

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

VESNA LEMAIĆ
IT'S ALRIGHT, IT'S
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ORIGINAL TITLE: NIČ NI, NIČ NI

NUMBER OF PAGES: 4

Vesna Lemaic: It's Alright, It's Alright

The seabed is bright because of the sand, just like in Hawaii. Down there are small sea urchins and cucumbers which are not found in Hawaii, only colourful fish, not as easily scared as these in the Adriatic. She has been waiting all afternoon for a shoal of picarel which she is going to follow with her new flippers, but not too far, out there are Italy and the dirty sea.

It is a different world down here, the creatures move soundlessly about. Only two sounds can be heard: the built-up pressure in her ears and her mouth-breathing through the snorkel. She takes it off, takes a deep breath and does four consecutive rolls, much easier to do with flippers. She looks towards the shore to see if grandpa and grandma saw her. One day, she would like to break the record and do ten of those in one breath. Grandma is reading a book and grandpa is sleeping in the folding chair, dark sunglasses perched on his nose. Her legs kick impatiently under water, how long before they notice she is not on the beach? She puts the snorkel mouthpiece back in her mouth and turns the other way.

Sea urchins lie in bunches like families on the beach, patches of sunlight passing over them. If you dive and swim towards them, they get much bigger. She shoots out of the water to gain momentum, takes a deep breath, dives headfirst, splashing her flippers in the air, and disappears below the surface. She is approaching the bottom fast, but the pressure in her ears is also rapidly rising. Only a meter and a half short of reaching it, she runs out of breath: she turns around and darts upwards. The sea catapults her above the surface all the way to her bellybutton. She looks towards the shore. The beach has already emptied. Grandma is leaning over grandpa as if she is telling him something. Is she worried because the girl was nowhere to be seen, having dived right at that moment? But grandpa does not shield his eyes with his hand, he does not get up. Grandma stands up, the girl instantly submerges.

How deep is too far? she once asked. Grandpa told her that too far from the beach was where the sea was too deep, meaning where she could not touch the ground anymore. When she runs out of air, she peeks out above the surface: grandma is sitting on the beach chair again. Slowly, the girl heads towards the shore. There is still time: the sun has not set yet. Maybe the picarel will show up after all.

The closer you get to the shore, the more sea cucumbers there are. Below her, there they are, scattered, rolling around, lazy and ugly: they remind her of turds. The girl swims towards them, a sudden current of cold water sends chills through her body as she gets close to the bottom. She is not particularly choosy about which one to grab, all of them are equally warty and slimy, quick to slip out of one's hands. She pushes off the bottom with a cucumber in her hands and waves it towards grandpa and grandma. She squeezes it tightly in the middle, water squirting from one end. They are both watching her, maybe, but do not wave back. If she

was not back for a long, a very long time until the evening, they would both be standing in the shallow water gazing intently at the sea.

She dips her head in the water, lets go of the cucumber, watching it as it twirls to the bottom. When the cucumber lands, the girl looks again in the direction of grandpa and grandma and thinks what they would do if she never swam back again. They would definitely cry for her. They would be sorry for not paying attention to what she was doing in the water. Her eyes water, she lifts up her mask and rubs them, vigorously kicking her legs. She has too salty a taste in her mouth, she really needs to wash it down with some tea. But she has not gone over all of her underwater routes yet: she swims away from the shore again towards the distant cape where the nudies usually sunbathe.

Her back already feels chilly, but with her flippers, she will be there in no time: she heads towards the white buoys. She usually swims there before the nudies go home. With her mask, she can look at everything under water that she is not allowed to on land: the men's willies and legs flop around like squids when they swim and women's breasts look like underwater zeppelins. She turns towards grandpa and grandma; they are small and surely cannot see her any more. Are they thinking about her yet, where she is?

A little further from the nudies' beach is a row of buoys. Their mooring, overgrown with thorny oysters, is a frequent gathering place for fish. The girl takes a deep breath and submerges: the fish get startled and, even with her flippers, she is unable to keep up with them. She suddenly feels tired, hungry and thirsty. She will be back tomorrow and try to follow them as long as possible. She swam here for something else. A little further on from the buoys is an area where the water is not very deep. Here, a solitary noble pen shell is buried in the sand; she goes to see it almost every day. There are never any fish around, all of them go around it: the sandy seabed here is bare and the pen shell lies in it like a desert sage. The girl dives: she goes to touch it. The pen shell is guarding a secret in its shell. The bottom is not as close this time, the high tide takes her by surprise. The pen shell is slowly approaching, the girl reaches it, mission accomplished: she touches the edge of the shell with her index finger and runs out of air. Turning her head upwards, she sees the reflective surface, which suddenly seems far away. She knows she cannot open her mouth now, she is rising like a soulascending to god. When she breaths in, she is so exhausted that she thinks of returning to grandpa and grandma on land. But divers do not do that. The sun is almost touching the sea. She lifts the mask up to her forehead, the snorkel dangling from her head, and turns her back on the cape. She turns towards the two dots on the beach. They are waiting for her. Will they get up when they see her?

