

Torn: the story of a Lithuanian migrant

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Abstract

This doctorate consists of two parts: a novel *Torn* and the exegesis: *Writing the migrant story: nostalgia, identity and belonging*. The novel and theoretical exegesis are intended to complement each other in capturing the 20th century Lithuanian historical and political circumstances that led to Lithuanian emigration to Australia.

In my novel and exegesis, my intention has been to explore how the experiences of Lithuanian refugees and migrants differ, especially in relation to nostalgia, identity and belonging, depending on the time and circumstances of their arrival in Australia. Lithuanians came to Australia from the same place geographically, but from a different place in terms of history and politics.

My novel is a creative representation of the Lithuanian migrants' experience in the diaspora. It is set in the 1980s and 90s when the political, socio-economic and cultural environment radically shifted under Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* (restructure). Daina, a theatre producer from Soviet Lithuania, comes to Australia to look after her great-uncle, Algis. As a postwar Lithuanian refugee, settled here since the 1940s, Algis has strong views about his Soviet-occupied homeland and its people. He lets Daina know that he hates anything associated with Russia and Russians who, in his opinion, were responsible for killings and deportations of Lithuanians during the war. Daina keeps her diary and writes short stories to escape her uninviting surroundings and the postwar Lithuanian characters' suspicion of why did she come. She struggles to accept loss of her professional status and fractured relationships with men. This, together with her realisation that she is not being accepted in the Australian-Lithuanian community, shatters her sense of belonging and intensifies her nostalgia for homeland. After six years, she returns to Lithuania to discover that the "home" she yearned for all that time is no longer there. *Torn* is the story of a Soviet Lithuanian citizen's life in Australia, it is a story that has not been previously told in fiction.

In the exegesis, my aim has been to reflect on the diversity of genres dealing with nostalgia, identity and belonging, that range from historical sources to autobiographical

and journalistic accounts, to the novel writing. This helped me to develop a dialogue between the non-fictional to fictional genres, and to contribute to creative scholarship.

In this doctorate, my aim has been to capture the significance of leaving a homeland for another country, the way this interrupts the familiarity of identity and fractures sense of belonging that does not allow migrants to reconcile with their past.

Declaration

I, Grazina Pranauskas, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Torn: the story of a Lithuanian migrant* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and excluding bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

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Grazina Pranauskas

Table of contents

Abstract	2
Declaration	4
Acknowledgements	5
<i>Torn: the story of a Lithuanian migrant, novel</i>	7
Writing the migrant story: nostalgia, identity and belonging, exegesis	209
Introduction Constructing my PhD novel	210
Chapter 1 Politicised identities in twentieth-century Lithuania	225
Chapter 2 Writing <i>Torn</i> – the migrant writer	243
Chapter 3 Migrant women’s voices in Australia	256
Chapter 4 Writing about history and place	267
Conclusion	279
Bibliography	284

Torn: the story of a Lithuanian migrant

Novel

1986

Daina had been walking towards the departure gates when she bumped into Toivo.

‘What are you doing here?’ she asked.

‘Came to say goodbye,’ he replied. Daina blushed. ‘I wish I was going with you, keeping you company. It’s such a long journey.’

‘I’ll be fine,’ Daina said.

‘I’m worried you’ll never return,’ he said, looking into the distance, his hands tightly squeezed into his pockets.

‘I wonder why that would worry you. You’ll have plenty of fun without me,’ she said in one breath, trying to catch the expression in his light green eyes partly hidden behind his spectacles.

Toivo took her hand and kissed her fingertips; she felt his soft moustache against her skin. Daina withdrew her hand and adjusted her unruly, ash-blond hair. He spoke in Russian with an Estonian accent. She didn’t understand Estonian and he didn’t speak Lithuanian. Russian was the only language they had in common.

‘I have nothing to hide.’

‘Who was the girl you were with yesterday then? I saw you!’

‘When? How?’

‘Simple. I went to the university to look for you. I wanted to surprise you, and to say goodbye. But you were busy...’

‘You didn’t tell me you were coming. I thought you were arriving by plane from Vilnius this morning.’

‘I changed my mind and caught the train,’ she said, trying to suppress her anger, biting her lip. ‘Who is she?’

‘Believe me, Daina, it was nothing. She is a good friend, a fellow student.’

‘What’s her name?’

‘Larisa, but let’s not talk about it, please. She’s not important.’

‘How old is she?’

‘Twenty-four, like you and I. Please don’t mention her. You are leaving soon and there is so much to say.’

‘In two hours I will board the plane,’ Daina said.

‘You know I only have eyes for you. You were my Altay Mountain companion and I’ll never forget you,’ he said. ‘Please write to me.’

‘I’ll think about it,’ she replied, feeling more relaxed, but still curious about his relationship with Larisa.

‘And don’t stay too long, please.’

‘Sure. Just six months with my great-uncle or even less if I don’t like it.’

‘How can you not like Australia? I have heard people there keep kangaroos and koalas as pets, and rosellas wake them up in the morning.’

‘And they have fruit we can’t get here, like fresh mangos and figs,’ she added.

‘And you may eat marzipan,’ he teased her.

‘Yes, marzipan. I’ve never tasted it – only heard of it in my mother’s lullabies.’

They sat for a while in silence, observing the passers-by.

‘I don’t know if I can trust you,’ Daina said.

‘Don’t worry. You are my girl, and that’s all that matters.’

‘I mean, I don’t know if I can trust you with my secret.’

‘What’s on your mind, my dearest?’

‘I am going to see my great-uncle and look after him because he wants me to. He is very rich and after he dies our family will inherit everything he has, because he lives alone and has no one in Australia. We are his closest relatives.’

‘Looking after someone is a big job,’ Toivo said, adjusting his glasses. ‘Is he old?’

‘Yes, nearly eighty, but don’t worry: things are different in Australia. Looking after him will be easy. He’s got everything he needs. You can get whatever you want over there, even a nurse that comes morning and night. So, she can look after his needs. To me, going to Australia is the greatest adventure. I’m going to enjoy the fruits of nature, the different cities, and travelling wherever I can get to.’

‘I’m glad you are thinking that way,’ Toivo replied quietly, looking at his shoes. ‘Good luck with your plans anyway. You do whatever you need to do, as long as you come back, that’s all I’m asking.’

He took her hand into his and spoke about his plans to settle in Lithuania after completing his degree.

‘I need you back. Otherwise what would I do living in Lithuania without you?’

‘You can live in Tallinn. Why don’t you? It’s your home.’

‘I know but still I’d like to live in Lithuania.’

When it was time to leave, Toivo walked with her to the departure gates, gently embraced her and gave her a kiss. She hesitantly kissed him back.

At the gate she turned around for the last time, and saw him adjusting his glasses, and staring at her with a serious expression on his face. She waved and proceeded to the departure lounge and then boarded the Aeroflot plane UM86.

While people settled into their seats, Daina had time to find her notebook. She’d kept a journal since the age of twelve and now she wanted to document the details of her flight, and the exciting adventures she hoped she would have on her first overseas trip. She studied her ticket: Moscow-Tashkent-Delhi-Singapore-Brisbane-Melbourne. The flight times, printed on a piece of shiny pink paper, indicated that the first leg of her journey would last for thirteen hours.

While watching those around her squeezing their bags into the overhead compartments, she trembled. As a Soviet citizen, she wasn’t allowed to take goods worth more than 100 rubles out of the country. In her suitcase she had the gifts she’d purchased in Kaunas and Vilnius for her great-uncle Algis. They had cost her over 300 rubles. She had vodka in her case too, and was concerned it might spill. Each time the flight steward walked past, she worried they would order her to disembark.

Finally, the plane took off. She blocked her ears with her fingers. The noise and rapid speed disorientated her. Her pen and the notebook fell onto the floor. She tried to keep her mouth open and her fingers in her ears until the pressure in the cabin stabilised. Finally, the pilot announced that it was safe to unfasten seatbelts and walk around, but Daina didn’t move; she was too scared.

The plane landed briefly in Tashkent, and at Singapore airport she had to change planes. While she waited to board her new plane, she spent her time carefully recording her experiences in her notebook: there were people sleeping, reading, talking, walking or playing with their children; pilots and stewards with their light luggage entering and exiting through the departure and arrival gates; every few minutes there were announcements made but she couldn’t understand most of them. She noticed a couple that looked her parents’ age sitting in front of her. They were smiling at each other and

conversing with ease. Daina remembered her parents sitting in the kitchen and silently eating their dinner, then her father grabbing his hat and locking the door of the flat from the outside. Every night, after dinner he went out. Often Daina didn't hear him coming home. Oh, how she wished that her parents were like this couple in front of her – friendly and passionate about each other, talking, holding hands, sharing their laughs. Her parents never did anything like that. When they spoke, her father used to swear at her mother for being a stupid woman. Then he used to go out, and she used to cry. Daina didn't know what to do, and she used to join her mother, and they both cried. If her grandparents weren't living with them, things might have been even worse.

Her father had been a strict parent. He'd belted her when she was little for not eating quickly enough and for being late for school even when it was his fault. He was the one who took too long to cook her beetroot soup. She'd hurried – eating it while it was too hot, but she'd still been late for her lesson and the teacher was angry. She'd wished her mother could take her to school but she had been too ill. Her grandparents took her when they could but often they had to leave early for the market to sell crafts her mother and grandmother made. They crocheted serviettes and baby blankets and knitted jumpers, socks and hats. Her father was cruel; he punished her for every small thing she did wrong, often making her kneel on peas spread around the wooden floor. This punishment could last for half an hour each time and when he'd finally allow her to stand up, she'd keep kneeling, eyes full of tears, trying not to move or turn around. Her knees would be burning like fire and she'd wanted to scream. Her father used to say:

‘Our daughter will go a long way. Look how long she can kneel on peas. They are as hard as rocks and she is still there in the corner. Look, look, what a stupid stubborn girl.’

Now, through her, he is hoping to get Algis' inheritance. Daina had a sharp pain in her chest. It was the pain of her parents' unhappiness and her father's infidelity. She knew that she was doing the right thing in going to Australia. She wanted a fresh start. She wanted to live her life differently from her parents and she saw this as her greatest opportunity.

She had nine hours to wait. She closed her eyes and drifted in and out of a light sleep. In her dream, she saw her school friends, Sonata and Darius. They were kissing, their hands full of summer berries and faces smudged with red and purple. Then Darius was calling her. She reached out to him but he disappeared. She woke up feeling restless and anxious for the journey to end.

In the Brisbane airport transit hall, she saw stuffed koalas at the souvenir shop. She touched one. It felt smooth. The koala's eyes were dark and shiny, and a baby koala was protruding from the mother's pouch. She felt a warm sensation travelling through her body, thinking about how soon she'd be able to cuddle the kangaroos and koalas waiting for her at Algis' farm. She smiled and left the shop.

While walking around the airport, she started to think about Algis. Would she like him? She hoped he was not like her father, who had no respect for women. She didn't know what she would do if Algis was like her father. Her thoughts were interrupted by the announcement to proceed to the departure gate.

*

After her arrival in Melbourne, exhausted and sweaty, Daina waited at the carousel for her suitcase. She placed her small, manicured hand on her amber necklace. The transparent beads were smooth, like round bonbons, reminding her of home. She touched her lips, remembering Toivo's kiss. She collected her heavy suitcase and carefully checked to see if anything was leaking. It was dry. Smiling to herself she passed through the 'Nothing to Declare' gate. On her way out, Daina looked around. There were hundreds of people in the arrival lounge, but she spotted Algis at once. She recognised him from the photos he'd sent her grandmother, his sister Roma.

Algis was short like Daina but otherwise he resembled Roma and spoke in a similar manner, slowly and clearly.

'Labas Daina.'

She was pleased to hear him speaking Lithuanian. For the last thirty-seven hours sitting at the airports and on the planes, she hadn't heard her native language. He greeted her with open arms and a broad smile. She also greeted him with a hug.

'Labas rytas dėde!'

‘Sveika atvykus į Australiją!’ he said, carrying her suitcase to his car. She observed his dim grey eyes. He appeared healthy, and yet, his eyes seemed lifeless. Was he tired of living? He was slim, and looked surprisingly well for a man of seventy-eight.

‘You are so strong and sun-tanned.’

‘I work outside in the sun every day,’ he replied jokingly, opening the front passenger door and then placing her case in the boot of his old car.

‘I’m so glad you are here. Now I have someone to care for me and someone to give my inheritance to. You are my only family.’

Daina’s face lit up as she smiled, settling next to Algis in the front seat.

‘I’m very pleased to be here,’ she said.

On their way to Whittlesea they talked about Daina’s father, Tadas, Algis’ nephew. Algis was pleased to hear Tadas was in good health and kept himself busy at work, but he was more interested in Roma’s life. He hadn’t seen her since 1944.

‘How is my dear sister?’

‘She is not too bad, just not as steady on her feet. My parents look after her.’

‘How many of you live in that one bedroom flat?’

‘My parents and Roma. I work and live in Kaunas.’

‘One less mouth to feed then.’

‘Yes. I haven’t lived with my family since I finished high school and left Kretinga.’

‘Does Roma talk about me?’

‘Yes. She told me how well you got along when you were young. How you bought her a hair comb with the money you saved working in the potato fields. How you went on bicycle rides and swam in the river.’

‘Did she tell you how we played cards under the dinner table by torch light?’

‘No. She probably forgot. Since my grandfather died, she hasn’t talked much.’

‘That was the year before last, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Was he a good man?’

‘Very good, and very quiet. Both of my grandparents often prayed in their room, and spent their time reading.’

‘I pray too: for Roma’s health and for my wife’s soul, may she rest in peace.’

‘Your sister is an excellent seamstress. She used to make clothes from the materials you sent us. She used the Australian wool for knitting. Ah, the jumpers, hats and gloves she made were so warm.’

‘I see. That pleases me. Anything to help my family is a pleasure. I have more than you over there.’

‘Thank you. You are so generous and kind.’

‘If I can help, I’m happy, my dear. The war and the breaking up of families was a disaster. Nobody who lived through the horrors of deportation or bombardments can free themselves from these memories. But at least we survived.’

Soon the city was behind them and there were no more multi-storey buildings, no more trams, fewer and fewer houses and larger blocks surrounded by high fences. It was early morning and there was not a person in sight. Daina looked out of the car window at the flat ground, at the sheep grazing in the fields, at the huge black crows that Algis called magpies, and at the pink-chested rosellas flying around. As they drove further, she noticed wide tree trunks and patchy shrubbery.

‘It’s so flat, mostly animals and birds. Not many people at all,’ she said.

‘See the mountain?’ Algis pointed his finger towards the green hill.

‘Yes. I didn’t realise you had mountains here.’

‘In comparison to Everest, it’s a dwarf. That hill is at Kinglake, past my house, past Whittlesea. I love living amongst nature. But also the further out one lives, the cheaper the properties are. I have a lot of land and it’s a good investment,’ he explained.

They drove through a gate along a driveway with trees stretching all the way to the house and beyond. She saw a hill in walking distance from the house. Algis showed her around, leading her to the shed where several cows were stabled. He pointed to the hen house, where he kept his twelve chickens and a rooster locked up.

‘I have to lock them up to protect them from wild foxes.’

She was curious about spiders. He told her to wear gloves when working outside and to be vigilant.

‘The ones with red marks on their backs are very dangerous,’ he said. ‘You must be careful not to touch anything in the shed without checking first.’ Then Algis pointed proudly towards the hill where a couple of sheep were grazing, exclaiming, ‘This is all

mine – as far as the eye can see!’ Daina smiled to herself. He looked tiny against the backdrop of his huge farm.

‘Would you like to see some kangaroos?’

‘Yes,’ Daina replied.

They left her luggage in the car and started to climb up the hillside.

‘I can’t believe the space you have here,’ Daina said when they reached the top. ‘I have never seen so much empty land. Back home, most people live in blocks of flats so similar to each other that at times they get lost. And here you are living surrounded by nature.’

‘Yes, I am.’

They sat on the top of the hill and Daina inhaled the fresh air.

‘The panorama is beautiful from here. It’s vast, green, and the colour of the sky is such a light blue. My eyes are sore from the intensity of the bright light.’

‘It can be a bit glary.’

‘Are those lakes yours?’

‘They’re not lakes. They’re dams. The rain fills them. My animals use them. Also snakes.’

‘Snakes? Are they poisonous?’ Daina jumped to her feet.

‘Tiger snakes. They actually are, but if you don’t step on them, they won’t bite.’

‘They could be here, anywhere,’ she glanced over her shoulder. ‘Can you see any, Algis?’

‘Relax. Snakes and spiders do not harm you as long as you don’t disturb them.’

‘Still, it’s scary. Who lives over there?’ Daina asked, pointing to a house in the next valley.

‘Those are my closest neighbours, Mr and Mrs Smith. They have their own tractor, a truck and a bull. John brings the bull to my cows. Only one of them, Star, gives milk, and the others I grow for meat. John helps me to slaughter the animals when it is time, and his wife, Sue, carves the meat. I keep it in my spare fridge. The meat of a young calf is tender and tasty.’

‘I don’t really eat meat. I like cakes and biscuits.’

‘No worries, you can get them any time. Our supermarket shelves are full of sweets. But we’ll have some meat as well, alright?’

Daina nodded. 'I feel slightly dizzy from all the fresh air, as if it's too much oxygen.'

Algis wanted to show her the kangaroos, but after waiting for more than half an hour, none appeared. By the time they returned to the house it was close to eight. Algis offered Daina some coffee and biscuits. He had breakfast but she didn't feel hungry. Later he showed her to her room upstairs and she had a shower and rested. Looking around she noticed that the paint was peeling off the walls and the wooden floorboards were very worn. She observed the thick layer of dust covering a small table near the window and decided that Algis definitely needed her help.

After lunch she opened her suitcase and presented him with various gifts she had brought from home – a loaf of bread, a bottle of vodka, a linen tablecloth, a book of Lithuanian photographs and an amber rosary.

'How did you manage to get this through customs?' Algis said as he brought the loaf close to his nostrils.

'I don't know. I just walked through the 'Nothing to Declare' exit and that was it. Nobody asked me anything. Should I have told them about the bread?'

'Never mind, never mind,' he replied, patting the loaf. Tears were rolling down his cheeks. Then he put the rosary around his neck.

'Your gifts have taken me back in time,' he said. 'When the war broke out we didn't know who would win – the Germans or the Russians. The year before it ended, there was a lot of confusion. We feared for our lives. Our family home was bombed.'

'I think I would have died of fear,' Daina said.

'Everybody was frightened. There was so much uneasiness and it led to people running away to try and find safety. My wife, our son and I found ourselves on a road to Germany. There were no borders, the observation decks deserted, thousands of people crowding the DP camps. We lived in three different DP camps.'

'What does DP stand for?' Daina asked.

'Displaced Persons,' he replied.

'Ah.'

‘Anyway, when the Germans lost the war and the camps began to close down, we were forced to emigrate – returning to Lithuania was out of question. We would’ve been shot by the Russians who, by that time, were spreading propaganda about Lithuanians living abroad. They said that we were the traitors.’

‘How can you be traitors if you ran for your life?’

‘It’s all about politics, Daina. We are traitors and you are communists, so to speak. The Russians completely control our homeland, and brainwash Soviet citizens like you.’

‘I didn’t know Lithuania was under Russian control,’ Daina said.

‘Most are afraid to talk, that’s why you don’t know things. People back home are a bright and happy lot, helping the Soviets to build a classless society. I’m very relieved I escaped. I chose Australia as my temporary home but ended up living here for more than thirty years,’ Algis said.

As Daina listened to Algis, she regretted that her grandparents and parents hadn’t told her these stories.

‘But you could come back to Kretinga and stay with us, surely?’

‘You can hardly fit into the tiny government flat yourselves. It’s too late anyway. I built this house with my own hands – not one, but two storeys. I have the animals, the car, all my friends are here, and besides, how can I leave my wife’s grave? It’s been ten years now,’ he said.

‘That means I was fourteen when she died. I remember Roma mentioning this to me. You must be so lonely.’

‘Yes. Well. I had to adjust to a bachelor’s life.’ He lifted his cup from the table and suggested they sit in the lounge room to watch television.

‘We’ll talk more about this and many other things later,’ he said.

Overwhelmed by the smell of fresh air, the openness of the land, and Algis’ hospitality, Daina had forgotten that she’d hardly slept during her journey. But by late afternoon, she couldn’t keep her eyes open and fell asleep on the couch.

*

The following night, Algis’ house was full of visitors. To celebrate Daina’s arrival, he’d invited some of his Lithuanian friends for dinner. Rimvydas and his wife, Ona, were an

elderly couple about Algis' age. Ona, like Daina's grandmother, had grey hair gathered into a bun. She was very slender and her face was pale. She wore a white silk blouse, dark cardigan and black slacks. Daina remembered that her grandmother never approved of women wearing pants. 'A lady should always be a lady – not a man,' she used to say. Rimvydas was tall. He wore a dark suit and a light blue shirt with a tie. He also wore a vest underneath his unbuttoned jacket. His hair was wavy and white.

The second couple, Jonas and Zosè, wore identical green jumpers and slacks. Zosè's short hair was tightly curled. They both had chestnut hair. They must be applying the colour at the same time, sharing the dye, helping each other to dye their hair, Daina thought. Zosè gave her a bunch of white lilies. She said they were from their garden.

Daina was taken aback when she saw that the guests had also brought food – herrings, an apple cake and alcohol. In Lithuania the hosts provided all the food and drinks. She commented on this to Algis' friends.

'But it's good to bring what we love to eat. Algis usually feeds us bacon and eggs. He's a single man and not a very good cook,' Zosè replied, making everybody laugh.

Algis invited them to sit down and filled their glasses. Soon his guests began to sing the old Lithuanian songs, *Stok ant akmenėlio* and *Ar aš tau sese nesakiau?*

After a few drinks the men wiped their tears away and raised their voices louder and louder. Daina didn't understand why they were so upset.

'Rimvydas and Jonas came to Australia alone, without their families,' Algis explained to her. 'To this day they feel guilty about leaving their partners behind. But their loved ones either died or disappeared during the war. Their lives would've been different if not for that stupid war. We Lithuanians have always been reluctant to move around or change our addresses. It's in our blood and in the blood of our ancestors to stay put, to plough our land, to harvest it, to grow the vegetables and fruit, and to care for our animals. We love agriculture; we are attached to our land.'

