

And so, let's say it right away, that it is about my sister that I am going to talk to you today. I am going to tear myself away from an inordinate laziness for writing, to celebrate on a background of nostalgia, so strong that I am back again in those ignite years, celebrating our twenty years of complicity, she, my bohemian sister with her wagon, carrying her images, her dog, who so easily used to shed his hair, her awesome energy, she who steps into Prague fearing not to be repulsed by the slightly hostile melancholy of the country, as Havel is crying over the end of Tchékoslovakia, i.e. two good years after the Velvet Revolution of 1992, as the illusions for many had disappeared under the blades of a Europe entirely devoted to her financial pornography, and especially in Prague, this black city where history gets deposited in thick layers, like grease on the gold of the statues, the city where everything seems to be for sale, Skoda, the good beer, the girls for Germans on the side of the road to Plzen, the crumbled palaces, the hotels on Wenceslas piazza, baroque art, the paintings of Mucha, or the vinarna dear to Habal, or Menzel. And there comes forth Merry Nadine. She knocks at my door, at the Stepanska number 35, this famous franco-tchèque institution where I work at bringing together these two countries with so much zeal that I had become one with Olga. A zeal which has not prevented me from being willingly prudent, even discouraging with all those men and women who are coming from abroad thinking that Prague is the new city of light and that they are going to meet Kupka, Kafka or even Kundera and to whom I say that those lead years had actually destroyed one or two generations of Czechs. And that it was not going to be on the morrow that art was going to find in it its eminent place.

And so I gave all these good reasonable reasons marked with the experience that I had acquired in my corner of that city whose façade was constructed, which was painted on the surface, but which inside was gnawed. The difference this time was that I had in front of me, a woman, tall, illumined just enough, who introduces herself as an art merchant, who believes that her destiny is here in Prague. Actually not exactly in Prague, but in its northern suburb, by the Vltava, a village, Roztoki, not even ten thousand inhabitants. That place has a castle, highjacked since dozens of years by socialist and popular associations in which there seems to be enough square meters to rent, but still enough, to make a gallery, a place where she will bring— sure of her success— great artists who will realize multiples, works, will create in situ, in this big Central Europe, that

they don't know , but that they were going to discover in great haste, because Prague makes one dream. She trusts me with her project; she wants to live here, to be happy here. She is the only one at the time so determined. She is so ignorant of everything, of the Czech language, of the obstacles, so much so that she is impressive. She impresses me. And I don't need a lot of time to realize that she is sincere, that she will do as many times as needed the thousand kilometers between Paris and Prague , before she can see her gallery spring out of the ground, the Gandy Gallery, where she will bring her Ben, Raynaud, Genz, Buren, the works as well as the artists, to whom she will show the way to the happiness of being part of the reconquest of this extraordinary part of world culture. She will invite them to share the joy of being in the traces of such a history, and no matter really if she does not earn her bread. It is herself that she rebuilds, in a daily struggle, an absolute determination, the vision , the admiration of what was taking place there at that moment of ourselves, our thirty and some years , our loves, our solitudes, our brotherhood, she, Nadine, whom I have never left since, neither when she came to the Bauhaus center of Prague, nor later when she flew to Bratislava, thirteen years after that day, when she stepped into Prague, who was not waiting for her, who made her my friend; the friend of the passers by in the city , the lovers of the beautiful and awesome, the children of Havel and Dubcek, and of the big white birds flowing down the river at the foot of the castle, where freedom had just made its nest, that unique moment, warm with the thick thatch which is called a meeting. A meeting that one remembers with the pride of having believed in it, indeed, with the heart, the belly, the mouth, and the eyes, that one has for the other , so close, so devouring and so eminently indispensable.

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(Translated from the French by Simone Fattal)

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