a psychiatric clinic as an alibi so Edi can kill an old invalid man on the order of his heir. Galina herself had had a family life outside the psychiatric hospital. All of this becomes an obstacle to their love that cannot take flight, at least not for nine years, which is the length of Edi's jail sentence for attacking Galina's husband. And after the passage of time, love does not return. When Edi is released, his lover no longer recognizes him.

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Daks traded only in crazy ideas, and sometimes you could buy a few from him.

I held Galina by the hand and pulled her, not toward the exit, but instead down the long hallway where the outpatient clinic was and where there wasn't a soul in the afternoon. This time as well, we saw only the cleaning lady, half kneeling over her bucket, not even lifting her gaze to us as we slid through the ward where, had it been night, I would have feared ghosts. Of course, Galina didn't know where we were heading, but you couldn't make out even the smallest trace of worry on her face. She followed me as you only follow someone whom you trust entirely. I was grateful for the calm that flowed into me as she squeezed my palm, and that we walked so slowly now, close, side by side, as if we were only talking a nice stroll. The doors were always locked at the end of the other hallway. We stepped into a vaulted space where light fell from high meshed windows down through the dust motes. Once our eyes grew accustomed to the sudden illumination, we were able to make out on the wall opposite a draped table, benches, and a cross hanging between the two windows.

"Have you ever been here?" I asked.

"No, I haven't," she whispered. "I don't go to mass."

"I don't go to mass either." I embraced her.

I felt a shudder travelling down her body and I knew it wasn't from cold. I only needed that small sign for everything to shift inside of me. In those days, our bodies know more about what we desired than the two of us who were just guessing all the time. I opened her robe and she took it off. Her hair fell around her face and her breasts waited for my touch. They were full of her essence, but somehow different from her. Her calm had not settled in them; they were filled with something other than calm. She looked at me with eyes that were not eyes. I lunged between her breasts with lips that were no longer lips but just hunger, or maybe the passion that greedily stripped us and, who knows how or when, threw us to the floor. We made love on the stone floor that should have been cold, but was hot, almost white hot. I felt the heat on my naked back and thighs. It was if I was lying in the shallows at the edge of a southern sea, and Galina was splashing over me, like higher and ever stronger waves. The storm lifted her hair. Her breasts, in their mad agitation, travelled each in their own direction for an instant before catching the irresistible rhythm again. I tried to etch into my heart the image of the woman who was not hovering above me only in dreams; no, she was actually here and she was touching me with her deepest inside. I wanted to remember her mouth forever, her mouth opened in expectation.

And then that mouth cried out.

The beautiful cry lodged itself in my memory.

It was as if something fateful had been revealed, and she hadn't even heard it. She relaxed on top of me, growing calm again. The stormy sky gradually changed into the gray ceiling of a poor chapel. I looked at the wooden Christ mutely staring somewhere into the distance. It suited me that he had been looking away the whole time. I wouldn't have liked it if he were alive and saw all of this. Galina, so naked and open, was only mine. Nobody else would know the violent lust captured in her seemingly fragile body. It was our secret and I was prepared to protect it any cost. I wanted to ask her if she now knew why she didn't die yesterday when she was all feverish. She lay on top of me, curled up like a child. I was still

inside of her. But we couldn't stay there for long. If the cleaning lady came, that bucket would probably fall right out of her hands. If a person came with the intention of prayer, he would have a stroke. Our offering mustn't have something like that on its consciousness...

"Don't be afraid," she said, feeling my agitation.

"I'm not afraid," I whispered.

"Some come to the altar to marry. We make love." She lifted her head and looked through her tousled hair. "That's something more..."