'I know,' Daina said. 'I was born and raised in a village-like Kretinga. But I think it's boring to stay put. That's why I wanted to study in a capital city and get away from the vegetable gardens and the same view. It's so provincial. I've always wanted to see the world.'

'You're young and naïve and don't know what you are saying,' Algis replied.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, life on my farm is very provincial, and there is nothing much here to see.’

‘Aren’t you planning to show me Australia?’

‘Yes, I will, a little bit at a time,’ he said, smiling.

His friends asked Daina about Lithuania. They had many questions about people they remembered from their towns and villages back home, but she didn’t recognise any of the names. She knew they wanted to hear stories of home so she spoke to them about the countryside, especially the lush forests of Žemaitija, where every autumn she picked mushrooms with her family.

‘How big are they today – still huge?’ Jonas asked.

‘As big as your hand,’ she said, noticing Jonas adjusting his hearing aide. ‘The best thing is finding a whole family of *baravykai*. Usually you spot one large mushroom first, and then if you look around carefully you soon discover five or six smaller *baravykai* with their brown tops and long white stems.’

‘Delicious!’ Ona nodded enthusiastically.

‘And yes, like in the old times, we still fry them in butter,’ Daina added.

‘Shame that we don’t have *baravykai* here, only the champignons. The ones we never bothered picking back home,’ Rimvydas said.

‘Our forests are full of real mushrooms – tasty *raudonikiai*, *lepšiai*, *voveruškos*, *rudmėsės* – apparently more than a thousand species,’ Daina continued.

‘My favourite are *lepšiai* with their soft and spongy umbrella-shaped parasols. I can remember my excitement discovering tiny mushrooms hidden under a layer of green moss,’ Ona said. ‘Back in Lithuania, in my village of Smilgiai, we used to eat salted mushrooms. We kept them in salt to preserve them over the long winter. They stayed so fresh! Just before cooking, my mother would immerse them in boiling milk, and the pleasant aroma of freshly planted fir trees would waft around the kitchen. I remember sitting at the table with my brothers and sisters watching my mother fill our plates with boiled potatoes and mushrooms, garnished with white creamy sauce. It was my favourite meal.’

‘Do you remember *raudonoji musmirė*?’ she asked.

‘Of course we do,’ Algis replied. ‘When we were little, we wanted to pat their heads and pick them, but our father taught us never to touch them. He said they’re colourful on the outside but poisonous on the inside. Still, *raudonoji musmirė* fascinated us with their red hats decorated with white dots and long slender stems like a ballerina’s tutu dress.’

‘How is life in Lithuania?’ Rimvydas asked, putting his empty glass on a table.

‘Good. My parents and my grandmother are healthy. We have good neighbours.’

‘Our neighbours were the opposite,’ Ona said. ‘They turned out to be spies and reported us to the Russians. We were lucky to escape before they captured us.’

‘But why would they take you away?’ Daina asked.

‘For no reason at all. I suppose for being good farmers,’ Ona replied.

Daina continued after a pause. ‘My mother and grandmother knit gloves, hats, scarves and socks which sell well at the market. My father works in a factory. And I work as a theatre producer. So, we are content.’

‘That doesn’t sound like what we’ve been told about our homeland. Some of our friends who returned to Lithuania in the late seventies and early eighties were greatly disappointed,’ Jonas said, exhaling a long and narrow stream of smoke. ‘They felt they were constantly being watched. They were not allowed to travel outside the capital and even discovered tiny microphones attached to the night lamps in their hotel rooms.’

‘I’ve walked past Vilnius’ International Hotel many times, not realising what was going on inside,’ Daina said.

‘That’s right. Do you think we are happy that our relatives were forced into collective farming and their land taken away? We know that people steal the government’s property and produce from the collective farms, so-called *kolkhozes*, then sell them privately, just to get by,’ Zosė said.

‘I will tell you something,’ Rimvydas said. ‘My friend Kazys stayed at the hotel in Vilnius when he visited. Every night, he addressed the lamp in his bedroom saying: “Good night, my lovely lamp. Let’s have a rest. No news for you today,” before switching it off. He wanted to let them know he knew they were listening. The lucky ones snuck out to the countryside to see their properties, but found that their homes were in poor shape. Strangers, apparently Russians, had moved onto their land; they were working and ploughing their land.’

‘Or drinking their life away and not worrying about the weeds,’ Ona added. ‘My sister wrote to me that our house in Smilgiai is collapsing, and that four different families, including our ex-servants, are living there in the space made for one family. How can we claim it back? There is nothing to claim – better burn it all – the shed, the house, everything. But I feel sorry for them too, because they have nowhere else to go, and even worse, because the houses belong to the government – nobody cares if they deteriorate.’

‘That’s terrible,’ Daina said.

‘How come the Soviets let you out?’ Jonas asked, and Daina admitted to them that her friend’s father, a prominent diplomat, had helped her to obtain the visa.

‘Is he a communist?’ Ona wanted to know.

‘I’m not sure,’ Daina replied.

‘He must be. There is no other way if you want to have a good job, a flat, a car or to go abroad. We know. We learn everything through the *Amerikos balsas* radio program,’ Rimvydas said, raising his dark eyebrows. He had a sad expression on his wrinkled face.

‘I am blessed to be one of the luckiest people. I can’t even believe I am in Australia!’ Daina exclaimed. ‘I hardly knew anything about it before I arrived. There was no information about it in the local library. Also, Algis didn’t mention much about Australia or Australians in his letters. How happy I am that his invitation has served as a ticket to an adventure.’

‘How did you organise her coming?’ Ona asked Algis.

‘I invited my sister as well, but Roma can’t travel. Although she is four years younger than me, she has more serious health issues. So, she suggested Daina should come by herself, and I am glad she is here. She is young and fit and can help me around the farm.’ Algis was beginning to slur his words. While the women had been sipping champagne, the men had managed to finish six bottles of beer, a bottle of vodka and half a bottle of cognac. Daina wasn’t surprised. In Lithuania drinking was a huge problem. The party continued late into the night, ending with hugs and kisses. Back home only close relatives kissed and Daina felt uncomfortable, especially when Rimvydas kissed her on the lips. He smelt of vodka, onion and perspiration. His tie was

undone and his clothes stained. She walked outside and spat on the grass, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand.

When they were all gone, Daina helped Algis clear away the dirty dishes, cigarette butts and empty bottles. He went to bed but she wasn't sleepy. She was amazed that Algis' friends, especially the men, were sad, and drank too much. The women had been friendly and chatty but nosey.

She stood at the kitchen window, trembling with excitement at the possibility of a new life. She gazed down the long driveway, framed by gum trees, wondering what Australia had in store for her. She took half a bottle of wine to the lounge room. Though her head was already spinning, she took a sip, and then another, soon emptying the bottle. Then she grabbed Algis' coat, turned the lights off, opened the front door and walked towards the trees, fascinated and frightened by their height. She wished she could climb one of them and sit on the highest branch. But she knew it would be in vain because it was so dark she wouldn't be able to see anything.

'I have plenty of time for that,' she said, hugging the closest gum tree, feeling the silky surface of its trunk. Taking in its gentle acid, Daina sat under the tree. Before long she drifted off to sleep.

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In the morning, Algis and Daina drove to the railway station, left their car, and caught a train to the city. While glancing through the window, Daina admired the one and two-storey houses with their pink, white and red blossoming camellias and bright yellow wattle trees in the backyards.

'How strange that in winter you have so many colourful flowers,' she said.

'In a couple of months, the white magnolias will be in bloom. I'm sure you will enjoy them too.'

'I've never seen magnolias,' she replied.

'You will. And as we don't have real winters here, Daina, we have lots of plants blooming all year around.'

'I love this climate. It seems that people here don't have to wear many clothes or worry about their feet and nose freezing,' Daina said.

‘That’s right,’ Algis replied. ‘But now it’s winter and the temperature could drop to zero.’

‘Luckily I brought my jacket,’ she said, tucking her hands into her deep pockets.

In the city Daina was overwhelmed by the politeness of shopkeepers, policemen, train conductors, and passers-by. Everybody seemed to be smiling and she relaxed, enjoying her outing. They caught a tram to the zoo and for the first time in her life she saw possums, kangaroos, and koalas. She asked Algis to take photos of her standing near the wombat and emu enclosures. She was mesmerised watching the baby platypus swim. In her notebook she wrote short descriptions of the animals she saw, what they ate and how they behaved in front of the visitors. That night, she composed a letter to her family including her first impressions of Australia and Algis’ farm.

After the first few days, Algis started introducing her to the work on the farm. This was all new to Daina as she’d never done physical work. She told Algis that she had worked on different theatre productions at the cultural centre in Kaunas and had never touched a shovel or had to clean up after animals. Now she was told she’d have to milk a cow, feed chickens, clean the large house and cook three hot meals a day. She didn’t know how to do most of these tasks and Algis was surprised.

‘I thought Roma taught you how to work.’

‘No. We live in a flat and have no animals. Also, nobody cooks in our family as the canteen across the road is open all day. My grandparents and I can share one three course meal between the three of us.’

‘Really?’

‘They would eat a bowl of soup and half a bun each. I would eat the main course and drink a glass of compote or juice.’

‘How much does such a luxury cost?’

‘One ruble.’

‘That’s really cheap. But that means you can’t cook, oh dear. Since Valerija died, I haven’t really had hot meals.’

‘Don’t worry. I attended a cooking course before I left and I know how to prepare our national dishes.’

‘Thank God for that. For a moment I thought I was going to starve if all you could give was your artistic imagination!’

They both laughed.

In Melbourne, Daina saw many things: Algis took her to the cemetery, to huge indoor shopping centre, and to the sea. She tried kiwi fruit, sweet potato and fig jam. She loved glancing through the colourful advertising leaflets full of kitchen appliances, shoes and clothing that she regularly found in Algis’ letter box.

Algis’ friends were kind to Daina, and gave her clothing that their own children no longer wore. They called her “poor child” and she could see they felt sorry for her, because she came from the Soviet Lithuania that they hated so much. They talked about their fear of being shot or deported to Siberia, of how they lost their homes, farms, families, personal belongings, and how they missed their birthplace. They frequently told stories of having to hide or escape during the Soviet-German War, finally finding refuge in Germany, then emigrating to Australia.

Listening to Algis’ friends, Daina realised she didn’t really know much about her country’s history. It upset her to find out that people had been deported and she wondered how her grandparents had managed to survive. They were also farmers like Algis and his friends. But now she realised Algis had escaped. She had grown up thinking the Russians had not done anything wrong. As a child, she’d worn a badge in the shape of a star with the face of Lenin on it and had been taught that the Russians were the heroes of the war. On television she’d watched Russian movies about the war: the Russians had won the battle of Stalingrad, along with every other battle. She used to spend her summers at the pioneer camps and she’d learned to sing many Russian songs praising the bravery of the soldiers and the wonders of the Soviet Union.

Every night, after dinner, Daina made herself a special cup of Italian coffee. The smell of percolating coffee reminded her of her life in Lithuania, of sitting in cafés after work and on weekends with her friends, discussing politics and telling each other funny anecdotes about the challenges of life. If there was an alcohol shortage in the country, they shared jokes about drinks; if there was a shortage of sugar, toilet paper or underwear, they laughed at their desperation. They didn’t know any different and their way of coping with the constant shortages was to make jokes. Sometimes they shared

stories they had heard from sailors who worked on the Soviet ships and had visited Spain, Italy or Morocco. The sailors returned to shore dressed in jeans, and wearing good quality shoes. They sold clothing and jewellery; they brought colourful magazines with pictures of people surrounded by modern furniture, living in spacious houses with manicured lawns, and cars sitting in their driveways.

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Daina was wearing a pair of second-hand jeans and pink slippers. Her cardigan had no buttons, and hung down to her knees. She liked it – it was so big that she could wrap it around her chubby body to keep herself warm. Since her arrival she had gained weight – she found it difficult to resist all the pies and cakes so easily available – and now most of the clothes she'd brought with her were too tight.

She'd washed and ironed the tracksuits, skivvies, and t-shirts given to her by Algis' friends. During the warmer weather she left her wardrobe ajar to let the musty smell evaporate. She missed wearing her own dresses, blouses, and slacks. Most had been made by her grandmother from the fabrics that Algis had begun sending them in the late sixties. She'd felt special walking along the streets of Kretinga in her outfits, so colourful in comparison to what others wore.

After packing gifts for Algis and the main necessities, there had been very little room in her luggage, so Daina had left most of her best clothes behind. She'd imagined Algis taking her shopping and buying her new clothes but he was actually very tight with his money and reluctant to spend. Not that she really needed fancy clothes. On the farm in Whittlesea, she didn't have to organise children's entertainment or meet VIP delegations from around the USSR as she had done previously as part of her job. She loved her job in Lithuania, but there was a great deal of pressure on her to produce shows that attracted more people to the cultural centre; the numbers mattered so much. But she was a great organiser, well respected for her work. Now Algis' shed became her stage and his animals her only audience.

She took a seat on the wooden stool and placed the bucket under the cow's belly. The first time Daina had tried to milk Algis' cow, Star had moved forward, kicking over the aluminium bucket. Then she had mooed loudly and raced out into the paddock. Daina was angry and frustrated but there was nothing she could do. She chased the cow

around the empty paddock. She hated the stench of the fresh manure – she accidentally put her foot in the cowpats again and again.

Algis came out to the paddock and led Star back to the shed. The animal went without hesitation.

‘I’ll leave you to it. You must learn, you must adjust to the life in the country, otherwise you’ll be of no use,’ he said.

Daina persevered. ‘That’s lovely. My life is just great,’ she said and patted Star’s head. ‘Look at me, Star, I am trying to please you, you stubborn animal, as if I had nothing better to do. Back home I spent my time going to cafés and restaurants, organising entertainment for people. Luckily, no one can see me now, squeezing a cow’s teat. Talking to a cow. I had no idea that it would be so difficult, just you and me, and my inner emptiness. To tell you the truth, I want to scream.

She calmed herself down and switched on the radio that was hanging by a hook on a wooden post. The sound of an accordion immediately filled the air and a pleasant melody spread its wings and took flight in the shed. Finally, Star settled and Daina was able to begin milking again. She half shut her eyes and imagined the good-looking musician who was playing the *Entertainer*. Then high-pitched notes, like snakes, seeped through the walls of the tin shed into the open spaces of Algis’ farm, reaching higher and higher until they blended with the thudding noises of the approaching kangaroos.

She had heard this music before. The previous week, the radio announcer had introduced the Melbourne-based accordionist as Raimondo Milano. Daina thought that the accordion came from France. She had seen a television advertisement with a young man playing it on a bench near the Eiffel Tower. The ad had created a romantic atmosphere. Two young lovers held hands and stared into each other’s eyes. As she listened to the music, she imagined Raimondo as a street busker. He looked like the composer Franz Liszt, wearing a long coat, his dark hair covering his mysterious face. His music transported Daina out of the shed and into the city. She imagined Raimondo touching the keys softly to set off the resonant sound, full of notes, as if he was taking long, long, short, short, long, short breaths, resting between the punctuated pauses. During the pauses she could hear the stream of milk hitting the side of the bucket – psssss, pssss, psss. Then the music started again. She was engulfed by it – it lifted her up so she was floating among the clouds. She imagined a huge circus tent, an old-

fashioned carousel, animals and funny clowns jumping up and down. The sharp laugh of the kookaburra interrupted a key change and unexpectedly staccato notes flew out of the accordion, drowning her thoughts in a mixture of soft and harsh broken chords.

Daina created a scene of a play in her head. She could hear the sound of small change dropping into the accordion case. She saw Raimondo playing for the morning commuters and enjoying their attention and gratitude. She heard herself talking to him at Flinders Street station. She greeted him with a smile; dropped a shiny dollar coin into his case. He caught her hand and wished her good morning. She glanced at his flamboyant gesture and softly replied, 'Thank you.'

'Oh, play louder, louder. Please hold my hand until you feel sure that I am the one you saw in your dreams. Are you playing just for me? Your music is a comfort to my soul.' She saw Raimondo looking at her tenderly, reaching for her, overtaken by emotions. She was Cinderella and he would gallop into Whittlesea and take her away.

Eventually Raimondo's melody dispersed into the odours of the shed. She travelled with the sounds through affection, hope, disappointment and, finally, catharsis. As long as he was playing, Daina managed very well, milking a nearly full bucket of fresh, ready to drink milk. Star had behaved wonderfully – maybe the music was a comfort to her too. She followed Daina with her huge eyes and a little white star on her forehead.

'Alright, alright, I am going. Would you like me to leave the radio on? Would it help you to produce more milk? If only I could guess what you are thinking, it would make my job much easier. Good night,' Daina whispered, leaving the shed. Star moored back as if she understood.

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By the time Daina had been in Australia for a couple of months, she felt homesick most days. She spent hours watching planes fly overhead, counting the buzzing flies and cleaning up after the magpies that constantly left droppings on the veranda. The tapping of the huge black crows on the windows, waking her up before dawn with their "koww" and an echo-like "eh-aw" sound, made Daina uneasy. She wanted to be with people she could talk to, with people who understood how she felt. Her writing was the only thing that kept her sane. She had filled her notebook with poems, stories and ideas. Her

writing had become an essential part of her existence, and a place to go when she was lonely. She'd started sending some of her pieces to Lithuania.

Her friend Jovita was a journalist with Kretinga's newspaper and Daina hoped to get published. So, she'd regularly posted letters to Jovita. But in her snippets on nature, climate and animals, she didn't mention her own struggle to fit in. On the contrary, describing the emptiness of the Australian landscape and its people, she reflected:

Gerbiami skaitytojai,

Besiklausydama supančios tylos, stebiu neaprėpiamas Australijos platybes. O, begalinis baltų, rožinių ir raudonų kamelijų grožis! Ne be reikalo Aleksandre Dumas pavadino savo knygą "Dama su kamelijomis". Ne be reikalo dėl jos, gėlės ir moters, taip stipriai plaka vyrų širdys. Juk panaši į gvazdiką ir rožę, kamelija svaigina moteriškais kerais, reikalaudama pastovaus dėmesio. Baltoji kamelija – skaistumo, rožinė – geismo simbolis, o raudonoji, tarsi daugybe sluoksnių suklostyta Karmen suknelė, degina nepasotinama meile.

Australijos dangus kaip atvirutė: tai skaudina akis nenusakomu melsvumu, tai pažeria įvairiausių atspalvių vaivorykštę, atsišviečiančią blankiuose eukaliptų kamienuose, tai apgaubia gelsvais ir rausvai pilkais šešėliais, su pro juos besiskverbiančiais tamsiai mėlynais lopiniais.

Ši svetinga šalis, atsiskyrus nuo viso pasaulio, gyvena savo ritmu, kuris šitaip skiriasi nuo lietuviškojo. Kai Lietuvoje dar tik bundama, Australijoje ne tik pilnu tempu vyksta prekyba, bet ir šventės ateina devyniomis valandomis anksčiau!

O jau gyvūnų pasaulis, neišpasakytas! Mačiau ančiasnapius, vadinamus platypuses, po žeme įsirausiusius šiltakailius, kurmius ir ežius be spyglių primenančius vombatus, greitakojas žolėdes kengūras, kurios draustiniuose trumpomis letenomis iš rankų ėda duoną, bet prie sterblės su mažyliu jokių būdų neprisileidžia.

Žmonės Australijoje labai paslaugūs ir gausiai aukojantys labdaroms, todėl visiškai naujų rūbų ir avalynės pigiomis kainomis pilna naudotų prekių parduotuvėse, kur beja, be atlyginimo, dirba savanoriai! Pašalpos punktuose galima gauti maisto, elektroninių prekių, baldų ir patalynės, o ir vaikams žaislų čia tikrai nestokoja!

Palinkėčiau ir jums, gerbiamieji skaitytojai, kada nors apsilankyti šioje pasakų karalystėje ir visa tai patirti patiems.

Daina Leitaite

Melburnas

Once a month Daina dutifully wrote to her family and Algis added a few sentences for his sister. She also included a poem or a short story in each letter and was pleased to receive their positive feedback. She hoped that in future she could produce plays based on her writing. She loved putting her ideas on paper, particularly in Australia where things were so different and every experience was new. She wanted to capture her surroundings, the nature, animals, plants, but most of all the people – people who seemed so different from her. Daina noticed that away from home, she became more honest in expressing her feelings. She was ready to open up more, even if no one was to read what she wrote. She was also glad to be able to reflect on her experiences back home. She would never have imagined writing so freely there. Writing appealed so much to Daina. She knew writing was her calling.

Her family thought Daina had changed. They'd commented on being surprised by the expressive language and creative ideas that sounded more mature than the way they remembered her. They couldn't wait to receive new stories. Encouraged by their words, she continued to tell them more about the local traditions, habits and culture she'd observed. She wrote in front of the television, with music on, and even during conversations with Algis. When the thoughts entered her mind, she quickly scribbled them on paper. That was one of the reasons she tried to keep her notebook close-by, like in a pocket of her apron, or in a drawer in the hallway. Sometimes she also wrote letters on behalf of Algis to his childhood sweetheart, Morta, who lived in a small town called Šakiai.

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When Daina had been in Australia for four months, Algis asked her whether she was sure she would like to stay on at the farm and take care of him.

‘Staying with me will get you permanent residency here,’ he said.

Daina knew she would stay. She’d come to Australia to help her family. Algis was wealthy and old. She knew when he died she would be in line to inherit his fortune. That’s why Algis wanted her here. She hated her father for making plans before she left of how he’d quit his factory job and buy another car. Roma was upset and blamed him for being heartless and greedy.

Ah, how mistaken Daina was to presume that she only needed to stay with Algis for a short time. He was still a strong man. Now she knew how he longed for company and how he needed her on his farm. As soon as she had started to have those thoughts, she felt sad and guilty, for part of her had become quite attached to him. She didn’t want to speculate on the future. The thought that he would die one day upset her.

Given her circumstances, she thought her stay might provide her with the opportunity to establish herself in Australia. As a permanent resident, she thought, she might be able to get a job.

One evening, as Daina returned from the city, she noticed Algis watching her through the window. He was always pleased to see her whenever she came back into the house. He often told Daina that when he saw her, the feeling of warmth spread right down to his knees. He told her it was pleasant to have someone looking after him. Not just anyone, but a young woman.

‘Hello – I’m home!’ Daina called out as she entered the kitchen.

‘Hello. What did you buy?’

‘Denture tablets, socks, new flannel pyjamas, food,’ Daina said, passing the shopping bags to Algis.

‘Where are the receipts?’