Grandpa and grandma are illuminated by the sunset, her eyes water again. As she reaches the shoal, she takes off her flippers. She goes on watching them for a moment or two longer, then stands up. She feels dizzy, stands still for a bit. She walks clumsily over the rocks, which feel sharp against her feet, as if she was walking on sea urchins. The ground beneath her feet is shaking. She is holding her flippers in one hand, her mask in the other, the

snorkel slapping against her thigh, all of it dripping with water. She is chilly. She drops her gear on the ground at their feet.

“Granny, thirsty.”

Grandma stoops down to the bag while the girl wraps herself in the nearest towel. A plastic thermos stopper cup with tea appears in front of her. She drinks it, then grandma's hand offers her a sandwich. She takes two bites, lies down and falls asleep wrapped in the towel.

She is awoken by the chill against her feet; it has grown dark and they are still sitting by the sea.

“Granny, are we going home?” “Not yet.”

The girl takes a dry bathing suit from the bag. She laughs: “Grandpa, don't peek!”

She slips on a shirt and a pair of shorts, covers her feet with a towel and puts on a cotton hat.

Up there is the moon. And the stars; she thinks she sees a surfboard with a triangular sail out on the open sea.

“Grandpa, do you see there? Someone went surfing at night.”

Water trickles down her ear, she wipes it away with her shirt. Lights twinkle in the distance on the other side of the bay.

“Are we going home?”

“Grandpa fell asleep,” says grandma.

“I have to wash my flippers and mask with water so the salt doesn't eat into them.” Grandma is gazing at the sea. The girl tries to spot the triangular sail on the horizon. But there is nothing out there. She sees the half-eaten sandwich beside her and takes a bite. She feels the taste of dead picarel in her mouth. Grandma spread the sandwich with that awful fish paste again.

“Grandma!?”

“Shh!” Grandma pulls a bottle from under the chair and takes a swig.

“Grandpa is sleeping.”

The girl takes another bite of her sandwich: she is hungry and it is not the right moment, grandpa is sleeping. When she is done eating, she leans forward: the row of white buoys around which she swam should be visible out there; the cape seems very far away now. As far as the unreachable stars shimmering in the sky like a shoal of picarel. When will

grandma get up and wake up grandpa? They were waiting only for him: he bought her flippers this morning and now he is asleep with big dark sunglasses on his nose. Grandma takes a pull at the bottle.

“Grandpa, wake up!” The girl shakes his arm. His head slumps over his shoulders.

“It’s alright. It’s alright,” says grandma and gets up. She walks away with slow steps, her dark figure reminds the girl of the swaying sea cucumber. She squats behind a big rock, a sharp sprinkling is heard. Grandma is coming back; before she sits down, the girl gets up quickly and says:

“Are we going home now?”

The folding chair creaks, grandma sighs. The girl realizes she was too late but does not sit back on the chair. She suddenly gets the feeling that she no longer belongs on land. Sitting in their chairs, grandpa and grandma are smaller than her and refuse to go home. Has she gone too deep, too far away from them today, is that why something between them has changed?

Grandma takes another swig, the girl marches off with feigned determination, before stopping after a few paces, loudly announcing: “Now we’re really going home!” – she hears grandma knocking over the bottle. It rolls away. The girl runs down to the sea, picks it up and hides it behind her back.

“Let’s go home!”

Grandma sinks deeper in her chair.

“Why don’t you listen to me?” asks the girl.

As grandma does not reply, she holds out the bottle and notices it is empty. The girl walks over to grandpa and starts shaking him. “Help me wake up grandpa!”

“It’s alright. It’s alright,” says grandma and goes on staring at the sea.

The girl puts the bottle in grandpa’s lap.

“Now I’m really leaving,” she says angrily and disappears behind their backs.

She stops after a few meters and looks at them. She stands still for about a minute, then goes back to them to get her flippers and mask.

“I’m leaving!”

And she really does. She does not stop for quite a while, then puts on her flippers and mask, inserts the mouthpiece in her mouth to hear her breathing and sits down. She looks back with the mask over her face: it seems as though nothing is wrong: grandpa and grandma are sitting in their folding chairs, resting. Only grandpa looks a bit like that pen shell buried in the sand. He is guarding a secret inside him, refusing to let it out of the shell.