I didn't understand her but remained silent. I wasn't in the mood to discuss God at the moment. She said she didn't go to mass, she probably didn't know much about it, and that was fine with me. We could meet here again sometime. The chapel was a safe haven because the patients didn't come here, maybe many like me nursing some resentment. We dressed slowly as if we'd just gotten out of bed in a hotel room. I'd seen a film like that, though I'd never been in a hotel room myself. I haven't really been anywhere in this world... I was surprised by the emotion I felt. It was completely new to me: after all the beauty that had just overwhelmed me, I was strangely moved. There was a woman beside me who had given herself completely and utterly. Her body was smooth and taut, her face shone with sweet dew, her eyes were overflowing with grace, and I could only offer myself to her. I would have given her my blood, kidneys, liver, heart, everything that could be transplanted I would put in her, protect her life with my own. I had nothing else. Nothing else was in my power. I was not worthy of her affection, it seemed to me. She deserved much more.

"Now we're patients again," she smiled, when we were dressed.

"We weren't before?" I shuddered. I had the feeling she read my thoughts.

"We weren't," she nodded. "Before only our souls were here. Nobody else could come near," she smiled indulgently. "Now they're all going somewhere else again."

"Who?" I asked.

"The spirits" she shrugged.

"Who are they?" I frowned. There were so many of them, these creatures of hers, and I never knew quite what she meant. "Where do they come from?" I asked.

"Spirits are different from kelpies and wraiths. They don't have their own world," she whispered.

"They come from inside of us," she whispered.

"Inside of us?" I gasped.

"Yes, from people." She was entirely convinced. "That's why they never do anything good. You and I are really bothering them now." She clung to me. "There's nothing worse for them than this sort of happiness." She squeezed my muscle. "We have to take care..."

"How?" I wondered.

"We have to trust each other." She stroked my cheek. "You have to believe in me and I in you. Whatever the spirits come up with, we mustn't let them lead us astray."

Daks was certainly a bad spirit, it struck me. But he wasn't a ghost. My God, I thought, if only I could understand her! Does anyone understand her? If someone did, she probably wouldn't be in here. But I loved her and that was more important than anything else. I believed that what she saw really existed and that was enough. I also knew that I wasn't going to go with Daks but would stay here... Alright, I didn't know that yet. I hadn't said no yet, but things were gathering inside of me, the scales were shifting,

I sensed it would be that way because it couldn't be any other way. If before there had been even one percent chance that he would get me, there wasn't even that one anymore. And yet even such a tiny chance could change things – a professional has to recognize that – even James Bond couldn't always avoid it.

“Galina,” I said her name for the first time. “What can the spirits do to us?”

“Anything we let them do,” she answered quietly. “But we can never know what they're cooking up, what their plans are.” She raised a warning finger. “That's why it's so hard to defend against them.” She lifted her eyebrows. “They're sneaky, you know. Only evil moves them. There's not a trace of mercy in them...”

“You're very afraid of them.” I hugged her.

“I'm only afraid for you,” she breathed.

“For me?” I was surprised.

“Because your heart is so soft and you don't know anything about these matters.” She stared into my eyes and laid her palm on my cheek. “You do things that your heart wasn't born for and we mustn't do things our heart wasn't born for...”

“What do I do?” I asked fearfully.

“I don't know,” she shrugged. “That's what I don't know.”

I held her to me and felt a tightness around my heart as if I had already done something terrible. But I hadn't. I'd even decided moments before that I wasn't going to help Daks. I had nothing else on my conscience. I was a petty thief, that was all. I only ever stole what I needed. I was like an animal going to hunt only when compelled by starvation. It wasn't my fault that I've been hungry my whole life. And I didn't know for what purpose my heart was born. I didn't even know where I was from. I was found in a shopping cart in front of the supermarket. Whoever left me there must have hoped that someone would take me home like a stuffed teddy bear. But no one did. I never had anybody. I was abandoned to people who touched my fate only insofar as their jobs demanded. If I wanted to win somebody's heart, I had to kiss their ass. And even as a child, I resisted that. Instead of fighting for affection, I retreated and hid. I fled until all my connections with others were broken. Then I started to disappear from the files. To not be among the counted, that was my greatest satisfaction. Nobody could claim anything from me. But then Daks had come, the enabler, and now there was Galina, a woman who was afraid for me.