‘Here, in the bags with the goods.’

‘I’d like to go through them with you as I get so mixed up with what’s what.’

As they were checking goods against receipts she felt like laughing. She couldn't believe Algis wanted her to be his carer and at the same time didn't display any trust.

'I'm not sure what to think, Algis. How can I be your carer if you don't trust me?'

'I'm only double checking that you bought what I asked.'

'I haven't experienced anything like this before, and don't feel comfortable,' she replied.

'It's not about comfort or feeling. It's about being good with your money. Do you think I had much when I used to send you parcels? I struggled but never let my sister down. I knew your family was in greater need. Valerija and I tightened our belts and continued to support you.'

'I didn't realise that. I'm so sorry that you had to do that,' she bit her lip watching him spilling his coffee on a table.

'Remember, Daina – life teaches us a lot of wisdom. 'I learned that saving empowers people.'

She rolled her eyes, took his cup from his shaking hands and wiped the table.

Once the receipts had been reconciled, Daina told Algis what she'd noticed during her shopping trip.

'The city was full of cars and trams, and there was pop music playing in the shopping mall. 'I walked a long way, window shopping and observing how people dress. Many young women don't wear make-up; most men dress casually; though older people, coming out of a theatre, were well dressed. I didn't pick up any particular fashion for this spring.

'Maybe there is none,' Algis replied.

'So many people here drive cars,' Daina commented.

'Most do, and why not? The distances are huge. A car is a necessity.'

'It's hard to get a car in Lithuania. My father put his name down on a waiting list at work but he had to wait for over ten years to get one.'

'Yes, things are much easier here,' Algis admitted.

'The city was great. At Queen Victoria Market I found a European-looking woman selling meat, bread and dried fruit. She said she was Polish. She was selling Latvian liverwurst. She suggested that if I wanted more European food, I should go to the shops in Balaclava.'

‘Yes, I know the area,’ Algis replied, ‘but I had no idea that Australians sold European food.’

‘It’s not Australians who sell the food, but Russians. At least, that’s what the shopkeeper told me.’

‘I see,’ said Algis, his voice tightening. ‘I don’t want Russians selling me anything! They killed millions – I hate them, they can get stuffed and choke on their sausages!’ He was almost screaming and his face was red with anger.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll never mention Balaclava to you again, I promise. Please forgive me for my ignorance.’

‘It’s okay, Daina,’ he said taking a deep breath. ‘It’s not your fault. You were born and raised under the Soviets. You wouldn’t understand my suffering or that of the thousands of people forced to leave their homes.’

‘I know, I know, you’ve told me about the occupation and the way Lithuanian families were dispersed on their way to Siberia. But it’s the past.’

‘No, it’s not,’ said Algis. ‘It’s still real and raw.’

He also criticised her for watching Russian movies. After that she would go to her room to quietly listen to the SBS Russian news. She longed to hear about her country, but Russian presenters rarely talked about Lithuania unless there was some trouble in the Baltic States. Algis didn’t want to discuss the news or anything to do with Russians. He didn’t want to hear the language – the language of his enemy. He demanded Daina forget it too, but how could she? She tried to explain to him that the Russian language had been part of her life from the moment she was born. She admitted liking Russian music and entertainment. Algis was deeply irritated by this.

‘I wonder whether I’ve made the right decision asking you to stay with me. I have a reputation to maintain,’ he said, ‘and I don’t want to be accused of housing a communist.’

Daina now knew the extent of Algis’ hatred of Russians and Russia. But his stance didn’t deter her from reading Dostoyevsky, Lermontov and Tolstoy, of engaging with the comical characters of Gogol. She could not give them up. At the same time his explanation of the past events in Lithuania had made her feel betrayed by her own country, by the way history and politics had been distorted. Daina had thought Algis had left Lithuania to look for a better life. She’d heard other people went to America

between the First and Second World Wars looking for opportunities, and she'd believed he'd done the same.

As Daina's stay lengthened, she noticed Algis' friends eavesdropping on her conversations. Whenever she was among them, she felt a chill in the air. Each time she mentioned Russia, Russians or collectives, a complete silence engulfed everyone. She became less willing to mix with his guests as they criticised her for something she had no control over – that she'd been born during the Soviet era and spoke Russian. To make Algis happy, she stopped reading the Russian books she had found at the charity shops. He believed they contained the lies and distortions of the historical facts.

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Algis constantly talked about free Lithuania – the Lithuania that existed between the two great wars. He often repeated the story of how he'd met his wife, Valerija, in 1940 at a village dance.

'I spotted her from the other end of the hall. She looked radiant. She was standing with her girlfriends, giggling and chatting, and she laughed when I invited her to dance. Valerija smiled at me while we were dancing and I was mesmerised by that smile for the rest of my life. That night, she made my head spin and my heart beat so fast that I could hardly wait till the next morning to propose.

'Valerija's family were rich farmers and in 1941 they were deported. They were sent to Siberia – her mother, grandparents and two brothers – they disappeared or died there. When the Second World War broke out, we were living in the small town of Garliava near Kaunas with our only son, Romukas. In 1944, we left Lithuania. Not just us, of course, there were thousands of others leaving to escape the war. Romukas died from pneumonia on the boat coming to Australia. His body was buried at sea.'

'I am so sorry you had to go through so much,' Daina said.

'And we weren't alone. The weak didn't survive the long journey. When we left Europe one man jumped overboard. His name was Sam and he was from Yugoslavia. He had changed his mind about going to Australia, and wished to disembark but it was too late. The ship had already departed. He disappeared into the ocean.'

‘Poor man.’

‘We were upset. Valerija cried day and night for Romukas and spent the whole journey staring into the waves. I think of him down there on the ocean floor lying with the man from Yugoslavia.’

Daina stood up quietly and placed the kettle on the stove. She made Algis a cup of tea. Sipping slowly, he showed her a black and white photo.

‘See, this is me, my beautiful Valerija and our son – a perfect family snapshot just before our journey to Australia.’

‘Yes, Valerija looks very attractive. She has such a natural smile. Romukas is so cute. He has a beautiful face.’

‘He had the face of an angel. We loved him so much. He was eight years old when he died. My wife was such an easy-going person, but after losing her child she changed. She lost all joy for life and nothing mattered to her anymore. On top of our own misfortune, we arrived in Australia stripped of our status. We were nobodies in this new land. Imagine ten thousand people from Lithuania, who’d already lived in Germany for five years, resettling again?’

‘But that’s the population of a town like Kretinga!’ exclaimed Daina.

‘Yes, you could say that. There were so many of us. I got a job making rail sleepers and stayed in the same line of work until my retirement. Valerija worked as a cleaner in a hospital. Seeing sick patients on a daily basis, on top of her personal grief, destroyed her health. It was frustrating too; back home I’d been an engineer and she’d been a well-respected teacher. In Australia, we were worth almost nothing – the only jobs we could get here were labouring and domestic jobs. “Forget who you were before,” we were told by those bastards, officials in government offices who wouldn’t let us work in our professions.’ Each time Algis told his story, his voice trembled, as if events had only happened the day before.

Six months after Daina’s arrival, Algis announced his plans to see a lawyer about his will. Daina was surprised at the thought of this seemingly generous act, because just the day before they’d spent an unpleasant evening arguing about a bucket.

‘I didn’t touch the bucket,’ she had reassured him, but Algis hadn’t believed her and they had exchanged angry words. He’d accused Daina of stealing it. She’d looked

for the bucket everywhere. She wasn't sure why they were looking for the plastic bucket that she used once a week to wash the floor. What was the importance of it? What was the urgency? After an extensive search inside and outside the house, Daina finally discovered the bucket under Algis' bed. But of course, he'd forgotten to tell her he was using it as a chamber pot. When she pulled the bucket from under his bed, she had to hold her nose – the dark yellow liquid smelt so bad – she had to gasp for air. Dirty old man, she thought, too lazy to go to the bathroom. She told him that it wasn't appropriate to urinate in a bucket when the toilet was just a few steps away from his bedroom.

‘But I was tired.’

‘You must make the effort to go to the toilet, and please don't use this bucket again. It's plastic and plastic holds the smell. Tomorrow I'll go to town and buy you a bedpan like the sick people use in bed when they can't get up at night.’

‘Sorry, sorry,’ he apologised repeatedly. ‘I won't need it again, you can throw it out.’

Daina went upstairs and looked out her bedroom window. She could see the evening sun shining on the grass. She opened the window and inhaled the air. The beauty was breathtaking, but the evening air had no perfume. She felt as if she was Cinderella looking on while others were dancing, laughing and enjoying themselves in an imaginary castle. In her mind she already had the scenery for a play. She would call it *Cinderella of Whittlesea*. She'd transform the sheep into white stallions; the bathtub rusting in the paddock into a golden carriage; Algis' potatoes into the carriage wheels; the field flowers into her crown. She'd make a kangaroo into a Prince Charming; and she'd be Cinderella, dressed in a golden gown and shoes, unable to reach the castle before midnight in time to join the party.

She was desperate for a friend, but she took solace in her notebook. She was quickly filling it with memories and thoughts she hadn't shared with anyone. One evening, she'd torn a page from her notebook and begun to compose a letter to her family.

I can't believe that so much time has passed since my arrival. We've managed to get a partial refund for my return ticket. So I am staying on as

planned. I do a lot of work on Algis' farm. I'm also learning to speak and write better English by listening to the radio and watching children's programs.

I've seen flying foxes on the farm. They help themselves to plums at night. They look like drawings in a children's book. Their wings are thin and transparent, joined together by wire-like bones. I can hear from a distance how they flap their wings. I hold my breath, not wanting to inhale the smelly droppings that they leave all over the porch. I plug my ears with my fingers, not wanting to hear their short popping sounds and their high-pitched calls to each other.

Dear Mother, my friend Jovita, who bumped into you at the pharmacy, wrote to me that your new medication is more helpful in controlling your epileptic fits. I'm so pleased for you.

How are you, Grandmother? Algis loves you and sends you kisses and hugs. Now I'm not only his carer, but also his housekeeper, and his nurse. Anyway, at least he takes me shopping and spoils me with small gifts. Even his friends give me clothing and shoes that may last my life time.

One day, when Algis' inheritance comes through, we'll move to a bigger flat, we'll replace our furniture, get a car, dress ourselves like the Westerners, and travel the world.

At times I feel like I'm living on a stage without a curtain or an audience: surrounded by huge fields with hidden animals, I feel like I'm living in the unknown. When the sun disappears behind the hill, the picture changes from purple to white, from exciting to boring, depending on the clouds. I imagine seeing your faces up there, floating one by one, smiling at me, and I smile back, sending my love to you all.

Daina

She couldn't bring herself to tell her family about Algis' stinginess and that her life in Australia wasn't what she'd expected it to be. These things seemed trivial when she thought about her mother's health, and the money they needed for her medication. She placed the letter into her handbag to post it in the morning.

*

Algis and Daina had to rise early to get to the city. The trip took a good hour. They arrived at the solicitor's office just before nine o'clock. The secretary, dressed in a short red jacket and a black skirt, looked like one of those miniature statuettes people keep on their mantelpiece. She seated them in a huge waiting room. Natalia Clark – Daina read the name tag pinned to the secretary's jacket. As Natalia answered the phone, she played with a lock of her long dark hair.

Daina found herself envying Natalia. Under her breath, she repeated every word Natalia said into the receiver, trying to copy her accent and tone. Miming the words of television and radio announcers had become a habit for Daina. She was trying to adjust to the Australian accent and manner of speaking. Back home she'd learned the British pronunciation – even though her English language teacher spoke the language with a Lithuanian accent. In Australia, the language sounded light and simple to Daina – relaxed and casual, which appealed to her, and she wanted to adopt local expressions.

She'd already learnt to read some of the Australian gestures. She knew that when men stuck their fingers out of car windows at other drivers, it was a rude gesture. She only found out about this by accident when catching a bus to the city. One morning she had jumped onto a bus as it was about to take off. The bus driver had planted his foot on the accelerator and Daina had only just managed to grab the hand rail and stop herself from falling over. She was holding up one finger to ask for one ticket. The bus driver reacted angrily and pointed his finger back at her.

'You too!' he said, and the passengers had laughed. Then one of them elaborated to her on the meaning of one, two and even three fingers being aggressively waved in the air. It was quite embarrassing for Daina, having a toothless middle-aged man with bleary eyes explain the subtleties of finger gestures.

A young woman sitting next to Daina smiled and introduced herself as Dorothy. She said she was a primary school teacher from Carnegie. Daina also introduced herself, telling Dorothy that she came from Lithuania to visit her great-uncle. Algis nodded politely, letting her know that he also came from Lithuania, but in the late forties.

Daina observed Dorothy's longish face and wide brown eyes.

'Tell me about yourself. What do you do for a living?' asked Dorothy.

‘I live with Algis,’ Daina replied.

‘Where did you go to school, here?’

‘No. ‘I arrived from Lithuania in 1986, already having my diploma in theatre producing.’

‘And have you worked in your profession?’

‘Yes, yes. I have experience in staging plays. I also love working with children.’

‘Children?’

‘Yes, children. I produced an old Lithuanian fairytale, a musical, and a few plays,’ Daina explained.

‘That’s excellent. At my school we’d greatly benefit from your expertise.’

‘Really? I haven’t done anything in English, but I’m sure I could come up with something,’ Daina said.

‘When we plan our academic calendar for next year, we could include your participation in our curriculum. Maybe you could give some acting tips to our primary school students or create short plays. Would you be interested?’

‘Of course, of course. Thank you very much for the invitation,’ Daina said, blushing with happiness.

‘I’ll keep you in mind. I’m glad we met,’ Dorothy said and they exchange their addresses and phone numbers.

The lawyer’s waiting room had high ceilings and a huge chandelier made up of suspended plastic beads of different sizes. The white walls of the waiting room seemed freshly painted and the atmosphere reminded her of a hospital.

‘Mr Baniulis,’ Natalie called, showing Algis and Daina into a spacious office.

‘Hello. My name is David Hall,’ a pleasantly spoken man motioned them to be seated. ‘Mr Baniulis and – ?’

‘Daina Leitaitė.’

‘How are you, Daina?’

‘Alright,’ she replied, offering her hand for him to shake. She realised she should have thanked Mr Hall as part of her hello, but in her mind there was nothing to thank him for as yet. He was wearing a blue suit and had short dark hair. They sank into the low chairs across from Mr Hall’s table. The lawyer looked so tall on the other side,

whereas she and Algis had to sit up straight so that their heads could be above the table. Daina felt like a garden gnome.

‘How can I help you?’ Mr Hall asked, raising his thin eyebrows. Algis explained that he was getting old and it was time to think of the future and of Daina, his carer who had arrived from Lithuania to look after him. He said he’d like to leave everything to her. Daina immediately felt Mr Hall’s attention shifting to her.

‘Where exactly is Lithuania? I must apologise for my inadequate knowledge.’

‘It is part of the USSR,’ Daina replied, looking up into his squinting brown eyes.

‘Ah. I know where it is now. There are many countries in the Soviet Union – that’s why it’s hard to remember them all.’

He asked her a number of questions and Algis started to shuffle impatiently in his seat. Mr Hall seemed to suddenly notice and turned to his paying client. He then paged Natalia. The secretary emerged shortly with the necessary documents and in about half an hour Algis had signed the required papers – making Mr Hall the executor of the will. Mr Hall gave them a copy of the will, placing the second one in his safe.

On their way home, Daina thought about how her future would change. She wasn’t born a princess, but with the money she would inherit, she thought she might be able to choose to live like one. She imagined she would soon be the wealthiest woman in the neighbourhood: the land, the house, the animals, and the car would all be hers. She’d invite her family to Australia to look around. Then they would sell everything and return home. She felt as if a heavy burden was slowly lifting from her shoulders. It doesn’t matter, she thought, how long she’d have to wait. Now it was all official. She’d have an opportunity to return to what she loved to do. She’d always wanted to become a theatre producer. Even as a small child, she had written plays and organised her friends to act in them. In her teens, they’d improvised and made a stage on the grass, stretching a blanket out on a rope as a curtain. They’d dressed in their parents’ clothing, sold tickets and invited people from the flats nearby to watch their performance. After receiving a warm reception, Daina would feel like a star. While waving to the crowd, she would think, ‘One day I’ll be a household name. One day I’ll be really famous. You are clapping to a future celebrity.’ After completing her studies, Daina had been proud of her professional achievements. She’d produced a number of children’s plays, and

travelled with a local theatre group around Lithuania as well as parts of the Soviet Union. While touring, she'd met actors, make-up artists and producers who gave her professional advice and shared their work. She'd purchased a famous book by Stanislavsky and studied it in-depth in an attempt to improve the acting skills of her troupe. She'd also written theatre reviews for several newspapers and magazines. She loved to share her passion for theatre with people. Now she'd have a chance to shine again. She often found herself returning to Kaunas in her dreams, wearing her evening gown, receiving bunches of flowers for her solo performances.

*

Every day after finishing her household duties, Daina went for a walk. As she climbed the hill behind the farmhouse, she gazed into the distance and smiled, thinking of all the myths she'd heard before coming to Australia: of kangaroos living in the backyards and children riding on their backs; of people eating from golden plates; of Australians living on the red earth with money growing on trees. She had enjoyed the sense of freedom at first, but now, even with all the space around her, she felt hemmed in. Sitting on the top of the hill and looking around, she observed magpies flying past. Their harsh screeching was not even close to the Lithuanian *lakštingala's* song, full of trills and meaningful pauses, soft and colourful tones echoing in a forest. This tiny hill she sat on was nothing in comparison with the mountains she'd climbed in Mongolia. Her cheeks burned when she recalled her last encounter with Toivo. Where was he now? Still studying? Or had he returned to Estonia? What was happening with Larisa? Were they still together? She was wondering whether she'd ever see him again. Her lips tightened when she thought about their last, subdued kiss. She imagined that Toivo had probably lost hope of seeing her again.

They had met in Mongolia, as part of a group of tourists from around the USSR who'd gathered for a walking tour in the Altay Mountains. They had steadily climbed the winding path towards the peak. She had fallen behind. Too exhausted to continue, she had put her rucksack under her head and stretched out on the grass. She had enjoyed being surrounded by the green shrubbery and the soothing fragrance of the field flowers a-buzz with insects. The sound of footsteps had awoken her and when she'd opened her

eyes, a young man was standing over her. He'd introduced himself as Toivo from Tallinn and she'd told him that her name was Daina. They'd spoken of how Toivo was a student at the University of Moscow and Daina had talked about her love of theatre.

'It would be a shame, being so close to the top, not to actually claim it, don't you think, Daina?' He'd offered her his strong hand and helped her to stand up.

'I suppose so,' she'd said, trying to put her heavy load back on her shoulders. When he'd realised Daina was struggling, he'd insisted on taking her rucksack. It was still a mystery to her how he'd managed to walk the steep track with a double load. He'd walked slowly, adjusting his rucksacks as he went up, looking like a giant old turtle. Daina had secretly munched on a block of chocolate hidden in a pocket as she followed behind him. She felt guilty now, thinking about it, but back then she had needed the energy to reach the peak. Everybody had cheered when they arrived at the top. Daina had noticed many ribbons and hankies hanging on the peak, and she'd hung her hankie, watching Toivo tie his sock around the pole.

On the evening of the first day, when the tents were up and the gear unpacked, Daina had heard a strange noise coming from the adjoining tent. She'd looked out of her tiny window into the neighbouring tent, and saw two young women noisily drinking condensed milk from aluminium cans. Just before they'd begun the journey, their instructor had distributed the food, safety equipment and tents evenly amongst all forty tourists in the group. Each of them had ended up carrying over thirty kilograms. For many, including Daina, it was a laborious task and so all of them were trying to get rid of the weight by eating the food. As a result, there was no food left by the end of the trip.

Toivo was the only one who had food on the last day: some bread and dried mushrooms. At breakfast they'd dipped the stale bread into hot tea, served in aluminium cups, and eaten the fried mushrooms. Everybody had praised Toivo for taking care of their last resources. In reply, he'd smiled into his bushy moustache, brushing back his fine hair that was standing up like needle-shaped pines.

Upon returning to the base, the travellers had dispersed to their rooms, later gathering in the hall. It had been amusing to see everyone looking so refreshed at the dinner dance.

Daina had hardly recognised her group members. Freshly washed and with their hair neatly brushed, they'd looked so different: especially the women, who, in their shoes and dresses, had turned into elegant ladies.

'You are much prettier in your dresses than in your baggy tracksuits and runners,' one of the men had commented.

'A little make-up has transformed you into gorgeous young women,' said another. 'Your manicured hands and toenails are so beautiful,' another added, making the young women giggle among themselves.

It was August 1984. They'd danced and then listened to Toivo singing softly in Estonian, accompanied by his guitar. Daina had noticed Toivo glancing her way. She'd tried to listen to the song but she was distracted by his obvious attraction to her and his attempts to convey this to her.

After twenty days in the wilderness of Altay, the travellers had dispersed. Some went back to Moscow, others to Kiev, Minsk, Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn. Toivo had left his address and telephone number with Daina, pleading with her to write. He wrote love letters to her. In each of them was a poem or a pressed leaf. They'd met once every three months in Kaunas until she'd left for Australia. It was now up to her to write to him, but for some reason she had not been able to. This was partly because she felt embarrassed to admit that she was living in the middle of nowhere, that she had no proper job and that instead of being a producer, she was struggling even to milk a cow. She also still had doubts about whether his feelings for her were genuine.

*

Daina walked along Mornington beach. There had been a storm but now the sea was calm. She and Algis had been dropped off at the beach by Algis' friend Augustas, who was visiting his son who lived in the area. Algis had settled on a rug in the shade of a gum tree, a pillow under his head, napping. Daina felt a silken wind touch her face as she ventured beyond the main swimming area. The water licked her bare feet and she cried with happiness for the freedom she felt at that very moment.

Daina walked further and further away from the main beach. The waves were rising; bottles, coca-cola cans, and litter were washing up around her feet. She glanced towards the horizon and felt the presence of the Baltic Sea. She wished she could saddle the rainbow and slide to the other side of the globe. She wished she could return to her own sandy shore. While reminiscing, Daina collected shells, touching their smooth interiors and counting their faint purple and pink stripes. She held a large shell to her ear and listened to the soft sound.

