

András Cserna-Szabó

*Spa-zee-baa*

They've been sitting on the riverbank for two hours, they've had four cans of Borsodi each. No bites yet, they're enjoying the peace and quiet. The frogs are croaking, the floats are bobbing in the water, the reeds are swaying gently in the breeze.

'Why'd you take your car?' asked one.

'What do you mean?' asked the other, agitated.

They've been coming fishing together for fifteen years, they were classmates in high school. Later they became family. Kálmán got married to Imre's little sister, Döníz.

'Because you normally take the bicycle', says Imre.

'And?'

'Just asking. It's a free world. We've been sitting here two hours now and you haven't said a single pissing word.'

'Neither have you.'

'What's up?'

'I've a hangover,' says Kálmán, switching to a gentler tone.

'Is that why you took the car?'

'No. If you must know, I took the car because I didn't dare leave it at home.'

'Why not?'

'Because of Döníz.'

'Why? What does Döníz do with the car when you leave it at home?'

‘Hoking, poking, sniffing about, fuck’s sake, if you really must know. She hoovers out the back seat and then searches for women’s hair. And used condoms under the car mats.’

Imre laughs.

‘Stop laughing, it scares off the fish.’

‘No it does not. That’s an urban legend. Fish are deaf as anything.’

They say nothing, they fish. A couple of minutes later Imre starts again.

‘So last night you got drunk, and brought a girl to the backseat.’

‘No I didn’t.’

‘Didn’t what?’

‘There was no girl.’

‘What then?’

‘A dwarf,’ says Kálmán.

Imre spits out his beer, he coughs.

‘What?’

‘A dwarf.’

‘Sneezy?’, asks Imre, and jumps out of his camping chair, he can’t bear the excitement.

‘No, asshole. A real one.’

‘You screwed a real dwarf?’

‘You idiot! I didn’t screw him. I just won him.’

‘You won him?’

‘We were playing poker at the Penguin. There was a guy there, Ukrainian, he said, but he spoke decent Hungarian. I won all

his money. I was blind drunk, but I couldn't lose. The guy was standing there in his boxers, I'd already got his rings, even his sunglasses.'

'Was this Ukrainian the dwarf?'

'No. The Ukrainian was the one who lost everything. But he wouldn't give up. He said he had a dwarf in his car outside. That was his bet.'

'A dwarf?'

'A dwarf.'

'But what's a dwarf worth?'

'That's what I asked. Then he said a dwarf is worth plenty. A good dwarf is worth his weight in gold. The Ukrainian bought him from a travelling circus, supposedly he cost a fortune.'

'Okay but why? What good's a dwarf?'

'The Ukrainian said he put the dwarf on all kinds of buses. On traffickers' buses and tourist buses. Into the baggage hold.'

'Put him where?'

'Down below, into the bottom of the bus, with all the bags. He put the dwarf into the suitcase, and he loaded the suitcase into the hold with the other bags. And then he put an empty suitcase in too. Then the Ukrainian bought a ticket, got onto the bus, and travelled to the last stop. While the bus was driving from A to B, the dwarf climbed out of the suitcase, took all the valuables out of the other bags, packed them into the empty bag, and then climbed back into his own bag. At the last stop the Ukrainian got off, took his two bags out of the hold, and struck gold, with nobody the wiser.'

‘You’re taking the piss,’ says Imre, dumbstruck, his pale moustache quivering nervously, he lifts a Borsodi out of the cooler, and almost sinks the whole can of beer in one gulp.

‘I’m not. The Ukrainian’s a millionaire because of that dwarf.’

‘If he’s a millionaire, then why did he bet his dwarf? Why not his money?’

‘He didn’t have any more cash on him. He had 1500 dollars, which I won. He was in transit.’

‘And where’s the dwarf now?’

Kálmán shifts uneasily in the camping chair, he tugs at his T-shirt stretched across his belly, and eventually confesses: ‘He’s here, in the car. In the boot.’

‘You idiot! You stuffed a living person in the boot of your car during a forty degree heat wave?’

‘Listen, if he survived from Kiev to Istanbul...’

‘You sick monster! Have you not heard of human rights? They’ll lock us both up!’

‘Relax. The devil isn’t as black as he’s painted...’

‘Relax how, you moron? If a policeman comes and opens the boot, we’ll sit twenty years for kidnapping!’

‘I didn’t kidnap him, Imre. Calm down! I won him at poker. I said.’

‘And who’s going to believe that?’

‘What about innocent until proven guilty? Is that all bollocks?’ asks Kálmán, getting frustrated.

Imre tries to calm down, he paces, he lights a cigarette.

‘Open that boot now!’ shouts Imre.

‘Don’t get all worked up, Imre! We could become millionaires with this dwarf!’

‘You’ve gone mad! You’ve lost your mind!’

‘Listen, Imre. We’ll put him on the bus in the village now to Budapest. The same deal. He digs through all the stuff down below, you ride the bus with the rest of the passengers up top. You get off at Népliget, you grab the two suitcases, and I’ll be waiting for you with you the car in front of the football stadium.’

Imre takes a long drag on his cigarette.

‘Tell me, Kálmán. Do you know Jesus?’

‘Sure.’

‘Love thy neighbour, that sort of thing.’

‘Sure.’

‘Do you think this fits in to all that, locking a dwarf into a baggage hold?’

‘I can confess!’

‘And what’ll you say in the presence of God? Answer me that.’

‘I’ll work it out.’

‘Okay. If you don’t let him out, I’m not fishing with you!’

‘Don’t be stupid, Imre!’

‘In fact, I’m going to the police station right now to report you. No, first I’m going to find Döníz.’

The float jumps, it darts towards the middle of the river. Kálmán shouts: ‘You’ve got a bite, Imre!’

Imre tosses his beer and his cigarette, he walks over to Kálmán’s ten-year-old blue Opel, and he opens the boot. A dwarf is lying in the boot. His body is wrapped up in a blanket,

the blanket is tied up with string. There's brown tape over the dwarf's mouth. He looks terrified, his hair is greasy, his brow is beady with sweat.

'Imre, think about it!' says Kálmán, pleading.

Imre undoes the knot on the string. He pulls the tape off the dwarf's mouth. He lifts him out of the boot. The dwarf slips out of the blanket. The blanket falls to the ground. They lock eyes for half a minute. The dwarf doesn't know what to make of the situation, he just looks at Imre in surprise.

'Go on, get out of here! Go!' says Imre in English.

The dwarf slowly starts walking away, constantly glancing back, expecting some kind of trap. When he reaches the dam, he starts running. Faster and faster. He's barefoot, he's wearing shorts and a tank top. Kálmán lights up, he opens a Borsodi. Imre silently watches as the dwarf runs across the top of the dam.

'Happy now? That's our millions jogging off, prick. We could have been rich. You can go back to slogging away in poly-tunnels now,' says Kálmán, and reels in the line.

The dwarf is about to disappear over the far end of the dam, but suddenly he stops. He turns around and looks at the fishing men.

'Spa-zee-baa!' he shouts, then starts running again, and disappears from sight.

'What did he say?' asks Imre.

Kálmán pokes a worm onto the hook, and considers whether he'll confess to Imre, that in the back seat of the car, wrapped up in a blanket, is a second dwarf – because it was two dwarfs he won last night.