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It was strange. Love, that last night wouldn't let me close my eyes, tonight was rocking me to sleep like a child.

As I dozed off, the scene in the chapel played in my mind, increasingly unreal, changing into the love between two innocent creatures that might be angels. My palms slid across the swollen curves of Galina's breasts without suffocating her, and her swaying hips touched me without the convulsive desire to crack me like a walnut below her belly. In the end, the storm that swept over us two shipwrecked souls, who had only the power to hold onto each other, became a light breeze that couldn't even shake a ripe fruit off the tree. And the chapel was no longer a makeshift place of prayer, the contribution that some buyer of castoffs quickly erected in the most damp and distant corner of an old building, but rather sprinkled

us with the light of crystal chandeliers and the floor itself become velvet. We were familiar but also somehow strange to one another. Lovers who had no need to hide but could make love to each other a thousand times. Travellers in a time that was kind and generous to them. Dreamers who were allowed to dream.

I liked these half dreams in which everything was possible, in which a drop of conscious effort could change the course of things. Add or take away, make it more pleasant. It was something more than dreaming, as the images were alive and the impressions lingered like something that actually had been experienced. It was a pity that Galina couldn't be part of this luxury. She would see how beautiful it was. She would certainly be happy for me.

At night, I was awoken by singing.

I woke in the same slow way as I had fallen into dreams. First there was just the voice, high, pure and beautiful that swam above me as if in heaven. It seemed that it didn't come from a human throat, but from heaven itself. Only when I opened my eyes did I realize that it wasn't a dream, that I was lying in a hospital bed, and the voice was here, in my room. I held my breath. It was strange and incomprehensible. The nomadic instinct came alive within me and I looked around the room. Laszlo, stripped to the waist, wearing only wide baggy underwear, that reached to his knees, stood by the window, legs apart, and sang.

*I wait as the night waits  
for a morning with hope,  
my wounded soul,  
my poisoned soul.*

I lifted myself onto my elbow, rubbed my eyes, and stared at him as if at a miracle. This fellow, who since I shared a room with him, had never even spoken was now standing at my bed. From his throat came a voice that didn't seem to belong to him. It was high and velvety, almost like a woman's. It rose from his wide chest and flowed through his body, bringing forth a melody the likes of which I had heard before on the street. Only this time, the voice wasn't melancholy or meandering sadness, nor was it an expression such pain. Yes, Laszlo, 'the butcher who no longer worked,' was singing about something that he really cared about, addressing someone who wasn't even in the room. His heavy chin was lifted, his big face tilted slightly to the side, his eyes slightly open and staring into some unseen distance, his left hand falling dead against his body, his right with opened fingers always reaching forward, following his gaze to a place that his voice probably also wanted to go.

*Above the foggy graves,  
the balalaika sings,  
even a stone could hear it:  
the tears and lamenting.*

Only then did I notice that the singing had also roused our dwarfish roommate, who was no less surprised than I. He slid to the edge of the bed, his back against the headboard, leaning against the

pillow. His hand, with which he smoothed his gray tousled hair, trembled. He was probably most shocked at the fact that his Laszlo was, for the first time, doing something without him. The two men were inseparable, mysteriously connected to each other. They shaved and showered together, they ate and wove baskets together, just as they went for walks together. Manuel, 'the father of three children, happily divorced, and a little bit deaf,' was always the one to decide what they would do and how they would behave, and he also spoke for Laszlo. He explained to anyone who was willing to listen exactly how his comrade felt and what was going on in his head.

Well, now it was entirely different.

In the half light, his small bulging eyes were shifting in panic and soon they stopped on me.

"What is this?" he asked hoarsely. "What's happened to him?" He crawled across the bed to my side. "Why won't he wake up?"

"Maybe he is awake," I whispered.

"You think he's awake?" The fellow tugged on his hair again.

"Maybe he's just singing," I shrugged. "Maybe he wants to sing..."