‘It must be holding the sound of the waves and the wind inside. It’s like my enclosed memories bubbling away,’ she said to herself. Gradually the waves grew higher, swallowing the words into the darkening sea. She rushed into the water and her feet hurt as they touched hard stones. The green weeds, like long woollen threads, tangled around her legs. When she tried to shake the seaweed off, a huge wave rolled in, and the water reached her waist. Her dress clung to her whole body and she began to scream. When Daina came out of the water, she messed her hair up with her fingers, breathing deep, allowing the salty air to fill her lungs. More than anything, she wanted Toivo to appear and take her away. Her lips were cracked and dry and she felt thirsty, yearning for love.

Algis was alone and she hurried back. He was sitting on a mat and Daina joined him.

‘Where have you been? I’m hungry,’ he said in a raised voice.

‘But the food is in a basket we brought with us, remember?’

‘No. I don’t remember. I fell asleep and when I woke up you were not here! I thought some young man had taken you for a ride in his yacht, and I would never see you again.’

‘Don’t worry, I’m here. Let’s eat. I packed some potato pancakes left over from dinner last night. Also boiled eggs, fresh onions, and tomatoes with buttered Latvian bread. Come on, eat. Coffee is in the thermos.’

‘But where have you been?’ he persisted.

‘I just wandered beyond the holiday makers’ beach. Look at all the people spread out everywhere! I wanted to be on my own, without being disturbed by kids, dogs and swimmers.’

‘Don’t do it again. I am worried that something might happen to you.’

‘What could happen? As if I was one of those gorgeous Hollywood actresses that let themselves get tangled up with men. I don’t flirt. I never stay away from home. Don’t go out at night. What else do you want from me?’

‘I want you to be by my side. I need your company, your laughter, your smile, your cooking.’

‘What about me? I came here for freedom and now you are treating me like a prisoner. I swapped the USSR for Australia and you want to restrict my every move. Would you like to inspect my Soviet Lithuanian passport?’ As her voice crescendoed, the passers-by turned their heads towards them.

‘Calm down, calm down, Daina. I’m surprised that for your age you have such strong opinions.’

‘Well, I do.’

They shared their meal and coffee.

‘It’s nice to be young and healthy. I’d give anything to be young again and to travel’, said Algis, looking at a young man jogging past.

‘How come you never did, Uncle? You worked so hard all your life. You have time, money.’

‘You see, I take a dollar in my hand and feel powerful. Recently I lost a dollar, not sure what happened to it... I usually never lose a cent. Money gives me confidence and brings respect from others.’ Daina blushed, remembering the day she found a dollar in the washing machine and pocketed it.

They ate in silence for a while before he spoke again.

‘I’ll not linger around. I’ll take a pill and won’t wake up again. I don’t want to be like my friends – not being able to hold a cup of coffee properly to my mouth, spilling hot soup on my pants. I don’t want my hands shaking as if they were surging from an electrical shock.’

‘Don’t talk like that, please. You’ll be alright.’

‘Ah. You don’t know much, do you? Old people return to their childhood, that’s what I think, and to tell you the truth, I am dreading my life with false teeth and no bladder control. Why do people live so long?’ he asked, trying to lift himself from his folding chair. Daina helped him up and he slowly walked towards the toilet.

*

‘It’s been more than a year since I arrived in Australia,’ Daina thought when Algis announced they were going to the Lithuanian Club for lunch. She was excited. She put on her linen dress, one of the few that still fitted, her amber necklace and beige shoes.

‘Most people go to the Club after mass,’ Algis explained as they drove towards the city. ‘After lunch they sit at tables or at the bar for hours. That’s how we keep in touch. Of course, we also gather for funerals; we are getting older and there are more funerals.’ He paused for a minute. ‘Each time someone dies, we all think: one more of us gone. Who will be the next to go? Why do we have to die here? It’s sad to think of being laid to rest in such heavy clay soil, so far away from home. Oh God, give us mercy.’

‘Why haven’t you taken me to the Club before?’ Daina asked, trying to distract Algis from his sombre mood. ‘I’m looking forward to meeting people closer to my age.’

‘I don’t want you to fall in love with a young man and forget about me,’ he replied jokingly. Algis parked his car in Errol Street, North Melbourne, in front of the *Lithuanian Club* sign. When they entered through the heavy wooden door, Daina noticed the walls were covered in photographs of Lithuania – of towns, churches and dark green forests of the countryside. There were also photos of singers, dancers and children dressed in national costumes.

‘These are the local Lithuanians,’ Algis explained.

‘This is you,’ said Daina, turning towards him and pointing at the group photo, but he’d already moved on and she hurried to join him.

It was Sunday lunchtime and the bar was crowded. People were gathering at the bar, talking and sharing jokes. They drank beer, wine or vodka. Some stood around and watched the billiard players. There was a pleasant aroma of bacon and butter. A long line of people ordering their meals stretched from the bar to the main entrance. Daina noticed that her favourite dishes – *cepelinai* and *bulviniai blynai* – were on the menu.

She felt happy to be surrounded by the sound of her native language, and yet, on listening carefully she noticed new words and phrases. Standing at the bar, she overheard two women discussing Queensland accommodation prices. They used a combination of English and Lithuanian words. But there was more to it – they often

added the Lithuanian endings to the English words or reshaped Lithuanian words to sound more English. They called *dvigulė lova* double *lova*, and the hotel became *hotelis*. But *lova* in English was bed whereas hotel in Lithuanian was *viešbutis*. Listening to them speak, Daina recalled that Algis' guests conversed in a similar fashion. This made her laugh and she had to move away.

She purchased a portion of *cepelinai* at the counter and collected them from the kitchen. On the way back, she accidentally bumped into a young woman. They apologised to each other and introduced themselves. To Daina's surprise her new acquaintance had also only recently arrived from Lithuania. Her name was Saulė. She was a twenty-five-year-old accountant from Kaunas, and was in Australia visiting her aunt.

'I know Kaunas well,' Daina said. 'My friends and I used to meet in the *Laisvės alėja* for a stroll and a meal.'

'That's where I work, in the office,' said Saulė.

'I worked at the cultural centre as a theatre producer.'

They were about to take up seats at the empty table when Algis, who'd been drinking at the bar, noticed them.

'Don't sit here girls. This is Mr and Mrs Kovas' table. Sit over there, that's my table,' he pointed towards the middle of the hall.

'Do you have to pre-book the seats?' Saulė asked.

'No, but some people sort of claim their "own" tables. We respect that. Everybody keeps to their group, eight to ten friends sitting together,' Algis explained.

Saulė and Daina glanced at each other and shrugged their shoulders, following him to his table. Daina noticed that a number of people were staring at them.

'Who are these young women?' an elderly man with thick glasses asked Algis.

'This is my niece, Daina, and this young lady is...?'

'My name is Saulė, from Kaunas. I am visiting my aunt in Mornington.'

'What's her name?' a couple of people asked.

'Milda Žeimienė,' replied Saulė.

'Ah, we know Žeimienė.'

‘My friends, they are both from Lithuania. You may want to know what’s going on there, so come closer,’ Algis said. A crowd began to form around the table and Daina felt too shy to eat.

Most of them were in their sixties and seventies. The older women were dressed as if they had just arrived from a Lithuanian village. Their lips were pale, their hair was straight or in tiny curls, and they wore plain clothes. Some wore hats or berets; some wore scarves around their necks. There were a few younger women – arresting women with make-up, blond hair and fair skin. These women looked as if they had never been out in the sun. All the women wore jewellery: the younger ones gold, the older women amber beads. One woman wore such a heavy necklace that it pulled her neck forward. The younger men were dressed in shirts, pants and jumpers, but the elderly men wore suits. Most of them were blue-eyed and blond; some of the older men were bald or had a little grey hair. Daina could see that some men coloured their hair brown or black. They look strange, she thought, regretting not being able to share this discovery with Saulė. Everybody was still looking at them.

‘Do you always wear so much amber jewellery?’ Saulė asked a woman, who introduced herself as Agota. Daina turned towards them and listened in.

‘Usually we don’t,’ Agota replied. ‘But during our national celebrations, we wear one or two rows of amber beads, and a brooch or a pendant. Our men wear their woven ties with national designs.’

‘That’s so impressive to see you following traditions,’ Saulė said.

‘Was it difficult for you to come here?’ a bald man standing next to Agota asked.

‘No, especially as all my family still lives in Lithuania,’ Daina replied.

‘Mine too,’ Saulė said.

‘We know that Soviets are reluctant to let people who don’t have any relatives in Lithuania go abroad. Russian officials are especially hard on those whose family members have been deported,’ Algis added with authority, others around him nodding their heads.

‘Are you planning to go back, girls?’ a woman asked. Daina noticed she was wearing a linen blouse and a dark amber necklace.

‘Yes, I am,’ Saulė replied.

‘Me too,’ Daina said.

People sitting around the table began enquiring about their friends and relatives.

‘Daina, do you know my brother Mr Petraitis from Kretingalė?’

‘What about the Poškaitis’ family from Skuodas?’

‘Maybe you know Mr Bitinas from Klaipėda?’

‘Saulė, you live in Kaunas – I worked there. Maybe you know my colleagues – Mr Dovydenas, Mr Morkūnas, Ms Sasnauskaitė?’

‘Do you know any of the Gružys’ family from Telšiai?’

‘Mrs Norvydienė from Kretinga?’

Saulė and Daina stared at them and then at each other with surprise.

‘I’m sorry. I’ve heard of these people but some of these names are very common, so I don’t know if they are the people you are looking for,’ Saulė said.

‘There were no such names in my neighbourhood,’ Daina replied, realising that the people surrounding them were looking disappointed.

Saulė and Daina were able to sneak outside. As they stood in the hallway, they shared their amazement at the old-fashioned attitudes of the people they had spoken to. They agreed that entering the Club was like stepping back in time.

‘It’s as if time stopped in the 1940s. As if they have created a second Lithuania here, with their own thinking and hybridised language,’ Daina said.

‘They are definitely removed from the current times and have little idea of what’s going on around them,’ Saulė said.

‘They have even less idea about what is going on in Lithuania,’ Daina said.

‘How can they ask us about people in their towns? How could we know?’ Saulė wondered. ‘I suppose their desire to have any news from home is so strong.’

‘What about their faces?’ Daina asked.

‘What about them?’

‘It seems that elderly people look much younger here than back home,’ Daina said.

‘That’s because their life is much better in Australia, don’t you think?’ said Saulė.

‘I agree, much, much better,’ Daina said. ‘Algis enjoys his farm.’

‘My aunt is also very happy with her little house close to the beachfront.’

They both felt that they were being watched closely. They felt they had to be careful how they phrased their sentences and whom they socialised with.

‘It’s like living with our grandparents or parents. I feel like I am being constantly scrutinised,’ said Saulė.

‘Me too. Algis’ friends act strangely in my presence, as if they don’t trust me.’

‘Have you noticed there are hardly any young faces around?’ Saulė said.

‘No, but can you blame them?’

Algis’ friends were still there, at the same table. They resumed the conversation about the past.

‘After the war, the Soviets forced people into *kolkhozes* and demanded they grow corn. Lithuanians had never grown corn and all the pesticides they were made to spray destroyed the quality of our soil,’ said a man with blond hair and a longish face. He was holding his glass tightly between his fingers, and gulped down his vodka once he had finished speaking.

‘It’s true. Everything belongs to the Soviet Lithuanian Government,’ Saulė said.

‘It used to be private land, passed from generation to generation. The Russians took what was ours,’ said a short man with a tipsy voice. ‘We have no right to our own properties.’

A couple of women in their sixties, Stasė and Rima, came forward to greet the young guests. They complimented Daina and Saulė on their looks.

‘You have a thick long plait, Saulė, and such wide blue eyes. They are the colour of my favourite cornflowers,’ Rima said.

‘Oh, thank you,’ Saulė blushed. ‘I am not used to compliments. In Lithuania people try to blend in; nobody says things like that. It makes me feel embarrassed.’

‘Ah, don’t be so shy,’ said Rima.

Stasė turned to Daina.

‘I’ve never seen a young lady with such a healthy looking, glowing face. When I was young I used to spread honey on my face or bathe it in milk. That’s how well off my family was. I could afford it!’

‘I see, I don’t do any of that. It must be the Whittlesea weather that does wonders for my skin,’ Daina replied with a joyful smile. ‘And I also love the Australian honey.’

‘That’s why your eyes are the colour of honey,’ said a softly-spoken man, winking at Daina.

She giggled, putting her hand over her mouth. She was taken aback hearing these compliments, as she knew that Saulė, whose name meant sun, was the beautiful one – warm and sunny, like her name.

‘You are both good-looking, just like we were once...’ Stasė began, but she started to sob and couldn’t continue.

‘She lost her daughter during the war,’ Algis whispered to Daina. Daina felt uncomfortable, as if she had done something wrong.

‘These girls make a fabulous picture among you, *seni gandrai*,’ the barman said, addressing the men as he wiped the table and collected the empty glasses. ‘Behave, you drunkards, and treat these two young ladies with respect!’ He shook his dirty cloth in the air. A bottle of vodka appeared on the table and people lifted their glasses, drinking to better times and the hope of one day returning to a free Lithuania...A group of them broke into song about their homeland where their dreams were brighter and their future was full of promises; where their loved ones lived. They talked of their yearning for the sap of the birch tree, to see the seagulls flying above the Baltic Sea and the beauty of amber. When the glasses were empty, people embraced each other and sat around in a tight circle, swaying to and fro, moving their feet to the sound of their own voices. They knew the words of their beloved folk songs: about a young maiden and a brave man galloping towards her on a white horse; about war and death; about the beauty of their old country. Daina and Saulė joined in the singing.

A tall man wearing a checked tie asked Daina, ‘Why don’t you want to stay in Australia for good?’

‘I feel foreign here,’ Daina admitted. ‘You’ve just told me that you experience the same feelings yourselves. It makes me wonder – if you are unable to adjust after all these years, it may be impossible. Your stories are about unfulfilled dreams. I have never felt so sad. Reading my uncle’s books and listening to his friends’ stories has made me nostalgic for things I thought I never cared about.’

‘True,’ Rima said. ‘Here we treasure everything Lithuanian, because once we go outside the Club walls, it’s another world.’

‘You’re right.’

‘She is, isn’t she?’

‘Definitely,’ everybody agreed.

Before Daina left the Club she visited the library and was surprised to find so many Lithuanian books. She selected a few and was told not to rush to return them.

*

Just before Christmas, Saulė invited Daina to go with her and her aunt to South Australia to visit Milda's son. Milda drove. After a while, Daina's eyes became dry and sore from spending hours looking at the light blue sky. The ground was flat and the landscape seemed to go on forever. The sides of the road were lined with untidy shrubbery and patches of trees.

'I'm surprised that the bush here appears so thin, not lush and thick like Lithuanian forests,' said Daina.

'Have you been to the Dandenong Ranges?' Milda asked.

'No.'

'There are plenty of lush ferns and tall eucalypts. That's what you call forests and more. They are tropical oases.'

'What about mushrooms? Are there any?'

'Local Lithuanians believe that the best places for finding them are around Geelong,' Milda said. 'But the only mushrooms I have found are champignons, and they aren't tasty, at least not to me.'

'Everybody tells me of these not so tasty champignons. I must try them one day just to satisfy my curiosity,' Daina said. 'Back home not many people were interested in picking them. But apparently they are delicious when marinated or properly prepared.'

'We only fry them in oil, and I find nothing special in their taste. I miss the Lithuanian mushrooms,' said Milda.

They had driven for about two hours when Milda stopped the car at a petrol station. Saulė and Daina ventured into the surrounding bush, discovering various fragrances of flowers and berries. The flies were sticking to their faces, necks and arms and the heat was exhausting. They had a short walk up and down the rest area, and drank some water upon returning to the vehicle. A few hours later they stopped again, got out of the car and had lunch. Milda carefully unwrapped bread, chicken pieces, garden salad and filled

the cups with coffee from the thermos. When the car stopped a third time, Milda stretched herself on a rug and closed her eyes. She rested for about an hour.

The young women took pictures of the trees, noticing how shallow their roots were. The strong acid of the eucalyptus oil, not even vaguely resembled the perfume of the pine trees. The gentle cuckoo calls seemed overpowered by the fancy-dressed rosellas who could not compete with the trills of the Lithuanian nightingales.

‘The nature here is a bit spooky,’ said Daina.

‘And too many flies,’ Saulė noted, waving her hands around. Feeling the intensity of the burning sun, they returned to the rest area where Milda was already gathering her things.

After driving all day, Milda pointed to the hills in the distance.

‘There are the Adelaide Hills. That is where Arūnas lives. We have almost arrived.’ As she turned off the main road and onto a side street, they spotted him, a tall young man in his early thirties with fair hair who was standing in front of a red brick house. Arūnas embraced his mother, introduced himself to Saulė and Daina, and invited them inside.

Daina couldn’t take her eyes from him. He helped them with their luggage and chatted with Daina in a mixture of English and Lithuanian. He explained how to use the shower taps and how to open the window. She wanted him to stay longer, but he excused himself as he needed to attend to dinner. While unpacking her bag and settling into her room, Daina heard Arūnas calling them to dinner. He’d cooked Malaysian vegetarian soup, followed by a salty Japanese dish with rice and salmon. They drank white wine and Milda suggested they raise their glasses to her son’s hospitality and exceptional culinary skills.

Later that night, he drove them to the beach. They parked the car and walked towards the water.

‘This is a favourite tourist attraction,’ Arūnas said, pointing at the cafés full of people and at the buildings across the shore.

‘They are so close to the water,’ Saulė said. ‘Don’t you have storms here?’

‘We do, but these buildings are strong, and the sea doesn’t rise so far up the coast anyway,’ Arūnas replied as they walked towards the bridge. Standing on the wooden bridge, Daina closed her eyes and tuned into the sound of the splashing of the waves and the flapping of the seagulls’ wings, and suddenly she felt like she was back home, on the beach at Palanga. Once she opened her eyes, she looked at the sand on the shore and realised that it was rough and yellow, like in Palanga. She spotted a young couple strolling along the sea’s edge, holding hands and kissing, then undressing and jumping into the water, leaving their clothes scattered on the sand.

She remembered swimming in the Altay Lake with Toivo, Marina, Ursula and Ivan. The water had been cold and the four of them had quickly swum back to shore, dried off and spent the rest of the night around the camp fire. She remembered how they’d talked about their trip and shared stories about those events that had the greatest impact on their lives. At that time she was already contemplating going to Australia, but had kept silent. It was a big deal to leave the Soviet Union in the mid-eighties, and Australia was not a common destination. She was suspicious of Ivan and worried about sharing any personal details. One night, she’d overheard him talking to Marina about his job as a KGB informer and inviting her to join the ranks. Daina couldn’t believe that already more than three years had passed since that trip. In Australia she didn’t have to worry about being spied on, or watch over her shoulder every time she spoke. Her eyes followed the young couple swimming side by side.

*

In the morning, Daina woke up to the sound of the chirping rosellas. The breakfast table was set with coffee cups, plates, bread, butter and orange juice. The bacon and eggs were served with hash browns and fresh tomatoes. As they watched their host running around the kitchen, the women talked of how they were pleased to be looked after. After an hour of eating and making jokes, Arūnas suggested they go into town. Milda volunteered to wash the dishes and stay home, but Saulė and Daina accepted his invitation with enthusiasm.

They arrived at a huge shopping centre. Both young women Saulė and Daina worried they might get lost or left behind. There were so many shops, so many things to

look at – shoes, feather hats, fancy dress costumes and masks, handbags, designer jeans, sun glasses and jewellery.

‘In Lithuania,’ Daina explained to Arūnas, ‘there is a shortage of fashionable items, and the only fabric readily available is black, grey or plain.’

‘I see.’

‘It’s true,’ Saulė added.

‘I had some clothing made from Australian fabrics sent to us by my great-uncle, Algis, whom I am visiting at the moment. My grandmother often recycled his fabrics to make new clothes in new styles for me until the fabric started to fall apart.’

‘Well, it seems to me that this is the perfect time then to update your wardrobe,’ Arūnas said, showing them around. He led them into a boutique shop and encouraged them to choose something they liked.

‘Sorry, I couldn’t,’ said Daina to Arūnas. ‘There’s nothing here that I want.’

‘As I said, you are most welcome to choose something, but it’s up to you, Daina.’ She joined Saulė and they both admired silk, woollen and cotton garments. Saulė chose light aqua and pink crocodile skin shoes, a yellow low-cut blouse and a cherry-coloured jumper. Daina suggested Saulė try them on and when she returned from the change room, Daina complimented her friend on her new look. Arūnas took his credit card out and paid. Then they stopped at the ladies’ clothing section of a large department store. Daina observed that while they were browsing around, Arūnas approached the shop assistant and whispered something in her ear. Then he left. Saulė and Daina found themselves with two female staff assisting them with a selection of garments to try on. The duo were surprised at the variety of undergarments available; there were so many colours and styles. Saulė tried on tops, pants and skirts. She chose long, body-hugging pants and a short leather jacket. The shop assistant complimented Saulė’s preference for a red pleated skirt, adding two pairs of thin, transparent stockings of the finest quality. Upon his return Arūnas settled the bill. Once again he encouraged Daina to let him know if there was anything she needed, but she shook her head. While putting their purchases into the boot of Arūnas’ car, Saulė kept thanking him for his kindness.

‘My greatest pleasure,’ he said. Then he took them to an old-fashioned photography studio. The photographer invited them to select from his collection of nineteenth-century outfits. The three of them disappeared into separate fitting rooms.

When they reappeared they looked like old movie characters. They couldn't stop giggling. Daina wore a long cream dress. Saulė wore a tiered brown skirt, a white blouse with a long row of tiny buttons, and held a white lacy umbrella. They sat on a fancy iron bench while Arūnas stood behind them with his fake moustache, a wooden cane and a bowler hat. After the "family photo" had been taken, the trio changed back into their own clothes and waited for the photos to be developed. They left the studio holding images of themselves as strange people from another century. They continued to giggle until they reached home.

On the way back to his house, Arūnas detoured to his friend's hairdressing salon. Antonio washed, cut and styled their hair. When Saulė and Daina saw each other they had to admit they looked like classy Westerners. Saulė's long curls were gone; her straightened hair now just reached her shoulders. Daina's pony tail had also disappeared under Antonio's scissors, and her hair now was cropped into a bob.

Milda looked shocked when she saw them. Daina noticed her raising her well-shaped eyebrows and rolling her green eyes. She stood there biting her thick lower lip, but didn't say anything. Arūnas said she should've come along and had her perm done. Milda dismissed his suggestion. She told him it wasn't due for two more weeks. As she spoke, she adjusted her short dark curls with her full fingers. They all admired the gifts for Saulė and then they went to their rooms. Daina opened her window and inhaled fresh air. She heard Milda's voice behind the wall.