But Laszlo probably wasn't awake. His beautiful silky voice flowed over everything and his big heavy hand reached out to a place, which the two of us couldn't see. A nurse came into the room and turned on the light. Footsteps could be heard in the corridor, but he kept singing, paying no attention to anyone.

*Come mama, come again,  
along the dewy shore,  
bring your young face,  
to me, again, once more.*

The two orderlies who came in soon afterwards stood silently for an instant or two behind the nurse's back. There was a not human being on this earth, probably, who would not be stopped by the song. For a moment, time stood still at the cold mad Sikorski Hospital. The thick century-old walls softened so as to carry Laszlo's plea along its path. The chamber pot became ears. Even the stones were impressed. The gigantic one hundred twenty kilogram loser with a face like a gentle child and the body of a used-up boxer, pleaded with his mother to look at him, to caress him once again.

I sat on the bed and tears slid through my fingers that covered my mouth. God, who I have almost lost here, may be witness that I have never before cried like that in my life. Now I did, as if something inside of me had opened up. The crazy butcher was also singing to my missing mother that night. I hoped she heard him, whether she was dead or alive...

Then everything happened very suddenly and I could no longer follow.

One of the orderlies stepped forward and struck Laszlo on the forehead. The other grabbed him by the nape of the neck and pushed him against the wall, which he slid down like a worm. There was a sudden tramping along the halls and stairways and it was only at this point that the guards and orderlies captured and overcame him. They probably took him to a locked ward; after that we never knew what happened to him. Every so often, Manuel tried to explain how 'the butcher who wasn't working any more' started to sing and finally lost his mind, but I never let him finish. He didn't have the right to explain it to me.

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Ever since I cried that night, I started to cry during the day too. It was as if a rusted pipe started to leak inside of me and it couldn't be repaired. I sat in some lonely corner and wondered what I should do about Daks. On the face of it, the situation was quite simple: if I wanted to get some money that would allow Galina and me to have a life together outside the hospital, I would have to go with him. For life outside, it was practically the only chance. It wouldn't be possible to live decently in Čert just by begging on the street. But for work in some warehouse, you needed connections. But Daks' offer was a risk and, since I'd gotten closer to Galina, I'd started to look at such things differently. It wasn't all the same to me anymore. Just the thought that we might fail made me so anxious I had to stand up, walk around a bit, catch my breath. Suddenly I was a new person who had something to lose and that changed me. I didn't believe I was invulnerable anymore. The boy who lived inside of me had become shy and had started to stutter. I realized that I had been feeding him lies. I had to admit it to myself. I filled my eyes with all the old people here, and things seemed entirely different than they actually were. I doubted that even the psychiatrist, Verka Budjovna, could help with such disappointment. My role as her interesting patient was inseparable from all the games and deceptions; reality was catching up with me. When, after our lovemaking in the chapel, I went to tell her that I had finally been thinking about her question and that, in my opinion, God really didn't exist, she simply posed another question that was again the sole and most important question of all.

"Look, Edward, you brought me an answer that you didn't just pull out of your pocket. Sometimes it's necessary to pull a tree out if it has deep roots." That was how she described my exploit. "We still have a lot to talk about before we both understand what this means. But you must trust me: it would be very precious for if you took some time and thought it over. Whether you are actually healthy or not."

I could only gape.

I didn't understand why she was doing this to me.

It took a while before I told her that I wasn't playing this game for real, that I wasn't in the hospital to get better, but because I needed an alibi. I wasn't allowed to say that I was better or she might release me. Especially now that I had Galina in here. I was afraid for us. I was anxious, but that wasn't a sickness; it was an anxiety with many names. After Lazslo's suffering, it had become even more intense. Daks found me that afternoon in more confusion than when he had visited me before.

"That's the way, mate!" he greeted me. "Now you've found yourself a peaceful corner."

Of course, I knew what he meant – the time had come for me to decide. I didn't answer him and let him sniff things out for himself. At first, he struck me as thin and weak. I didn't know why I'd ever seen him differently. Then I wondered why he needed me for this job. Then it was like a bolt from the blue: if this creep thought I would kill somebody instead of him, he was mistaken. That was the one thing I wasn't prepared to do. Besides which I could hold him to his word, since from the beginning he had told me that the only problem with killing is that the body has to be disposed of.

"What did that guy ever do to anyone?" I rushed at him with the question, once he had found a place we were sufficiently alone and he had a cigarette.

“What?” He thought for a moment. “Nothing.” He blew out a puff of smoke. “The problem is exactly that he did nothing.” That apparently struck him as funny. “I don’t even know how many years it’s been that this guy has done nothing.” Then he became serious again. “He’s an invalid, you understand. His legs don’t work. He does nothing, stays quiet, and waits. I don’t know if this guy thinks that miracles happen in this world, or what?”

“But – what is it that he doesn’t want to do?” I didn’t understand him.

“Yeah, to die – or to sign over his worldly goods.”

“To die?”

“Oh, you’re an idiot,” he turned on me. “The guy’s an owner, you understand, of some factories, bars, stables, only God knows everything he owns, and he just waits, you understand, waits ten years, twenty years, watching as everything goes to the devil, watching rabid dogs take everything away...”

“Wait,” I stopped him. “Who’s waiting?”

“Who?” he pierced me with a look. “Edi!” he raised his voice. “Are we professionals or fools?”

“Fine.” I withdrew. “I wasn’t thinking that.”

“What then?”

“Who’s the other one?”

“What?” he frowned. “What do you care about him? What do we care what the two of them have together?” He had raised his voice again. “For us, all that matters,” and now he spoke quietly, “is that we know what we’re going to do to him. The other one’s just the payer.”

And so what they were to each other remained unspoken: father and son probably. Or the payer could be a daughter. Some young woman. The other possibility was too difficult to contemplate. It was horrible. A dead man who would pay for his own death. A murderer who would help some bastards to get rich over night. Those bastards were us: the malingerer, Daks and me, the bum. It has gotten to the point where capitalist needed our charity to make a profit.

“The golden rule is this,” he instructed me like a boss, “don’t look the target in the eye. You are not his confessor, you are not a judge. You are not there to engage with him, not before, not afterwards. You’re just there to do the deed, wash your hands, and go.” He tossed his cigarette away and rubbed his hands together.

“Hey!” I scoffed. “Are you reading the rule book or something?”

“I am,” he retorted. “Everything’s ready on my side. I have the van, knives, bags, rags, clothes, gloves, ropes, tape, everything. What about you?” He shot me with his forefinger. “Do you know when you’re getting out?”

“Yeah,” I nodded reluctantly.

“So you’re not,” he concluded. “Fuck it! What if you been doing here this whole time?” he yelled. “A man could have already have dug a ditch, poured cement, you understand, not this now.” He was becoming even louder. “This is exactly where we can’t stumble. We can’t be nervous now. We need concentration. One trace, one single strand of your hair, and it could be a catastrophe.” Saliva sprayed from his lips. “And then what?” he slowed. “A piano?” He made an X with his fingers. “I’m telling you, Edi, if we’re not a hundred percent, it’s better that we keep begging on the streets...”

“Yeah,” I nodded.

“Yeah what?” he attacked me.

"Yeah, well, I don't know..."

"What don't you know?"

"Maybe it's true..."

"What are you talking about?" He grabbed me by the hand, his eyes bulging. "What's with you?"

I looked away but there was no point. We would have to look at each other sooner or later. We would have to end this. Daks didn't have the brains to understand it. He was too full of himself and his lousy ideas. The whole time he was asking me everything but whether I knew where that damn hole in the wall was. And, of course, he knew that I didn't know and that I could have told him so. But, no, Daks was a bumbler. It was only what he had in his own head; that was the only thing that stuck. Now he yawned like an idiot, wriggling like a fish on land. His eyes bulged. He opened his mouth so far I could practically see inside his guts. His face grimaced. I would have liked to slap him, to make him get his act together, and then it struck me: I understood him and that probably came as a shock to him too. "Come on, come on," I said gently. "Don't make more of this than there is," I calmed him. "I just got scared."