'What are your intentions with Daina?'

'Why are you asking?'

'Because of the way you look at her. I just don't want her to get hurt, son.'

'I like her.'

'She is a charming girl but she is Saulė's friend. Please don't spoil things.'

'I won't.'

Daina smiled, trying not to breathe, listening intensely.

'I'll make us some nice dinner before we go out. Would you like to help me?' he said, changing the topic.

'Okay, but be careful son. Don't break her heart.'

Daina sat near the window for a while, watching six galahs spread out on Arūnas' fence with their white crests raised and their pink chests puffed out for her to admire.

'Even the birds are in couples,' she said. 'And I wish I had a second half.' Then she stood up and looked at herself in a mirror. 'He likes me,' she whispered to herself, pressing her generous lips to the mirror. She wished that Arūnas would come to her room that night.

After dinner they all went to the Casino. The flashing neon sign of the *Casino* could be seen from a great distance. Daina squinted from the intensity of the kaleidoscope of colours at shop and hotel entrances while they drove through the traffic in Milda's car.

The Casino was crowded. Some of the women wore evening gowns and the men were dressed in suits. When they entered the main hall full of poker machines, Arūnas excused himself. Daina noticed that Milda looked concerned, following him with her eyes until he disappeared behind the shiny wooden doors.

'I'm afraid that one day he will lose everything,' she said.

'Don't worry, Aunty, he is an adult and he seems to be doing very well for himself,' Saulė said. They proceeded to the gaming machines. Saulė volunteered to get some change.

About an hour later, Milda asked Daina to check on Arūnas. Daina entered a medium sized ill-lit room full of smoking, shouting, sweating faces – men seriously engaged in a card game. Arūnas saw her and indicated to her that she should wait outside. Soon after, he appeared holding a bag of plastic chips.

'I won,' he said. Then he gave her a hug, lifted her up and spun around. 'Let's go and exchange these pretend coins for real money.'

The cashier looked Daina up and down and then stared at Arūnas, licking her cracked lips as she counted \$5576. She passed the money to him and rolled her eyes, trying to get Arūnas' attention. Daina wondered whether he'd noticed.

Arūnas took his female guests to the Casino Restaurant for dinner.

'Can you hear how well their instruments sound in tune with each other?' Milda asked. Everybody nodded their heads. The musicians showed such skill that diners stopped eating and just listened. When the tender beef in mushroom sauce was brought

to the table, Daina felt hungry. She was overwhelmed by the music, food and Arūnas' attention. He invited her to dance. As she stepped out onto the dance floor, she felt classy, especially wearing Saulė's pink crocodile skin shoes. Saulė had been so generous sharing one of the new pairs of stilettos with her. Daina had matching lipstick too. She knew that her hair styled closely around her face made her look older, and she liked that. For the first time in her life, Daina felt mature, and she imagined that the young men sitting at the other tables were admiring her. Arūnas held her close to him and although the music was not slow, he took his time, swaying her gently to the left, to the right, and then holding her in his arms, breathing into her ear:

'You are so beautiful, Daina, Daina, Daina,' the smell of strong whisky wafting to her nostrils.

She wished they could dance all night. But she also wanted to talk. He was silent, breathing fast. His hair smelt of cigar smoke and woody aftershave. When the music stopped, he brought her back to the table and excused himself to replenish his drink at the bar. As she was about to sit down, a good-looking young man appeared in front of her and invited her to dance. Her partner's name was Leo. He was talkative and a skilful dancer. She was pleased to have the chance to waltz. She didn't let her tight skirt stop her, lifting it well above her knees whenever she turned. It surprised her that other couples just stood on the spot or did very little with their feet.

Then the Charleston followed and Leo showed Daina how to do it properly. His dark curly hair fell over his face and his brown eyes narrowed. She could smell beer on his breath. Daina observed other dancers watching them. She saw musicians also having fun on stage, speeding up the melody and increasing the intensity of the notes and volume. Daina nearly tripped in her high heels but continued to mimic her partner's moves, swaying to and fro and clapping to the rhythm. When he finally brought her to the table, she felt hot, fanning her face with her hand.

'You should take some dance lessons,' Arūnas said. 'Pardon the expression, and if I may say so – you looked like a puppet, running around the stage with that stranger, your ankles twisting in your high heels.'

'I am sure you don't mean it, my son?' asked Milda.

'No. I don't mean it. So sorry, my dears,' he said, kissing his mother on the cheek, and Daina on her hand.

‘But I thought I was a good dancer...’ Daina replied despondently, and slowly sank in her chair.

‘You had fun and that’s what matters,’ said Saulė. ‘Don’t listen to what my cousin says. He’s already drunk. He probably doesn’t even remember chatting to a young woman at the bar for such a long time.’

‘Which woman?’ Daina asked.

‘The blond one who is still there,’ Saulė replied.

Unsettled, Daina glanced over her shoulder and observed a tall, slim woman with a long fringe, laughing and drinking in the company of men. Daina didn’t like the woman in a very short skirt who was openly flirting with her companions. It was the woman’s fault for Arūnas not returning on time to dance with Daina. She watched Arūnas finish his last drop of whisky. He could hardly stand on his feet. At two o’clock in the morning, Milda drove them home.

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Daina had been in Adelaide for five days when Algis rang demanding her return. He complained of being ill. Daina put the receiver down and told them the news. She would have to miss the tour of the wineries they’d booked for the following day. She returned to the couch where she’d been sitting. Arūnas was reading the newspaper and didn’t respond to her news. Milda and Saulė were sympathetic. Milda brought her a cup of tea and a piece of cake. Then returned to the kitchen. Saulė went to her room.

‘Are you happy living with your uncle?’ Arūnas asked Daina.

‘Yes, I am. I just wish he wasn’t sick.’

‘What’s wrong with him?’

‘Oh, he is old and I feel obliged to look after him because he’s my relative.’

Arūnas reached for her hand and ran his fingers along it. She withdrew it hastily.

‘My hands are so rough now,’ she said. ‘I have to milk the cow, work in the garden, clean the house and have no time to take care of myself.’

‘My friend can do a nice manicure for you,’ he whispered.

Daina blushed. ‘Back in Lithuania I had my manicure and pedicure sessions frequently, but at Whittlesea I don’t need to bother.’

‘A woman should always look after herself, no matter the situation – nails, make-up and hair should look perfect. That’s what I like in a woman. And a smile, always a smile, Daina, remember to smile, it suits you,’ he said filling her glass with wine.

She studied his white hands and almond-shaped fingernails, and his smooth longish face. She thought he was quite feminine for a man. And yet, she found him irresistible, and, Daina had noticed, so did other women. His naturally curly hair was gorgeous. She had to spend a whole hour to make her straight hair curl. She also admired his long muscular legs. She was afraid that if he embraced her, she would tremble and dissolve like a snowflake. Daina felt his intensity in every movement he made and in every word he spoke. She avoided his narrow eyes because she suspected he could read her thoughts and didn’t want him to know that she was already falling in love. When she was around him, she wanted to wear short skirts, silk stockings, heels, a hat and lipstick, always ready to go out. He is definitely too classy for me, she thought.

‘If you want to live differently, you should move to Adelaide,’ Arūnas suggested.

She was surprised how easily he could imagine her doing that. ‘Things could change any time. You don’t understand how strict the Moscow Immigration Department is. They are probably already looking for me. For sure my name has been added to some secret file.’

‘Why?’

‘You see, I haven’t returned to Lithuania after six months as per my ticket.’

‘Why should somebody be looking for you?’

‘Because I am a Soviet citizen, that’s why. I still belong there. You live in a capitalist country and I’m from a socialist one. We can never be the same, even if we try.’

‘There, there. Let’s enjoy our freedom and youth and the rest will look after itself,’ he said, patting her hand, smiling.

That night, after she said goodbye to Saulė and Milda, and promised to visit them in Mornington, Arūnas took her to the bus station and purchased a ticket for her. She admired his slim figure and bouncy hair, as he helped the bus driver put her bag in the luggage compartment. When Arūnas returned to her side, she did not know what to say. He took her hand in his and gently squeezed her fingers. She blushed as she glanced

into his eyes. Arūnas kissed her on the forehead, whispering, 'See you around,' and slowly walked away, leaving her unable to move, full of sparkles, yearning for love.

The whole night on the bus, Daina thought about Arūnas. She wondered if he liked her or was just playing some kind of game. She liked him. He was handsome and attentive. He was a skilful chef and host. It would be a dream to have him for a husband – a cook and an entertainer, she thought. Even though Arūnas' face was secretive, she felt she could read his eyes. They'd been full of warmth. She had not been able to respond in the presence of Saulė and Milda. She wished she could have remained in Adelaide with him – they would dine together in a candle-lit room, sharing caviar, strawberries and chocolate, with jazz playing gently in the background and their fingertips touching.

Milda had told Daina and Saulė that she was afraid Arūnas might relocate abroad.

'Sometimes he is overseas on business for three to four weeks before coming home,' she had explained.

'But why does he live in Adelaide, not in Melbourne?' Daina asked.

'Because my ex-husband moved to Adelaide after our divorce and Arūnas joined him. I can't wait until he settles down. Only the right girl will keep him home,' she said, smiling at her.

Milda's words had made her blush at the time. She was worried that if she became involved with Arūnas, she wouldn't have him by her side for long. She'd noticed other women staring at him. He didn't seem to mind. She wondered if he was a womaniser. How else could she explain his disappearance during their shopping spree or from their dinner table at the Casino? If Daina hadn't been invited to dance by Leo, she would've had a boring night. Nothing had happened. Arūnas hadn't kissed her on the lips. Was she making one touch at the bus station mean too much? He had embraced her and spun her in the air at the Casino too, but he'd just won lots of money and he was excited. She wondered if she was getting carried away. After all, he hadn't said anything when he dropped her off at the bus stop. She wished he'd come after her, that he'd follow her to Whittlesea and rescue her from the cows and sheep, from Algis' demands. She had begun to hate being a nurse to Algis. She wanted to live the life she had imagined people living in the West, a carefree life. She was reluctant to return to the farm, to the boredom and the stillness. She didn't want to think of the farm or of Algis. Instead, she

found her notebook and wrote about Arūnas. *I just want him to be here. I hope he'll come after me. I'll wait till he finds me again and brings me flowers like Toivo used to do.*

She glanced out the window but there was nothing to look at. The grass burned by the sun was lifeless. The summer heat was merciless to nature. She closed her eyes and thought how cool it would be now in Lithuania, as it was winter. She recalled one particular winter night she'd opened the window and the crystal-like snow stars had landed on her outstretched hands, her nose and eyelashes. She'd been waiting for Toivo to arrive. She'd seen him hurrying towards her with a bunch of flowers in one hand, his bag in the other, looking like a snowman with a red nose. He'd come to spend a weekend with her in Kaunas and by the time he reached her door, the bunch of chrysanthemums he presented to her felt completely frozen in his rigid hands. *It's no good to keep thinking of the past and the Toivo that only lives in my imagination,* she wrote, closing her notebook and gradually drifting into a light sleep.

She dreamed of walking at the beachfront in Palanga. The sun was just rising in a clear sky. The stillness of the surroundings made her heart beat quickly and loudly. She could see the Baltic Sea. She took off her sandals and walked along the coastline. When she turned back, she saw a trail of her footprints embedded in rough sand. Along the way she found a tree branch, picked it up and started to write the words of a song on the wet surface:

*Aš ant balto smėlio parašiau tau laišką,
Ilgą gražų laišką iš visos širdies.
Jį skaitys tik vėjas, kurs po kopas braidu,
Jį skaitys tik vėjas, niekas negirdės...*

The incoming waves washed away the lines as Daina wrote them, but she didn't care. As the letters disappeared, she glanced into the water and couldn't see its end. Then she saw herself standing at the front of the ocean. The waves turned dark, angry, spitting out and dumping seaweed in the shape of plaits, ropes and scarves, shells of different sizes and colourful stones onto the sand. The water whispered its secrets to tree stumps and fishnets lying on the shore. Daina felt the strength of the ocean at her feet. She jumped into the water but the sand had shifted away. She felt sharp stones under her

feet, cutting into her skin. She began to swim. She found herself engulfed by the passing current, washing her back to shore like a tiny snail that had lost its shell. She watched the shades of the red sun in the bleached sky and wished she was a painter.

When Daina woke up, she smiled thinking of Arūnas again and again, giggling to herself, remembering how funny she must've looked dancing the Charleston in the restaurant at the Casino. Being a bit chubby didn't help. Her legs had twisted in the wrong direction and her shoes had seemed too big, the heels too high to follow such cosmic speed. The musicians had probably had a good laugh. If only she'd seen her dance moves in a mirror, she probably wouldn't have accepted a stranger's invitation. But then she wondered if Arūnas had been jealous of Leo and if her dancing hadn't been that bad after all.

She imagined Arūnas packing his case to go on his next trip. She wished she could go too, but then she thought of Algis and felt sorry for him. He had invited her to Australia, paid for her ticket. He'd been good to her. She hated to think that she might contribute to his unhappiness if she left. Since Algis had made his will, she felt even more obliged to stay.

She spotted the huge skyscrapers of Melbourne and was glad when the bus pulled into Spencer Street. Algis appeared looking healthy and happy; he gave her a tight hug. His white hair looked even whiter against his tanned skin and his greyish eyes were sparkling for a change. She was pleased to see him looking well. But deep down she also felt angry that he'd told her over the phone he was sick and needed her at home. What could she say? She was already back. He didn't need any help to put her bag in the boot of the car.

Algis went to bed early. Sitting on the veranda, Daina felt engulfed by the silence of this mysterious land. She recalled sitting on her grandmother's lap, playing with Roma's knitting, feeling happy in her company. She saw in front of her Roma's thin eyebrows, dark green eyes, and her round face full of warmth and comfort smiling at her; her strong hands stroking Daina's hair and singing *Du gaideliai* in her gentle voice.

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A couple of days later, while she was standing under the shower, Daina thought about the sound of the ocean waves. She had felt free at the beach and the echo of the wind in the shell had reminded her of home. Part of her wished she'd never come to Australia, especially because she didn't want to look after Algis. His vertigo was getting worse and he made her stay close to him. Also, his memory was going. Sometimes he didn't know what he was doing. Other times he abused her for stealing his pyjama pants or for taking his portable radio from his bedroom when he'd moved it to the kitchen himself. Daina heard a loud bang under her feet; it made her jump. Then she realised Algis was banging from below – probably with a broomstick. Daina turned the water off. He was shouting:

‘Don't waste water. You've been in the shower for eight minutes already.’ Her hands shook while she selected a pair of shorts and a t-shirt from her wardrobe and brushed her wet hair.

Daina knew Algis was waiting for her to cook his dinner, to read his paper to him and to discuss the latest Lithuanian politics. She simply couldn't face him. Instead, she turned the radio on and lay down. Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, played by the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, filled her room.

‘*Tu bjaurybė, kaip aš tavęs nekenčiu!*’ she cried, cursing Algis. The words spoken out loud made her feel better. The banging under her room continued, and eventually, hearing poor Star mooing, Daina went down, grabbed a bucket on the way, and headed towards the shed. The symphony triumphantly spilled onto the walkway and entered the shed. She cried while she milked the cow.

Daina recalled her grandmother telling her about her family life in the outskirts of Kretinga. How they'd lived on a farm, and from a small age Algis and Roma had to feed chickens and milk cows. How she'd learned to use a firm grip when milking each cow, squeezing the teat hard, until the last drop of milk leaked out of the reddened teat. What a woman, Daina thought, regretting she'd never learned that technique herself. Algis was too impatient to teach her properly. She was sorry now that she didn't know more about grandparents' youth, where their families came from, and what they'd experienced during the First and Second World Wars.

‘Maybe one day I’ll ask her all these questions. Thank God she is still alive,’ Daina said. Tightly squeezing Star’s teats, Daina watched the evenly-running narrow streams of milk. ‘You are full tonight,’ she said and patted the cow’s underbelly. ‘Listen, I want to tell you that as much as I love you, soon I’ll be rich and won’t have to milk you.’ Daina smiled when she saw Star lazily move her tail from side to side, trying to reach for a dozen flies sitting on her back.

While continuing with her milking, she thought about an advertisement she’d spotted in the Australian-Lithuanian newspaper the day before. It was written by Paulius Sasnauskas. He was searching for a female companion in her twenties. His photograph showed a man with a welcoming smile – he was blond and slim, his shirt unbuttoned, with a white t-shirt underneath. At first she’d hesitated, but then she’d rung him. He was kind and pleasant on the phone. He told Daina he had recently arrived from Klaipėda to visit his aunt. He wanted to make friends and to find a girlfriend.

They spoke for a long time about their life in Melbourne. She was looking forward to hearing from him again. He had promised to make contact as soon as he finished painting his aunt’s bedroom.

Daina heard noises behind her, turned around and nearly dropped the bucket. Algis, dressed in his pyjamas, top buttons done up crookedly, stood in the doorway.

‘Being ill as you are, I didn’t think you could walk so far,’ she said with a mixture of fear and surprise in her voice.

‘You’re right, it’s too much. Now I feel nauseous. Could you please help me back? I couldn’t go upstairs to turn the music off. I felt too weak. But what a waste of electricity!’ he told her, holding one hand to his chest.

‘I’m sorry, I forgot to turn it off,’ Daina lied. She put the bucket down and they returned slowly, step by step, his hand around her shoulders, finally getting to the front door. On their way, the music had stopped.

‘See, you didn’t have to look for me. The symphony has finished.’

‘But the radio is on! Don’t leave it on next time!’

Algis took his medication and Daina helped him back to bed. As she came back into the shed, Star gazed at her and mooed, her face covered in white froth, bucket on its side. Instead of getting angry, Daina began to laugh.

*

One sunny winter morning, Algis' neighbour Mėta came for a visit. Daina stopped cleaning the bathroom and could easily overhear their conversation.

‘Isn’t she lovely, your great-niece?’ Mėta said.

‘Oh yes, she is.’

‘I didn’t think someone from Soviet Lithuania would be so sweet. They are well disciplined over there – like soldiers, aren’t they?’

‘I can’t say. I haven’t been back, Mėta.’

‘Me either. Whatever she does or says, she is all smiles, doesn’t shun or show disrespect to us oldies. She’s not a communist, is she?’

‘Daina is a very charming girl and of course she doesn’t belong to the Communist Party, if that’s what you’re implying. They were only forced to be the “grandchildren” of Lenin, then to become pioneers and to join the *komsomols* in their youth. You know yourself how people back home had little choice but to comply or go to jail.’

‘Yes, I know. Oh...I’m not sure what to say. She may be a bit red, but as long as she’s not a communist, I suppose she is alright...’

‘Of course she is apolitical. She didn’t come here to collect information on us or anything like that. I checked her room and her notebook. The only thing she does is listen to the Russian news and that’s hardly a crime, is it?’

‘I agree,’ Mėta said. ‘You see, because she is Lithuanian, I want her to meet my son. He likes her already. I showed him a photo.’

‘Alright then, bring him over some time.’ Daina noticed Algis using the table to steady himself. ‘I’m feeling a little dizzy. Could you please help me into bed?’

Mėta led him to his bedroom and at that moment Daina appeared, helping him to get comfortable, tucking him in.

‘I thought you were outside,’ Mėta said.

‘I was,’ Daina lied, making her way out of the room. ‘Don’t worry about my uncle. It will pass. Lately he hasn’t been feeling well. He gets tired quickly,’ she said watching the elderly woman’s surprised face.

When Mėta left, Algis commented that he didn't particularly like her because she was nosy. Daina hid her notebook in a new spot under her clothes in the wardrobe. She knew now that Algis had been checking her room and she didn't want him to continue reading her private thoughts.

'He must be so bored with his life and enjoys learning my secrets. Then he watches me and thinks, aha, I know what she is up to. I know what she thinks of me. But it's so inappropriate. Dirty old man,' she kept repeating aloud in her room, feeling frustrated and angry.

A week later, Mėta returned unannounced. Daina had been resting on the veranda in a folding chair, her face covered in an apricot mask.

'What happened? Are you alright? Your face is all yellow!' Mėta grabbed her by the wrist. Daina opened her eyes. She suspected that by the next day, the Melbourne Lithuanians would be gossiping about the mysterious disease she'd caught.

'I'm not ill, just having an invigorating mask to refresh my skin. The climate here is too dry and my skin is flaky.'

'I see, I see. Are you saying that you might bathe yourself in milk next?'

'I didn't say that, but of course it would be nice,' Daina teased.

'You are young and don't need any extras to look good.' Talking non-stop, Mėta tried to help Daina remove the traces of mask from her face. Daina thanked her, pushing her hand away.

'I can manage it myself,' she said. Mėta placed an old suitcase near Daina's foot. When Mėta lifted the lid of the wooden case – probably a Second World War relic, Daina thought – she saw a couple of moths fly out. The strong smell of perspiration and dampness made her sneeze; she found it nauseating.

'I brought you something. Look at this coat, a cardigan, just look at this green evening dress with loose sleeves and a high neck. Feel the softness of this material!' Mėta exclaimed, planting a garment into Daina's lap. Daina sneezed again.

'You see. All these poisonous masks, they are making you unwell. You shouldn't be putting anything on your face as it may become discoloured.'

The telephone interrupted them and Daina excused herself.

‘Hello.’ She smiled hearing Paulius’ voice. It had been two weeks since she’d responded to his ad in the Lithuanian paper, and his silence was beginning to worry her. He’d rung to ask her whether he could come for a visit and she was delighted.

‘We could meet later today, about six,’ she said.

‘Where do you live, exactly?’

‘When you arrive in Whittlesea, turn left at the roundabout, then keep driving till you reach a brown wooden gate on your right with number twenty-two written on it with chalk.’

‘Lovely. See you soon then. Will you be wearing something Lithuanian?’ Paulius asked.

‘Maybe I’ll carry a flag,’ she giggled.

Mėta had been standing right behind Daina.

‘Who was that?’ she asked.

‘It’s my new friend. He’s coming to visit me tonight.’

‘I was hoping you’d be interested in getting acquainted with my son Ramūnas. He’d love to take you out. He is so impressed with what I’ve told him about your politeness and gentleness. Also, about you travelling on your own from the other side of the world where you were starving under the communists and only lived on the ideals of a perfect society. He thinks you must be very brave to manage to escape through the Iron Curtain.’