But he probably didn't even hear me.

"You can't screw me over now," he stammered.

"You should just do it yourself," I said. "You'll get more money. You could really start something..."

"Edi!" He reached out his hand.

I shook my head.

It all seemed like a mistake to me. I looked at everything like I might some old movie. It was like two friends who planned something together and it wasn't working out. At this point, it was as if the camera lens slowly turned away. There was some bullshit music and you were quietly disappointed that you went to the movie at all. You could have spent your money on a hamburger, but you didn't, and now you're just left with your hunger. There was always someone like Daks in those kind of movies, staring somewhere far away above the audience, rummaging blindly for something in his pockets, then pulling out a cigarette, slowly lighting it, and pulling on the comforting smoke. I really hoped that that's the way it would turn out this time too. That the cigarette would calm him down and that he would do the shooting – but I badly miscalculated.

"You know what, Edi," my former companion said without even looking at me. "You're not going to get out of it. You can't pull a fast one like that on Daks. I am not some social worker who's going to send you to a spa or something. Either you get your act together now or I'm going to finish this cigarette and I'm going to go upstairs and tell them who they've really got in here."

"Yeah," I shrugged. "They won't believe you."

"I bet you'll be without a roof over your head tonight," he smiled. "And then you can get ready."

He really was like a stray dog. Wagging his tail all the time and begging and then when he doesn't get what he wants, attacking. He knew, of course, what it was to have the noose close around your neck, but I doubted that he would really do it. This was trench warfare and someone would definitely take the fall. It would probably be him. Because just the thought that he would take me away from Galina filled me with an untameable rage.

I looked him in the eyes and waited.

I imagined a line on the floor which he mustn't cross.

"Well?" he asked, flicking his ash.

“If you go up there, you’re finished,” I said.

But he went all the same.

There was only six steps to the line that he wasn’t supposed to cross. I knew that he had a jack knife in his pocket and his hand was there. But he still needed to pull it out, press on the spring, and open it, and I could wait until he crossed the border where my law began, my sanctions, my clean conscience. Only then did I strike the target. The knife clattered to the floor still closed. Daks staggered, somehow not losing his footing, and started to run. I caught up with him at the lawn where I tripped him and fell into a bush and then got up. I didn’t follow him after that. I knew that he wouldn’t stop running for a long time. He was like a headless chicken racing, pursued by a fear and exhaustion that wouldn’t leave him alone. I was pretty sure he wouldn’t come back. Daks was clever but he couldn’t do anything. He would have to take a risk, to step over the edge, to see what he could get out of the situation. But now he knew that he couldn’t more out of me, that I’d had enough. I also suspected that he would take care of this matter himself, but in truth I didn’t care. I picked up the knife and tucked it into my pocket. Then I changed my mind and slid it into a crack under the roof. I would find it again when I got out. It was a good knife with a spring. Not many people had such a knife. It was such a good knife it practically opened itself in your hand, if you’re quick that is, and not slow as Daks had been. And what would have happened if he had beat me to it? I was certain that I wouldn’t have let him live with such a knife. When the blade flashed, I would change into a terminator. My brain would begin to function differently and my body would obey it. I could always rely on that.

Even before I got to the staircase, the nurse came to find me. I had to go have a talk with the doctor. I didn’t think it could be a coincidence but I had to remain calm now. Daks had certainly not said anything, because I had seen him leave and he was probably already in town by now. And if he had said something, who would believe him? He certainly couldn’t say that we were planning a killing and I had let him down. Anything else he said probably wouldn’t have much effect since I was known as the interesting patient. According to Doctor Verka, I was still a patient, though she had said that she believed I might be cured. She said that she and I would have to have a long talk about this.