‘But I didn’t escape. The Moscow authorities actually let me come to visit Algis. Your ideas about me are groundless. As for the perfect society, yes, we had this dream that all, big and small, wealthy and poor, good and bad, eventually would become equal. Where we wouldn’t be required to pay for goods and services, where we’d eat at communal kitchens and the government would take care of us. Equal and happy – a classless society is the goal of communism; it’s a goal that we haven’t quite reached yet. We’ve only progressed into the second stage of socialism, meaning that no matter what job one does in an organisation, most of us receive the same wages. That’s the way we are aiming to achieve fairness and equality.’

‘Do you really believe what you say?’ Mėta asked in a fearful voice, squinting at Daina with her muddy eyes.

‘Maybe or maybe not, but the citizens of Lithuania, like citizens of the other republics that belong to USSR, don’t question this set of values.’

‘I’m never going back to Lithuania,’ Mėta said.

‘Where did you originally come from?’ Daina asked.

‘I was born and raised in the village of Girkaliai near the famous seaside resort of Palanga. My sister is still there. We had a wonderful childhood – our parents used to take us to the beach, where we enjoyed swimming and building sandcastles. Being five years older than my sister, I’d create my castle and then help Rožė finish hers. Our parents would come to inspect our artwork, rewarding us with ice cream. Oh, how I miss those carefree days.’

‘Where are your parents now?’

‘They were taken away. I never heard from them.’

‘That’s so sad.’

‘Luckily the night they were deported, I was away in Vilnius and my sister was staying with our aunt in Šiauliai. We survived, but were separated. I love my little Rožytė. She is seventy-five now. She only survives because of the parcels I send her.’

‘What do you send?’

‘Second-hand shoes and clothing.’

‘Like what you brought today?’

‘Yes, similar.’

‘But people over there can buy ordinary clothes. Food is a problem,’ Daina said.

‘Well, Rožė has never mentioned not wanting clothes...’

‘How could she? It would upset you, wouldn’t it?’

‘Are you saying that I should send her other items? I know that some of my friends send sugar and rice.’

‘Not sugar or anything heavy like rice, but dried fruit and vitamins and other essentials like toilet paper and medication. I am sure your sister would be happier with those sorts of things.’ She felt like adding – rather than wearing stinky, moth-eaten items – but she didn’t for Algis’ sake. ‘Don’t think badly of Lithuania,’ she said instead. ‘Personally, my life was alright there. My education was free. I could easily eat my three-course dinner for a ruble while earning 130 rubles a month. My rent used to be 15 rubles per month. Bread only cost 30 kopeks a loaf. I was able to have two part-time

jobs on top of my main position. It was hard to juggle, but possible. The reward was great – every summer my friends and I could afford to travel around the Soviet Union.’

‘But we’ve heard that pensioners can’t survive. That’s why I’m helping my sister,’ Mèta replied. Daina observed her opening her black leather handbag. Mèta’s grey hair, gathered neatly in a bun, was falling loose.

‘By the way, I have something for you from Ramūnas,’ she said, going through the contents of her bag. Her short thin fingers shook as she mumbled swear words ‘*velnias tave rautų, velnias tave rautų!*’ under her breath. Finally, she took out a small blue box and offered it to Daina. Daina didn’t move.

‘You mustn’t refuse. Have a look at it.’

‘I don’t even know your son. How can I take his gift?’

‘Oh, that’s no problem. I can show you his photo,’ Mèta replied, opening her handbag a little. It contained used tissues, a few lipsticks and a half eaten apple. ‘Here it is.’ Mèta produced a scrunched, oily photograph of her son, wiping sweat from her forehead with her used tissues and adjusting her loosened bun with a few pins.

‘This photo is unclear. I can’t see his face. I must start cooking for my guest now, if you’ll excuse me, please.’ She observed Mèta angrily stuffing the blue box and the photo in her pocket, closing the top of the suitcase she had brought, and walking towards her car. Daina noticed how well Mèta was dressed. She wore expensive-looking slacks and a light brown blouse, buttoned up to her neck. On the middle finger of her left hand, a huge diamond ring shone, and an opal brooch was pinned to her cardigan. She placed her suitcase in the boot of her vehicle and before driving away she swore loudly at Daina:

‘Tai matai kokia karvė, kokia komunistė atsirado!’

*

Daina shook her head and returned to the kitchen, where she hastily prepared her favourite *balandėliai*. Firstly, she simmered loose cabbage leaves. When the leaves softened, she drained them and stuffed plenty of salted and spiced mince meat into each, making huge rolls, and tying each one with white cotton thread. Then Daina fried them for about half an hour, and made a sauce with cream, onions, mushrooms and bacon.

Then she mixed the cabbage rolls and sauce up in a pan. The aroma of bacon filled the house.

‘Oh, *balandėliai* tonight!’ Algis exclaimed, entering the kitchen.

‘I still need to boil some potatoes when my guest arrives.’

‘Who is coming?’

‘Paulius, my new friend.’

‘Where did you meet him? I didn’t see you talking to any young men at the Club. Anyway, Mėta wants you to marry her son.’

‘I understand. Of course, he may like me, but we’ve never met. Why can’t he come and tell me these things himself, instead of sending his mother with a ring?’

‘Did I miss something?’

‘Yes, you did. She just left in a very upset mood after finding out that I already have a friend.’

‘Do you mean the one that is coming tonight?’

‘Yes. I am not willing to marry someone I’ve never seen in my life. I am not even willing to consider going out with him because I already like Paulius. He’ll be here in a couple of hours and my hair is not washed, my nails are not done...’

‘I see,’ he said, and she could sense a shade of jealousy in his voice. She quickly made him a cup of coffee, serving it with a biscuit, then ran upstairs to have a shower. The radio had been playing her favourite ABBA tune and she joined in.

‘Stop that singing. Stop it! Put on a Lithuanian record instead!’ Algis shouted from the bottom of the staircase. At first Daina ignored him. She was not going to let him spoil her excitement, but, not wanting to upset him, she paused in the middle of the song, turned the volume down, leaving ABBA to continue with their words: ‘Money money money...’

After getting ready, Daina joined Algis in the lounge room and they both waited for Paulius. Algis drank some vodka and Daina red wine.

‘When I have a drink or two, I want to sing,’ he said. ‘Do you know that Lithuanians in Australia have sung from the moment they first stepped off the boat?’

‘Did they?’ she said, but her thoughts were focused on Paulius. Should I smile or be serious on our first date? What should I say? Will he like me? Oh, I am so worried now. She remembered her mother telling her if she wanted to gain a man’s respect, she

should be as serious as her mathematics teacher and never flirt with him on the first date. Daina protested that her teacher was mean, and her mother said that that's exactly how a woman should treat a man. Daina was wondering why her mother had never treated her husband that way. Daina's father was like her teacher – mean and angry, angry and mean.

‘No, even earlier,’ Algis continued, making her concentrate on what he was saying. ‘We began singing together in German camps. How better to remember our country that we longed for so much than to sing about the green ruses, the beautiful maidens, blossoming like fresh flowers, and the young men, strong like oaks? I wish I was young and strong again. My love for my blue-eyed maiden is not forgotten. I can see her in my dreams, her long plaits stretching to her waistline. Where did the time go? Once I was in love myself. At school...’

‘Was it with Morta, the woman we wrote to?’

‘Yes.’

‘Tell me about it, please,’ Daina asked unconvincingly.

He just shook his head, ‘Some other time. Some other time. You must go now.’

Daina walked down the path, between the gum trees. Her heart was beating fast and she gulped for air. She was perspiring. She was nervous with anticipation and also conscious of her appearance. Since she had first spoken to Paulius, she had spent hours and hours anticipating their meeting and trying to decide what to wear for their possible date. She'd finally asked Milda to make her a skirt with side splits and a matching jacket. The light blue material was a gift from one of Algis' friends. Daina had washed the fabric and hung it on the clothes-line for days, until the smell of dampness and mothballs had completely evaporated. Then she'd gone to Mornington and spent a couple days there while Milda made her the suit. Milda patched a tiny moth hole on the right side of the skirt close to the waistline. It stretched perfectly around Daina's full figure. During her stay, she helped Saulė to clean, cook and wash up. Every morning, they walked to the beach. Daina told her about Paulius: about the ad in the paper, his photo, their conversation, and the impending date. She admitted being nervous about dating.

‘Why?’

‘It’s just that I’m not sure I’m doing the right thing. I left my boyfriend behind.’

‘So what? He is there and you are here. What’s the problem?’

‘I don’t know how I feel about him anymore. You see, I saw him with another woman.’

‘How? When?’

‘Just before I came to Australia.’

‘But that was ages ago!’

‘He didn’t realise I saw him with this other student. He wasn’t expecting to see me at Moscow University, but I went there to say goodbye.’

‘So, what did you see?’

‘They were holding hands. She was fiddling with his hair. He was whispering into her ear.’

‘What did you do?’

‘I just stood there, behind a tree, trying to slow down my heavily beating heart. It seemed to me they were having an intimate conversation. He didn’t protest at being touched.’

‘Well. As far as I’m concerned, he is something of a relic you must hide in a cupboard for now, and get on with your life. What kind of man is he – letting himself get tangled up? If I was in his shoes, I would’ve stood up and told her, “I’m sorry, I have a girlfriend already!” But no, he wants to be with her and also loves you – can you see the absurdity of this situation?’ Saulė said. ‘By the way, I noticed that my cousin had his eyes on you. He was all over you in Adelaide,’ she teased.

‘But Arūnas is too striking for me,’ Daina said, though she had been thinking of their occasional conversations, hoping he would call soon.

‘You shouldn’t be putting yourself down. Get on with it, Daina, enjoy what life presents you with. It’s wonderful to be loved and pampered by all these men. Don’t let go of opportunities.’

‘Oh, you are so clever, Saulė.’

‘I’d call myself a forward thinker or a strategist.’

‘I’d love to be more like you.’

‘You will, don’t worry. One day. I’ve had plenty of bad experiences with loving men who didn’t respond to my feelings. I’m sick of their game. Love is not worth

bothering with. It's the forward planning that matters. As the saying *kaip pasiklosi, taip išmiegosi* proves.

*

Daina reached the gravel road and waited, holding a tiny Lithuanian flag of yellow, green and red in her hand. Soon an old car appeared. Paulius stopped his Bluebird close-by and opened the window:

‘Daina?’

‘Of course, can't you see the flag?’ she said, waving it cheekily in front of him.

‘Hello Daina,’ Paulius replied and jumped out of his seat, leaving his car running. There was a trail of billowing smoke behind it. Daina noticed how intensely Paulius looked at her. His hands shook as he pinned a tiny bunch of flowers to a flap of her jacket. He had a friendly open face and she admired his light green eyes. She noticed he was wearing a wig and she wondered why. He was shorter than Daina but it didn't bother her – but the wig was an entirely different matter.

‘Violets, how lovely!’ Daina exclaimed and thanked Paulius with a kiss on his smooth cheek. ‘Let's drive in,’ she suggested, adjusting her flowers, and taking the passenger seat in the car. Once Paulius began to drive, she heard a loud clunking noise.

‘What's wrong with it?’

‘Nothing. It's just old and needs repairing.’

‘That's alright then. One day you'll fix it, I'm sure, or maybe buy a new one...’

‘Maybe.’

‘Now let's go to meet my great-uncle.’

‘Is he alright with us meeting at his place?’

‘Sure he is. He's been waiting for you.’

‘Where should I park then?’ Daina showed him a spot under a tall gum tree, not far from the house.

‘*Labas vakaras. Paulius Sasnauskas,*’ he straightened up and introduced himself to Algis, who was standing on the veranda.

‘*Labas, labas. Algis Baniulis.*’ They shook hands.

‘I don't think I've ever seen you at the Club. Are you new here?’

‘I came from Lithuania recently.’

‘You are new then.’

‘You could say that,’ Paulius replied.

‘How do you like Australia?’ Algis asked, easing his way into conversation. Daina excused herself so she could finish preparing the dinner. She needed to boil the potatoes that were already peeled and soaking in water. She warmed the *balandėliai* up in the oven and reheated the thick sauce.

‘The dinner is ready,’ she announced, returning to the veranda after about half an hour. She was wearing a white apron, her cheeks burning red.

‘Let’s go inside,’ Algis said. ‘As I was saying...’ Daina didn’t hear the end of the sentence as she was busily serving the meal.

‘*Balandėliai*?’

‘Yes,’ Daina replied.

‘My favourite meal my mother used to make!’ Paulius exclaimed and they helped themselves to the food. The talk between the two men continued over a bottle of vodka Paulius had brought all the way from Lithuania. Their voices became louder.

‘Do the Russians keep their tanks in the seaside resort of Nida?’ Algis asked.

‘I’ve seen tanks on the streets of Klaipėda, where, by the way, I come from. There is an army base outside the city centre. But Nida is a no-go zone for many as one must have a special pass to get to the resort.’

‘I’ve heard about some secret underground tunnels and warheads hidden there,’ Algis said.

‘I haven’t,’ Daina said.

‘We are only programmed to work and not supposed to ask questions,’ Paulius continued. ‘The less you know the better it is for you.’

‘I see what you mean, young man,’ said Algis and suggested the trio raise their glasses to toast the freedom they enjoy in Australia. Then he encouraged Paulius to continue.

‘Unfortunately, I had my share of bad luck. Have a look,’ Paulius said, taking off his wig. ‘See, the consequences of Chernobyl? I used to be quite a lady’s man but look at me now.’

Taken aback, Daina observed his short patchy hair and listened to his story, quietly eating her dinner. Paulius stopped eating and stared into space with watery eyes.

‘After the 1986 explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor,’ he said.

‘April twenty-fourth?’ Algis interrupted.

‘Yes. I was sent there on assignment. As a highly qualified engineer and a team leader, I took a group of men into the territory of the reactor to help clear the debris. It was five weeks after the explosion, but the air was still heavy with smog from the chemicals. We had not been given any protective clothing and worked with our bare hands. There was complete chaos around us. Nobody cared about us.’

‘But that’s awful,’ Algis said and Daina shook her head.

‘Russians are animals...For this they should be rotting in Siberia,’ Algis said.

‘Oh, some should,’ Paulius replied. ‘Anyway, the radioactivity in our living quarters was high. I used to put a teaspoon to my chest and it just sat there, as if glued to the skin. We heard that even in the neighbouring cities, the radioactivity levels reached one hundred milliroentgens per hour. I’m not sure if you know, but the average exposure to radiation through x-ray machines is about three hundred and fifty milliroentgens per year...per person.’

‘That is murder in broad daylight!’ Algis exclaimed.

‘Just wait. There is more: out of those twenty people working with me, one lived only a few months, others developed skin and lung problems. I’ve lost my hair.’ He poured more vodka into his glass and kept talking. His eyes were burning with hatred. His hands held the utensils tightly. Daina felt like crying. She wanted to press his head to her chest and kiss it. She felt he needed care and attention.

‘Don’t worry. You’ll be fine, young man. You look alright. You are strong. You’ll recover,’ said Algis.

‘There’s no doubt that all of us suffered and probably will continue to do so for the rest of our lives,’ Paulius spoke again. ‘I saw trucks taking people away from the area. Some locals were reluctant to leave and chose to stay, even to die, in their own houses. At the start of June, upon my return home, while I was staying at the rehabilitation centre in Palanga, hundreds of people arrived from Chernobyl. As they disembarked from the buses, I observed their red eyes, lifeless faces, the elderly and children coughing.’

‘Oh dear,’ Algis said.

‘We knew that the Russian authorities, who hid this explosion from the world, were hoping that medication and the fresh air of the tourist resort at the front of the Baltic Sea would cure their illness. It was not a joke and I started to worry about myself. Out of desperation I wrote to my aunt in Australia. She kindly extended her invitation and organised my visit here. And two years later, here I am.’

‘Let’s drink to that,’ Algis suggested and they raised their glasses. ‘What’s your aunt’s name?’ he asked.

‘Svetkowska, Rasa Svetkowska.’

‘I don’t know this woman.’

‘She doesn’t mix with Lithuanians. She’s married to a Polish man. But she is Lithuanian, born in Šilutė as Rasa Gružauskaitė.’

‘Never heard of her,’ Algis said. ‘I am amazed the Soviets let you out with that kind of experience. The details of the Chernobyl explosion were kept hush hush. Weren’t the authorities cautious of your departure?’ Algis asked.

‘You’re right, and the only way I could come was through my aunt’s uncle. He works at the Parliament in Melbourne and he managed to help get a tourist visa through the Australian Embassy in Moscow. Now I’m applying for a humanitarian visa. I don’t intend to go back, that’s for sure.’

‘Good on you,’ Algis said. ‘Are you a member of the Communist Party?’

‘Of course not,’ Paulius replied angrily, and his face reddened at once.

‘Very interesting, very interesting... Tell us some more,’ Algis encouraged.

‘Are you planning to stay with your relatives here?’ asked Daina.

‘It’s a bit cramped at Rasa’s house. They have three children and I sleep on a couch in the lounge room.’

‘How about work?’ Algis asked.

‘I’d love to find a job, to get into engineering. Just need to learn English.’

‘That’s good,’ Algis said. ‘Australia is a good country. You’ll find a job easily, especially in your profession.’ Daina wanted to say that she didn’t think so, but she just sat there, placing her fork on her plate. She had hardly touched her food. She stood up and went to the kitchen to make some coffee.

They continued talking until the early hours of the morning. Finally, Paulius apologised for his lengthy stay and stood up to leave.

‘Not at all, not at all,’ Algis replied. ‘I actually have a proposition for you. Why don’t you consider moving in with us? I have a huge house and a farm that needs to be maintained. Daina can’t do it all on her own. I am too old to be working. My head is spinning; you see... Sometimes I feel I am losing my memory. From day to day I don’t recall what has been done and what needs to be done here.’

‘I’ll think about it. If I decide to join you, when could I move in?’

‘Any time, any time. We are home every day and the spare room is next to my bedroom. Would you like to have a look?’

‘Yes please,’ Paulius replied and they walked around the house.

‘It’s so spacious,’ Paulius said enthusiastically. ‘I really like it here.’

‘Alright, then. By the way, everything will be free – food, accommodation, electricity, plus I’ll give you a small salary. What do you say?’

‘It sounds tempting.’

The men shook hands. Paulius smiled, gazing into Daina’s eyes.

‘Let me talk to my aunt and if she agrees with it, I’ll move in as soon as I can. How long will the offer stand?’

‘We are not in a rush to get someone,’ Algis replied as they said their goodbyes.

The Bluebird struggled up the hill amongst the shadows of the trees, finally reaching the uneven road.

‘I hope he is going to make it home tonight. That car is old and he had so much to drink,’ said Daina, with concern in her voice.

‘Don’t worry, he’ll be fine. Actually I like him. I’d love him to live here. I enjoyed his company – someone to talk to, to have a quiet drink with. That’s all I want in my old age.’

*

Algis and Daina returned to the house and went to bed. Daina couldn’t sleep. She was thinking about Paulius. He was attractive. When he talked, his thick, round lips formed into tiny pillows. His hair underneath the wig was short and white. She loved that. She didn’t like the dark wig. It made him look older. She was annoyed that he’d put a

photograph of himself as a much younger man in the newspaper and described himself as ‘a good-looking twenty-seven year old.’ She was surprised he’d lie about his age. He was definitely over thirty. But she wasn’t too disappointed and hoped he wasn’t lying about anything else. The events leading to him going to Chernobyl and working there on a rescue mission couldn’t be more real. In her eyes Paulius was a hero. She hoped they’d develop a strong friendship that might lead somewhere, but she was not in a rush. Even though he called only occasionally, Arūnas was still on her mind. He was entertaining and funny. Paulius was the opposite – scarred by his experiences. She also had a strange feeling that Paulius had a secret past, a past he was not willing to share...

‘We shall see,’ she said. When she finally fell asleep, she dreamt of trains and buses flying in the sky. She was flying too. In the morning, she decided the dream meant excitement and positive change. She hoped that when Paulius came to live with them, her life would change for the better.

A few weeks later, Paulius rang Daina. He said he was busy with house renovations, and regretted not being able to come for a visit. Once they finished their conversation she thought that her whole life so far was about waiting. She used to wait for Toivo to come to Kaunas; she kept waiting for Arūnas to call; she was waiting for Paulius to move in. With her eyes full of tears she sat in her room watching the passing clouds outside the window. She could see the animals coming down to graze on the grass, and imagined foxes and snakes lurking at night around the chicken enclosure. Her friends would be shocked if she told them that during the drought, when food was scarce, the kangaroos banged on the windows with their front feet. Of course they also left their droppings everywhere and Daina had to be careful not to stand in the small brown pellets. Her friends would be appalled to find out the truth about her life with Algis. In her letters she didn’t talk about his stinginess with money. He was so frugal. He showed her how to light the stove with a single match, even if he was going to use all four burners. During the winter months of June, July and August, Daina got accustomed to wearing fingerless gloves, just to keep her hands from freezing. Algis only allowed her to turn the gas heater on when the temperature in the lounge dropped to +10 degrees Celsius. At times she was shivering and her teeth were chattering. But she tried to make the most of it. How many people had the opportunity to live in such a spacious house

with plenty of land like she did? She watched two greyish-brown kookaburras fly up and down, until they finally settled on the branch of a tree to preen their feathers. Algis had told Daina that in the late forties postwar refugees arriving in Australia were scared of the kookaburras' laugh. They thought it was the locals laughing at them, and were surprised when it turned out that it was the birds that were teasing them; scaring them with their deep eerie voices. Algis explained how, little by little, he learned about these birds and eventually fell in love with them. Algis told her that the kookaburras feast on lizards, snakes, insects, mice and raw meat. When their chicks hatch, the whole family laugh, making a lot of noise as well as leaving droppings everywhere. Daina wished he wasn't feeding them leftovers. The grating laugh made her feel uneasy and she just wanted them to fly away.

*

In May, Daina and Algis visited the Club again. As usual they sat at Algis' table with Saulė and Milda. While Milda helped in the kitchen, Daina and Saulė were happy to catch up. Soon more people gathered around – some sitting down, others behind the bar, chatting away. Algis asked Daina whether she'd brought her notebook with her, and she said that she always kept it close-by. Then Algis told those standing close to his table that if they wanted to listen to good poetry, they should hear Daina reading some. Daina was surprised by his words.

‘How do you know that it's good?’

‘Because I've heard you reciting at home.’

‘Alright then. I've been writing to express what I feel about Lithuania,’ she said, ‘and would love to share it with you, if you wish.’

‘Please do!’

‘Sure.’

‘Why not?’

The circle around Algis' table tightened as more people gathered closer. Daina reached for her handbag, took out a notebook, found the page, and after clearing her throat, began to recite how she felt about living between the two countries, Lithuania and Australia:

*Gyvenu svajone, tebekeikiu likimą,
Tarp dviejų kontinentų, upių, marių, krantų.
Lūkuriuoju audros, galutinio sprendimo,
Kad priglusčiau ramiai prie berželių savių.

Išsitraukiu aš sagę iš rūdijančios skrynios,
Ją nublizginu švelniai, dovanosiu gal kam.
Margaspalviai karoliai ir brangus ametistas
Lyg ir džiugina akį, tik skirti neilgam.*

She paused for a second to glance at her audience. They appeared mesmerised by her performance. The memory of being in the theatre returned. I am a celebrity now, she thought, straightening herself up and continuing to read.

*Nesulaukus nei žodžio, nei menkiausio žodelio,
Sudėlioju skrynelėj nesklaidytus lapus.
Laiško nuotrupos seno jau pageltę nuo laiko,
Be atsakymo tvinksi sielos šauksmas duslus.

Neužbaigsiu rašyti, prie vartelių rymosiu,
Nusišveisiu aš skrynią pilną žodžių karčių,
O viltis lyg balandis, tolimon nuplasnojus,
Saugos vis palikimą nebaigtų paslapčių.*

Everybody listened intensely. Even the barman stopped collecting glasses and bottles from other tables. As soon as Daina finished the poem, he spoke:

‘I have seen many people drowning their tears in their drink. I pour them a glass of vodka or wine and what do they do? They start telling me their life stories.’

‘We do, we do,’ replied a short old man with only a few remaining wisps of hair. ‘Let me tell you my story, young ladies, but firstly, let me introduce myself. My name is Vilius,’ he leaned forward and kissed Daina and Saulė’s hands. ‘You should’ve known me when I was young, tall and handsome.’

‘Here he goes again, forgive him, girls, he is our clown,’ the barman said.

‘As I was saying,’ Vilius continued, ‘I am one of the DPs, and spent the first two years of my compulsory contract working on the Queensland sugar plantations. That’s where I acquired some muscles.’ He tucked his big belly in and bent his arm, showing off his upper part.

‘Please touch it,’ he said to Daina.

‘I can’t see any muscles,’ she replied.

‘There is only flabby skin,’ said Algis, touching Vilius’ hand and everybody laughed. Vilius smiled.

‘Anyway, we were fifty men cutting cane. My brother and I helped each other at work so that we didn’t fall behind as targets had to be constantly met. The conditions were harsh, the sun was unbearable and the future... There was no future, really, as we had left everything back home. In Lithuania, my father was a rich and respectable farmer. We had a huge house, animals, and a well-established orchard. My brother and I had hardly ever done physical work: he was a poet, and I played the piano. Cutting cane was difficult.

‘My mother was a great singer from Gargždai. When she married my father, they moved to Dreverna. Mother was not very good in the kitchen or outside, but we had servants. The servants cleaned, washed, cooked. They helped my father in the fields. My mother made me practise my scales every day. She also taught music at our school. Then the news of the war came and we found out that farmers would be deported to Siberia. Our father encouraged us to seek a safer place. We packed our clothes overnight, leaving our servants to take care of the house. Nobody suspected that we’d never return. Our strong horses managed to take us to Šventoji. There we found a boat – for a fee to the captain, of course – that one night sailed to the German border... That was in 1944. In Germany we lived in DP camps and in 1949 our family arrived in Australia.’

‘That’s a moving story,’ Saulė said.

‘Thank you for sharing it with us,’ Daina said.

‘Let’s have a drink, everybody,’ the barman suggested. When the empty glasses were replenished, he proposed a toast to those who never reached Australia.

‘I sveikata, į visų sveikata!’ The sound of the clinking glasses echoed around the bar. Then people turned back to Algis’ table, begging Daina to recite more.

‘Alright then,’ she turned the next page of her notebook and began to read,

Nostalgija

*Manęs šiandieną niekas nepažįsta,
Nes aš esu visai kita,
Gyvenimo audrų ilgai bandyta,
Daugybės laiko priešų apsupta.*

*Nerūpestingos dienos skyrė dalią
Toli nuo artimų ir Lietuvos,
Todėl lig šiolei širdį šitaip gelia,
Nėra paguodos nuo ligos savos.*

Daina looked up and noticed a number of people were crying. She felt as if she’d lived through their hardships; as if she’d arrived in Australia on one of the army ships herself to start a new life here, where she felt threatened by the spooky laugh of the kookaburras. She felt that maybe she should stop reading. She wanted to embrace them all and say let’s go where we belong – then we don’t have to yearn for the other shore, but she continued to read in her trembling voice:

*O ta liga – nostalgia vadinas,
Tik prabundu, o ji jau čia, šalia,
Tėvynės šauksmas ir pušų dvelkimas
Nebeišnyksta atminties saite.*

When she finished, a heavy silence hung in the air. Women stared into the distance with teary eyes. A few people clinked their glasses and took a mouthful of their drinks. Earlier they had been cheering and singing, but after Daina’s reading their faces seemed lifeless. When the conversations began again they were quiet, almost whispers, and it took a while before they became loud again.

‘Your poems express what we feel day and night, year after year,’ a softly spoken man wearing a grey beret and holding his jacket on his lap said to Daina.

‘Glad you liked them.’

‘Oh, so many of us wanted to go back,’ said another.

‘When we arrived, we were certain we would return, we were just waiting for the Soviets to leave Lithuania, for our farms to be returned to us, our houses vacated by the invaders,’ volunteered a well-spoken woman called Birutė. ‘The fifties, sixties, and seventies passed by and we were still living with the hope that we would one day see our lost land. Then our families grew up, we built houses, found employment, cared for our children and grandchildren, some learned good English...The day of our return never came.’

‘There are no words to describe our loss. We won’t recover nor will we ever belong to this strange land...’ Vilius added.

‘We’d like to go back one day, but why go now? The Russians are still living in our houses. The world believes that they “saved” Lithuania from German occupation,’ one man said.

‘Our family home was destroyed, the fields emptied, and the stables ruined. Apparently everything has been levelled to the ground,’ another man said.

An elderly woman called out to her husband:

‘Povilas, let’s go home. Enough of the glass lifting! You might damage your wrist,’ she teased and everyone around her laughed.

People were finishing their conversations and shaking hands. Saulė and Daina chatted away until Milda returned to pick her niece up.

*

‘Why don’t you go to the choir?’ Daina asked Algis.

‘I had an argument with Stasys, and I’m glad I’m not going,’ he said. Daina hoped to persuade him to return. She knew he wanted to be part of the choir. She had heard him sing in the yard and in the company of his guests. She thought if he rejoined the choir it would be good for both of them.

Algis finally agreed, and rang the conductor. Daina was pleased. She listened to his conversation with Mykolas. Mykolas wanted to find out about Daina, and Algis passed her the receiver. She liked his loud and joyful voice and appreciated his genuine interest in her. They chatted for a while about her stay at Algis’ farm. He told her about

his youth in Laukuva and his love of the accordion, and his regret at not being able to study music because of the war. Then she passed the receiver back to Algis.

‘My niece is well educated, like they all are over there. At such a young age, she is already a theatre producer.’

After putting the receiver down, Algis told Daina that Mykolas was more than happy for her to stand in the front row of the choir and look pretty. Mykolas thought it might help to attract some younger singers. She was hesitant to sing in the choir as she didn’t have the confidence. She mentioned this to Algis and he dismissed her doubts with laughter.

‘Everybody in the choir will give you plenty of support, don’t worry about that. They will treat you well, you’ll see.’

Algis sat in his favourite chair watching the television. During the commercials they spoke of how their life would change when they started to attend the choir. Daina was certain that for him, rejoining the group would be the best medicine. She hoped that singing might make him more cheerful and relaxed. Soothed by Algis’ reassurance, she was now looking forward to being a chorister. She remembered having to stand with the second altos at school, the choir conductor telling her to sing softer. Although she enjoyed the compulsory rehearsals, Daina had no opportunity to do any solos. Her music teacher kept saying that she wasn’t ready for a solo performance, and that her voice had not matured enough to carry the sound on her own.

That night, in her dreams, Daina saw herself on a stage, wearing a pink dress decorated with lilies. She had long blond hair that swayed from side to side. She moved her hips sideways, singing in Lithuanian. The other choristers were shouting at her for not holding a tune. One of them pushed her off the stage.

‘Go back to where you came from! We don’t want you to be with us and to learn our secrets. We don’t want to share anything with you. You are not one of us.’ Daina ran away from the Club but could still hear their harsh voices, their sharp and angry laughter, as she tried to hold her hands tight to her chest to stop the pain. She woke up screaming. She drank a glass of water sitting on her side table and shut her eyes again, but the dream didn’t return.

*

The rehearsal started at seven o'clock in the evening. The singers greeted them with warm embraces and handshakes. Daina enjoyed the attention. After people were seated, the conductor Mykolas appeared, distributing new songs. He asked the basses to repeat their part after him. Daina felt proud, hearing Algis' voice, strong but soft as velvet. She understood why everyone was so happy to have him back. After the lower voices had learned their parts, Mykolas taught the tenors. While one group was working on its part, the others were chatting to each other. Women were sharing their sewing and knitting tips; men talking about fishing spots and renovations. It was like any social gathering.

When the altos began to practise, she sang quietly, afraid of being told off. She enjoyed the music, the way it reminded her of Lithuania, bringing back the sounds of the creek, the perfume of fresh violets, the strength of the oak trees, and the silence of the white winter nights.

During the tea break, the women formed a circle around Daina. Some complimented her on her poetry – they had heard her reading at the Club – others were just curious to find out more about her background. She noticed that the choristers were enjoying themselves over a hot drink, prepared by one of the singers, Laima.

Daina listened to them talking and was fascinated by the language, how different their Lithuanian was to the Lithuanian she spoke. But then she hadn't even been born when these people left their homeland for Australia. Here they adjusted to their new life and culture. As she listened, she once again noted the way they included English words, giving them Lithuanian endings. She wrote some of the words in her notebook: *targetas, milkbaras, parkingas, helikopteris*. In Lithuanian, target was *taikinys*, milk bar *pieno baras*, helicopter *malūnsparnis*, and parking – *mašinų stovėjimo aikštelė*. She felt astonished hearing the new vocabulary and its innovative variations, but then in Lithuania people mixed Russian expressions with Lithuanian words without having a second thought.

The choir leader made a speech. He welcomed Daina and Algis, and a cake was brought in from the kitchen. He said it was baked by one of the soprano singers, Birutė, and everybody cheered in appreciation. Then Mykolas hailed the choristers' attention and said:

‘We value every participant, good, bad or mediocre, because the Lithuanian nation can’t live without song. You, Daina, may recall that song festivals in the homeland started in 1924 and are still continuing today.’

‘Yes.’

‘But you may not know that after our arrival in Australia, we formed our own traditions and have been organising Australian-Lithuanian Days since 1960. Every two years, we prepare for the song festival which is an integral part of the Lithuanian gatherings and activities. We hope that you’ll enjoy spending your time among us too. And we are most pleased with our best bass returning, and bringing you along for company,’ he concluded and everybody applauded.

It took about an hour for Algis and Daina to get back to Whittlesea. Algis wasn’t a good driver and most of the time he stuck to the edge of the road, letting the faster cars pass. Daina couldn’t drive at all.

‘I’m sorry I can’t be of any help,’ she said.

‘She’s right. I have no problem with driving,’ Algis replied, ‘only it’s a little bit more difficult to see at night. The lights of the oncoming cars blind me, but we enjoyed our time at the Club and that’s the main thing.’

‘Maybe next week we could go to the Club by train?’ Daina asked, trying not to show how scared she was. She was pleased that by this time of the night there were only a few cars heading out of the city.

‘It’s not safe travelling by trains, especially at this hour of the night. The train doesn’t run directly to and from Whittlesea and we’d have to take a bus as well,’ he said.

He began singing a sad Lithuanian melody.

‘As far as I remember, our singing sprang from the troubled history of disagreements between neighbouring countries,’ Algis said when he finished the song. ‘My mother sang that song when she was doing her chores. We have so many ceremonial songs like wedding, christening, funeral, war, love songs, don’t we?’

‘I don’t know why most of them are so morbid,’ she said.

‘But the words of each song are so meaningful.’

‘I only wish Mykolas taught more upbeat songs,’ Daina continued. ‘The choir should sing joyful pieces. Not all our melodies are sad. The past is no more.’

‘But we live in the past. We love our songs. How could one not love them?’

The following morning, Algis put on an old record and joined the American-Lithuanian singers with *Noriu miego*. He knew all the words and Daina followed him rather than the record. She smiled, noting that he’d forgotten about his health problems.

The light atmosphere lasted the whole week until the following rehearsal. Gradually, while hearing the strong, well-balanced and articulate voices around her, Daina became more confident and began to sing louder. She admired the Australian expression of “giving everyone a fair go”, and as she understood it, it encouraged people not to give up on whatever they wanted to achieve. Daina’s self-esteem grew and she also enjoyed having some thirty “mothers” and “older sisters” around her. One of them, Irena, gave Daina her national costume: a multi-coloured skirt made from vertically-striped curtain, a hand-woven apron and an off-white linen blouse. She thanked Irena.

‘I’m glad you will be using it as it was under the house for over twenty years. I put some weight on and couldn’t fit in it anymore. You see, my children are not interested in the Lithuanian traditions.’ Daina promised to wear it on every suitable occasion.

*

At the Lithuanian Club, Daina found out that lectures and concerts took place after the Sunday church service and lunch. These events helped to finance ongoing activities and were randomly prepared by different Lithuanian groups: scouts, dancers, women’s association, choristers or sportsmen. An elderly man at the bar told her the profits were kept in each participating organisation’s account at the *Talka* bank at the Club.

The commemoration of the Lithuanian deportations was held in mid-June and the choir had been rehearsing for it. During the event, the priest read a prayer, the President of the community spoke, the choir sang some sombre songs, followed by a performance by the youth dancing group. After the concert, people returned to the bar, and Daina did

too. She stood near the door looking for Saulė. As she glanced around, she overheard people in front of her talking. The conversation was about the choir and how Mykolas wasn't able to discipline the choristers.

‘That’s why so many so-called singers join on false pretences, especially that new KGB agent, sent here by the Russians.’

Daina was shocked by their certainty that she'd joined the choir to spy on them. They said she was capturing the information on a tape recorder hidden under her long woollen skirt, and that she wrote down their conversations and detailed accounts of events in her notebook. Upset by what she'd heard, she left the bar and went outside. That's where she met Saulė and Milda.

‘What happened? Why are you crying?’

‘They...they called me a spy...’

‘Don't worry, darling,’ Milda reassured her, putting her soft hand around Daina's shoulders. ‘People will always gossip: today about you, tomorrow about me, the next day about each other. Don't you worry, who are they to you, anyway? Do they feed you, look after you? You don't even know their names, why care then? They are nobody to you.’

‘I...I thought I was blending in,’ Daina gasped for air and wiped away her tears, as mascara ran down her cheeks.

‘Someone gets hurt every day by their bad mouthing. Do calm down,’ Milda pleaded in her gentle voice. ‘You have to understand that you are different – you and Saulė, both. To us, you are the “other” Lithuanians, not the postwar refugees. You haven't lived in DP camps in Germany. You didn't come here on a ship, didn't have to fulfil the work contract. You've arrived from the Soviet Lithuania that is ruled by Russians who took the lives of our brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents and friends. It's not our fault or your fault. It's just life.’

‘It's just life,’ Daina echoed.

‘That's right. We had to run from our burning houses, from suspicious neighbours and friends we thought we knew and trusted. And yet, we were blamed by the Soviets for “deserting” our families, our country, hiding under the wings of Western freedom. We thought we were leaving temporarily and would return after the end of the war. But it didn't happen. Do you think we enjoyed what we had to endure? In my early twenties,

before coming to Australia, I used to dream of my own home; I used to draw it in my mind – huge windows, warm kitchen, three spacious bedrooms, a bath. Sleeping on bunks in the overcrowded camps, moving from one camp to another, infected with lice, itchy, dirty and hungry – I don't think I could face it ever again. There is nothing better than to sleep under the sky of the rising Lithuanian sun.'

People moved closer, curious to listen to Milda's words. Daina stopped crying. Saulė wiped Daina's last tear away. The Club door opened and Algis appeared. He took Daina's hand, pulled her from the crowd and waved to everybody:

'Viso gero, viso gero,' walking to his car. On their way home, Algis told Daina he'd heard what people were saying about her "espionage activities".

'Their imaginary tales sometimes surprise even me. Fancy telling me I shouldn't allow you to wear the red coat or beret. Unfortunately, even my friends associate red with blood and the Russian flag. But everyone wears it. Big deal, they wear it themselves.'

'What else did they say?'

'Well. They were also questioning what you are writing all the time, not convinced that it is purely poetry.'

'I don't belong.'

'Your worries are groundless. You must adjust like the rest of us. We are a close-knit community, we help each other. One might go crazy without these communal activities. One person works in a meat factory during the day, he is a labourer, struggling to speak English, but at night he comes to the Club, and he is the President and people respect him. Another is a cleaner during the day, but whenever we have a celebration he puts on his best outfit and becomes the master of ceremonies. These duties raise self-esteem and remind people of their homeland, where they held respectable positions.'

'That means you live two lives – one as Australians and the other as Lithuanians. You have two different faces,' Daina said, still holding her scrunched hanky in the palm of her hand.

'Of course. We are like clowns with two heads: one smiles...and the other cries. It appears that our life is a circus, and what happens in the arena is our present.'

'And what happens behind the stage is your past?'

‘Yes, it’s the other part of us, the Lithuanian side of the double face. We pretend to be Australians, but we are not, and will never be.’

‘That’s sad, Uncle, but maybe it’s a good thing. Not everyone can have the privilege of having two identities.’

‘You are right. There is always the other side of the story and a reason for it. So, don’t be too hasty and blame anyone for what happened today. We DPs are still traumatised by what we had to live through during and after the war. Do you know that even your own grandfather was taken away to Germany to dig the trenches?’

‘What?’

‘Probably no one told you how he escaped from the trenches and returned back to Lithuania.’

‘It can’t be.’

‘He didn’t go home. It was too dangerous. Injured, he was hiding in a forest until one morning a woman came across him while attending to her grazing cow. He stayed with her for a few years and fathered a son.’

‘How do you know these things?’

‘I have my contacts back home; people go for a visit and bring the news to me. Also, there were some who knew your grandfather’s mistress...’

‘Now I understand why my family never talked of the war. It’s because they were hurt by what happened. When did my grandparents reunite then?’

‘I think it was in 1949 that Roma found him again through the Red Cross.’

‘I wonder why she took him back.’

‘They were very much in love when they met and got married, as far as I remember.’

‘That’s why Roma was often angry and upset, and why there was no affection between them. She simply couldn’t forgive him for his infidelity!’

‘It’s the war that ripped families apart and some, like me and Roma, never saw each other again.’

‘How awful. It’s taken me until now to discover these stories. Poor grandfather, he’d always been so reserved and quiet. He was simply afraid of Roma...’

‘The past is complicated. Often people push their past away as it’s too hard to deal with the memories. They want to forget it all. Anyway, we had to make the best of our

lives here. We were nobodies in a foreign land and only our language, dancing and singing saved us from going insane. We organised ourselves into different groups, and we have choirs and dance groups in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Geelong. We love our culture. Believe me, when we die out, nobody will understand Lithuanians here.

‘Is that why you maintain your roots so rigorously?’

‘Yes. We take that approach with singing. We must support each other, because we are short of professionals here. Take Mykolas. He is an accountant by trade, but at the same time he is doing an excellent job teaching us. He has sung in choirs since his childhood and continued at DP camps later on. When our previous conductor died, he was the obvious choice for a replacement. Mykolas plays the accordion, which is good and we have great voices,’ Algis assured her proudly. ‘It’s a shame that some of our nationals don’t participate in anything. They make excuses like being too busy working two jobs, trying to look after their growing families, or disappearing into the mainstream because of their mixed marriages.’

‘How sad.’

‘Also, no one gets paid for community work. It’s based on voluntary contributions and if you feel you are a real Lithuanian, you must continue with the culture.’

‘But it’s not right, Uncle. As a theatre producer I used to be paid for what I did. Are you saying that if I started a theatre, I would have to work for free?’

‘Exactly.’

‘Then I am shocked. What you are saying is that if I happened to produce a play, I wouldn’t get paid?’

‘If you are Lithuanian, it’s your duty to do it.’

‘But how would I survive without the income? I would feel demoted as a specialist, that’s for sure. I studied for four years to get my diploma. I worked in my profession as well. I would want respect and recognition for my talent, not like your choir conductor. I could see that the choristers are aware of his limitations and they offend him, they tell him how to do his job. If you keep things going that way – to me the future of your activities is bleak. Don’t you agree?’

‘I don’t understand what you’re complaining about. You’ve got a roof over your head, plenty of clothes and food. Try to see the community contribution as your hobby.’

‘I can’t. I want to progress and compete with others. How would I achieve that if I restricted myself to the community?’

‘Well, don’t be so hasty. Remember, you came here to look after my needs.’

‘But I am very surprised that Lithuanians here don’t value specialists, even though, as you say, there are no specialists available at the moment. Going the way it is, soon the level of participation in the choir will really fall. I mean, if there are no proper leaders, what results are you expecting to achieve?’

Algis continued to argue that her thinking was wrong, that her attitude was distorted.

‘We don’t have specialised professionals here, but we can’t just let everything go. We must sing, dance and continue to speak our language. That’s why we gather together. You were paid by the government back home and here we survive on our own donations. How do you think our Lithuanian Houses and Clubs were built? With these very hands.’ He stretched his arms forward, squeezing his muscles. ‘Don’t be so uptight, so harsh on yourself and others. Relax. We have to get rid of your communist mentality and make you one of us. You are in Australia now, not in Soviet Lithuania where everything is measured by professional capabilities and diplomas. Maybe you could read your poetry at the Club like you did? More people will come to listen as the word about your talent gets around. We could organise a cultural afternoon. The youngsters could dance, a duet or trio could perform a couple of songs, and you could recite some poetry. The audience could buy tickets at the door and we could donate all profits to the Australian-Lithuanian Foundation. Would you like to do something like that?’

‘I don’t know. Those Lithuanians that spoke about me...’

‘Forget that rubbish. Show them what you are made of.’

‘I’m not sure.’

‘Seeing that you are doing something to help us out, those gossipers will shut up for good! You must get into the community spirit and earn your place here,’ Algis said. ‘We are not holy angels. It’s like a family, if you know what I mean.’

‘Yes. But they don’t get along with outsiders like me.’

‘There is no ideal family. We have troubles and disagreements between ourselves too, but we keep it in the community. We don’t want others to know.’

‘Alright then. It may help me to take my mind off what happened,’ she said, but deep down she was already dreading further involvement. She didn’t have to prove anything to people that she hardly knew. She didn’t think it would work even if she tried. She’d never be one of them and didn’t want to be after what had happened. Singing in the choir was definitely out of the question, even if Algis stopped going because of her. She was not in any way obliged to continue to mingle with these narrow-minded people anymore.

*

In November 1989, when Algis and Daina arrived at the Club, the tricolour flag was hanging at the entrance. Upon entering through the heavy wooden doors, Daina felt like she’d been there the day before, as if nothing had happened, all bad feelings forgotten. She saw the same photos on the walls, the same people entering and exiting the bar; recognised the faces sitting at “their own tables”, the names of the same dishes with grammatical errors scribbled on the menu board. She liked the consistency and the homely feeling created by the joyful atmosphere.

She’d organised to meet Saulė. They called each other whenever they needed to talk. They confided in each other. Saulė had confessed to Daina that she had married an acquaintance of Milda so she could get a visa to Australia. Rob had gone to Lithuania, married her at the Wedding Bureau in Kaunas and brought her to Australia. Saulė and Rob had divorced as soon as her permanent residency had come through. In turn, Daina told Saulė that part of the reason she had come to look after Algis was to get his inheritance. Saulė wasn’t surprised or judgemental. She thought Soviet citizens deserve a better life.

People at the Club talked of *Sąjūdis* – a movement fighting for an independent Lithuania, created the year before by prominent intellectuals in the homeland. Apparently, it had been gaining support around the country.

Everybody spoke about people of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joining their hands across their countries to celebrate an important anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The President of the Club made a speech, mentioning that on the 23rd

of August, 1939, the Baltic States fell into the Soviet grip, becoming deprived of their human rights, restrained from speaking their mind.

‘We are reliving European history here,’ said the President, ‘and should consider ourselves fortunate to learn of the unfolding events even though we’re far from the homeland.’

‘Yes,’ people shouted. ‘*Valio!*’

‘The forbidden Lithuanian national flag, hidden for years in basements and sheds, is now freely displayed on houses, outside blocks of flats and sticking out of people’s windows – all over Lithuania.’

‘*Tegyvuoją Lietuvą! Valio!*’ strong voices echoed through the bar.

‘Let’s drink to that,’ someone suggested and the clinking of glasses followed.

‘Dear nationals,’ the President continued, ‘what has happened in the Baltic States and how people have managed to break away from the Soviet grip makes us proud and relieved. The sense of purpose is surging through the thousands of hands, stretched from one end of the Baltic shore to the other; surging through our hearts, overwhelmed with love for our Lithuania.’

People gathered at the bar couldn’t stop talking about the developments that were shaping their homeland’s future. They were surprised how the Berlin Wall, built to separate East and West Germany, was dismantled on the ninth of November.

‘The thought has been unimaginable since 1961,’ an elderly man said, wiping his tearful face.

Some choristers stood up and started to sing and others joined in. The words of the Lithuanian anthem were sticking in Daina’s throat. People were tearful. Fresh drinks appeared on tables and the barman busied himself, collecting the empty glasses.

When everybody calmed down, Algis’ friends, sitting around the table, began talking about how much they missed their homeland and how they wished they were there. Daina and Saulė joined in their conversations. Daina felt deeply affected by their vulnerability but she knew that no matter what happened in Lithuania, most of them wouldn’t be able to return. It had been too long. They would continue to live with their homesickness – the sickness of longing for what is lost, she thought.

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Algis decided to celebrate Christmas at home. He said he didn't want to go to anybody's place, and Daina was pleased to be able to organise *Kūčios*. There were only three days left to buy the food. In accordance with authentic Lithuanian tradition, they decided to clean, dust, mop and generally tidy the house, which included changing the paper inside the cupboards, scrubbing pots, pans, washing windows, curtains, drapes and bedding.

'It's a part of Jesus' rebirth. He comes and we greet him with cleanliness and offerings,' Algis said. Once every corner of the house was spotless, Daina took a linen tablecloth she'd brought from Lithuania and spread it on the dining table. Algis had invited some of his friends, but they'd decided to celebrate *Kūčios* at the Club. They'd invited Paulius but he wasn't able to come, although he'd promised them he would move in by Christmas. Daina wasn't disappointed. She hardly saw Paulius as he lived in Dandenong – the distance was too great for both of them. When he visited, he and Algis drank. The following morning, after sleeping on a couch, he kept apologising to Daina for being such a pig; for not spending time with her; for procrastinating about coming to live with them.

Listening to his unconvincing ramblings, she caught herself thinking about Arūnas and was looking forward to seeing him. Saulė had passed on a message to her from Arūnas, with news that he might be coming to Mornington in January. His short phone calls here and there were hardly enough for Daina. She thought they should talk; they should discuss where their relationship was going. But she couldn't find the right time to do so as he was always in a good mood, telling her funny stories about the places and cultures he'd seen. Sometimes he seemed very caring; other times he seemed absent-minded; other times trying to express his affection towards her with compliments and silent pauses. After each conversation, she promised herself to talk to him seriously the next time, but he made her feel so uplifted; he said she was very pleasant to talk to, and in return all she could do was enjoy the greeting cards and little gifts he continued to surprise her with. She kept a silk scarf from China, a jade brooch from India and a porcelain doll from Japan on her bedside table. She appreciated his attention and was

prepared to wait as long as necessary. Her thoughts of Arūnas made Paulius seem increasingly unattractive and his drinking habit repellent.

‘Well, just the two of us then, Uncle,’ Daina said, slowly arranging plates with potato salad, beans, herring, carrots, jelly and mushrooms on the table. As no meat or alcohol was allowed on Christmas Eve, they drank the *aguonų pienas* poured into their glasses with tiny, hard, cube-shaped *šlyžikai*, made from flour and water.

Algis told Daina how much he had missed these dishes. He had stopped attending the Lithuanian Club on Christmas Eve. He said that since his wife had passed away, he hadn’t bothered. He recalled how after they got married, Valerija used to prepare the tastiest *Kūčios* dishes; how they sat around the table, eating and enjoying their salads and fish, and drinking *spanguolių kisielių*; how they gave each other homemade presents: one year he’d carved her a wooden comb, she’d woven him a tie; another year he’d carved a brooch, and she’d knitted a jumper.

‘That must have been lovely.’

‘Yes, it was. But we know how you were not able to celebrate the religious events under the Soviets.’

‘You are right, though Christmas Eve and Easter celebrations in the privacy of one’s home were not considered crimes, as long as we kept quiet about it.’

‘You were deceived all the same,’ he said.

‘Well, when I was growing up, my family didn’t celebrate *Kūčios*,’ Daina said. ‘But in my youth I had so much fun doing so.’

‘Really?’

‘One year I was invited to my friend Nijolė’s place. I was amazed to see the table decorated with a white tablecloth, presents placed under a real Christmas tree, and traditional dishes prepared. We ate and talked, not very loudly of course, and I didn’t mention to anyone afterwards how and with whom I’d spent my *Kūčios*. Nijolė’s mother, Rita, told us about the Lithuanian tradition of twelve dishes, representing the twelve apostles. Later in the night came *Senis šaltis*. Rita said that the name *Senis šaltis* was adopted when Lithuania became part of the USSR. She said since then, *Senis šaltis* had replaced *Kalėdų senis*. Also, New Year’s Eve became more important than *Kūčios*.’

‘She was right. So right.’

‘Nijolė’s family believed in Christmas magic,’ Daina continued. ‘They promised us women that we could find out if we were going to get married in the following year. We had to embrace an even number of fence palings with our outstretched hands. I could only stretch my hands to an odd number which meant being single for another year. They also said we could see our future husbands in our dreams, if we washed our faces and went to bed without drying them. In the dream, the future husband was supposed to appear and wipe your face with a towel. I tried, but the following morning I couldn’t remember a thing. If someone in my dream wiped my face with a soft white towel, I never saw him.’

‘I have forgotten how to practise such magic. But we used to do it as kids,’ Algis said. ‘One of us would scrunch some paper, place it on a porcelain plate and light it. In the darkness of the room we could see it burning into the shape of a house, a ring, a baby cot, a car or a coffin. The figures appearing on the wall would determine what was awaiting us in the following year – a baby, a death, a marriage or moving into a new dwelling.’

‘That’s so interesting. At Nijolė’s, another way was to write the men’s names on pieces of paper and then place them under your pillow. In the morning, I drew one of them out. Supposedly, he was the one I would marry.’

‘What were the names? Was Paulius amongst them?’

‘I can’t remember now. It was a long time ago.’

Daina missed the snow and without snow it didn’t seem like Christmas. When the weather turned humid, the flies and the heat were overwhelming. At times like that, she thought she would never adjust to such a climate, which lacked the proper seasons. She’d come from cold winters with temperatures well below zero as well as refreshing spring rains and chilly autumns. Lithuania, *the country of rain*. In Melbourne, in summer, the rain was rare and all seasons blended and overlapped, and she was often confused as to what to wear. The weather before Christmas Eve and leading up to New Year was hot and sticky. She longed to go to the beach, but Whittlesea was far from the coast. She spent long hours writing letters home to Lithuania and also reading the Christmas cards from her family and friends over and over again. She was overwhelmed

to receive a greeting card from her school friends, Ilona and Regina. The words 'We are missing you badly. When are you coming back?' made Daina's heart sink.

Paulius rang.

'Happy New Year, Daina. It's a bit special.'

'In what way?'

'Because it's a once in a lifetime number, 1990.'

'Happy Festive Season to you too,' she replied giggling at his "joke".

'Please think of me when you raise your glass of champagne.'

'Alright then, I'll raise it to your health on New Year's Eve at midnight.'

'I'll be thinking of you too,' he assured her.

After putting the receiver down, Daina felt like screaming. They talked about nothing. Maybe he couldn't have a proper conversation. Maybe his aunt sat next to him and he felt embarrassed to talk about his feelings towards her.

Arūnas was far away. She wished he was with her to keep her company. But as usual she found herself in the company of her notebook. She opened it and shut it. She couldn't write a word.

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'My friend Saulė is getting married, Uncle,' said Daina after chatting with her.

'Is she? To whom? Do we know him?'

'Saulė met her future husband, Rolandas, at the Club. I was also introduced to him on that day.'

'Did she? Were you?'

'I am so happy for her, and am honoured to be invited to her big day.'

'When is the wedding?'

'In October.'

'That's good, very good, but how much do we really know about him?' Algis asked.

'I know that Rolandas is a most pleasant forty-five-year-old divorcee.'

'Divorcee? Why does Saulė want to marry a divorcee? Is she pregnant?'

‘No. She doesn’t have to worry about children. Rolandas has two already. Saulė loves them very much. Apparently they have become really attached to her.’

‘I don’t know. I don’t know. Seems to me that being as good-looking and educated as she is, with a university degree, she could have any man she wanted, and a younger one too.’

‘How do you know she has a university degree? I don’t even know that myself.’

‘Because all Soviet people are well educated.’

‘It’s not true. My parents aren’t.’

‘I mean people of your generation, Daina. Anyway, what’s his surname?’

‘Kirka.’

‘Ah. I have heard of Kirka’s family. They aren’t involved in the community’s life, though their relatives are prominent actors and musicians in Lithuania. Just tell your friend not to rush into marrying him. What’s the hurry?’

‘I believe she is very keen. Let’s not spoil her big day with negative suggestions, shall we?’ Daina finished their conversation, already making plans for what she would wear.

‘We shall see. We shall see,’ he replied.

Later that evening, as she was pulling clothes from her wardrobe, she wondered whether Saulė would be attending the Club in the future. The Club was the easiest place to meet and catch up, but Saulė would soon be busy with her new family and forget all about her, hidden at Whittlesea. She envied Saulė. She wanted to move away from the country and to become an independent person herself. She also wished to find a husband. She thought that her friend was very lucky. Who will be my husband? she wondered. Toivo was beyond reach. He was out of the question. Arūnas? Yes, that would be wonderful.

‘Are we having any tea?’ she heard Algis’ voice from downstairs. Lost in her thoughts, she had completely forgotten about him.

‘Coming.’

‘Let’s have something to eat, Daina. I’m hungry,’ he repeated. She warmed up *cepelinai* and garnished them with thick cream, fried onion and tiny pieces of bacon. They finished their meal quickly as the dumplings were so tasty. They didn’t speak as they drank their camomile tea, and shortly afterwards retired to their rooms.

When, on 11th March, 1990, Lithuania declared its breakaway from the USSR, all the world media was talking about it. With a smile on his face, Algis said he was pleased that people were finally learning about their tiny Lithuania.

‘That’s true. It only has a population of three and a half million,’ Daina said.

‘Exactly! I’d have never thought that Lithuanians back home were game enough to attempt to separate from the Soviets.’

‘And they did!’ Daina said.

‘Do you realise I’ve been waiting for this moment since the day we left home?’ Algis said. She nodded and they embraced, sharing their joy.

Soon Algis’ friends came over, bringing a bottle of champagne, filling the flutes Daina had placed on a tray. While Algis was tasting his drink and wiping his tears away at the same time, Jonas, Ona, Rimvydas and Mėta said they’d heard the news on the television and thought they should get together.

‘Thank you, my friends. You are so kind. You know how much this means to me, to all of us. Our country is free again. There is no Soviet Lithuanian state anymore, no lies and no false imprisonments. Long live freedom!’ Algis said, emptying his glass.

‘Yes. We are free,’ Daina echoed. She began to cry and Ona held her hand. The six of them hugged. Daina called Dorothy and asked her whether she wanted to join them in celebration. Once they arrived at the Lithuanian Club, she was already waiting for them in her car.

At the Club, they joined several hundred people, cheering Lithuania’s independence. The drinks were free at the bar. People brought food and shared it around, enjoying each other’s company. Everybody sang together, at first the Lithuanian national anthem and then the upbeat folk songs, tapping and clapping at the same time. Daina felt as if the people around her were her close friends and relatives. She wished to hug them all. She joined their cheering and singing. She was glad that Dorothy was there too. She witnessed how much Dorothy cared for her, joyfully congratulating them with the arrival of a long-awaited freedom. That night, Daina and Algis returned to Whittlesea in a very patriotic mood.

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Before the wedding, Saulė invited Daina to Mornington. Daina helped her friend to curl her hair and polish her nails. She admired Saulė's white wedding dress and her going away dress. Saulė smoked a cigarette.

'This is my last puff. Rolandas suffers from asthma. Also, I won't be able to smoke in front of his children.'

'How often will they stay with you?'

'Every weekend.'

'What do you mean every weekend?'

'This is a new arrangement. After we marry I mean, just because his ex-wife is too busy...'

'Too busy doing what?'

'Well. Looking for a husband, I guess. As far as I know she goes out at night to clubs, travels interstate, talks for hours on the phone. I don't think she can actually cook as the two little-ones look underfed.'

'I didn't realise that Rolandas' ex was such an awful mother. Wasn't she the one that left him? How are you going to cope?'

'She left, but don't worry, I love children. Rolandas is earning good money. He promised to buy me a car so that I can drive them around. I'll be fine. Isn't he gorgeous?'

'He is dashing and also has a very honest face. I feel I can trust him,' Daina replied.

'I do too,' Saulė said.

'He's also tall and good-looking. What does every young woman want in a man?' Daina asked.

'She wants him to be good-looking,' they both said and began to giggle.

'And what does a young woman love to wear?' Daina asked again.

'High heels,' they replied in unison, rolling on the carpet with laughter.

'I don't mind my natural height but stepping into heels makes me much taller.'

'But you are already tall, Saulė.'

‘I mean heels give me more confidence. Would you like to see the ones I’ll be wearing tomorrow?’ Daina nodded and her friend brought two pairs of fashionable shoes from behind the couch.

‘These are my wedding ones,’ Saulė pointed to the white shoes with the golden buckles.

‘They must be at least fifteen centimetres high!’

‘Actually thirteen, but you were nearly right. Do you like my going away shoes?’ she asked showing a pair of white sandals. ‘Still high, but these make me only ten centimetres taller.’

‘Both pairs are very elegant. I like that your sandals have only a few straps and are open at the front for everyone to see your polished toe nails,’ Daina replied. She took her shoes out of her overnight bag and asked Saulė whether she remembered them.

‘Of course, Arūnas bought them for me but I gave them to you as a present.’

Daina wished she could ask Saulė about Arūnas. But the opportunity was lost as they decided to tidy up the room and Saulė’s conversation returned to Rolandas.

‘I remember the day he invited me to dinner at a winery on the other side of Mornington. He fussed over me and poured a drink into my glass with such care...’

‘Yes?’

‘And I found a diamond ring at the bottom of the glass. I had seen something like that happening in a movie but couldn’t believe it had actually happened to me!’

‘I’m glad he is so romantic, Saulė. How come you haven’t told me this story before?’

‘I wasn’t sure whether our relationship was real. I mean, after my previous experiences.’

‘I understand.’

‘But it’s serious. I can’t believe it myself,’ Saulė said and silence followed.

‘You’ll look like a princess tomorrow,’ Daina reassured her friend, admiring the white veil with its beads of mother-of-pearl.

‘To tell you the truth, I am afraid.’

‘Do you love him?’

‘Hmm...Daina. You are so naïve. I am not interested in the childhood fairytales. My father was an alcoholic. I left school at seventeen, got engaged, ran away from

home with my boyfriend. It didn't work. I learned my lesson. Once I got over the shock, I went back to complete my high school and then went onto university. I need security, protection and personal freedom. I know that Rolandas can provide me with all these things and more.'

'I know a woman should think with her head and not with her heart,' said Daina, 'but I find it difficult.'

'You must change your attitude.'

'I'll keep that in mind. Everything is good then, Saulė. Anyway, you can return to Lithuania later, if you don't like it here.'

'The only thing is I'll miss my family.'

'Just think...what's happening to you is a fairytale.'

'Are you already onto your stories of Prince Charming?' Saulė teased, trying on her new shoes in front of a mirror.

'Don't forget how lucky you are. Don't forget that there are no men back home, I mean, not enough for every woman: either they are in jail, at sea, or alcoholics. But now this is beyond your concern.'

'I shouldn't forget that anyway,' Saulė echoed. 'Every time I found a male friend, one of my girlfriends "innocently" pinched him from me.'

'We all need a man to fix the cupboards, to oil squeaking doors, not to mention to hammer a nail into the wall or help with renovations.'

'Yes, we do. We need them badly.'

'No matter if they are good-looking or not, men in Lithuania are appreciated,' Daina teased.

'That's right.'

'And they are aware of that. They know that if one woman doesn't want them, there are many others who do. And the circle keeps turning around and around: women are stealing men from each other so that the men can take them to restaurants or sea resorts, and buy them gifts,' said Saulė, sharing her experiences.

'You are absolutely right, Saulė. I also had a friend who had a son with her boyfriend. He bought her flowers and chocolates, furniture, clothing. Then she found out that he was married and had two children in another town!'

‘See, men in Lithuania – hardly enough for all. Where are they? Maybe it’s a consequence of war?’ Saulė pondered.

‘Maybe. I’ve heard that during the war, thousands of men were taken to Germany for work. Others became displaced around the world,’ Daina said. ‘Apparently most never returned.’

‘Maybe that’s where the shortage began?’ Saulė said.

‘Maybe.’

‘This is a good enough reason why we must find someone here. I have a feeling that Arūnas may propose to you one day.’

‘Oh, that would be nice, but I haven’t seen him since our trip to Adelaide. We only talk on the phone. He promises to visit but never does. Has he got a girlfriend?’

‘No. Of course not. He would’ve told Milda. Don’t worry. From my aunt’s description I learned enough to guess that he is like the wind, and can land near your feet at any time to surprise you.’

‘What else did you find out about him?’ Daina asked, trembling with anticipation.

‘He is not the settling type, unless someone can make him fall in love. You can do it, Daina!’

‘I hope so. But how can I do it if he is not here?’

‘Just be patient and he’ll turn up. Mark my words,’ said Saulė. Daina grabbed a tiny pillow from the couch and threw it at her friend. Saulė caught it and threw it back. The pillow hit the door. They both laughed.

Milda opened the door and interrupted. She brought a pot of tea and biscuits, and the three of them sat at the table sipping green tea and watching the sunset through the window.

‘Don’t you two stay up too long,’ Milda instructed, disappearing behind the glass door with the empty tray.

‘We’ll be going to bed soon,’ Saulė said loudly, but about an hour later both friends snuck out, running towards the beach, Daina holding a torch and Saulė carrying a basket of food. They ate their fruit and toasted their future happiness with champagne. Then they became immersed in the complete silence that surrounded them.

‘Are you cold?’ Daina asked.

‘Yes. But I don’t think it’s the weather; my body is shivering with fear of the unknown.’

‘Let’s forget about tomorrow – at least for now,’ Daina suggested, as they continued to chat until all topics were exhausted. Then they listened to the soft sound of the approaching waves, following the red clouds where the sun had disappeared for the night.

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Daina looked at her sleeping friend and thought that the bride-to-be would be well looked after by her new husband. She wasn’t sure about her own future or of what would happen if she left Whittlesea. Her thin hair covered her eyes and she gathered it into a bun. She stretched her short legs on the rug and turned on a torch; the light reminded her of a beam from a Giruliai lighthouse. She remembered her school friends Sonata and Darius. She’d had a crush on Darius, but he’d never known. The three of them had lots of happy times together, Darius entertaining them both with his anecdotes and jokes at the beachfront at Giruliai. Watching the darkening waves slowly rolling in and withdrawing into the unknown, she realised that they imitated the passage of her life. The incoming waves were her present and the departing ones were her past, the past pressed in sand and water markings where the waves had stopped. Her own life had stopped at the crossroads between the past and the present; her sense of direction had been blurred.

She trained the torch light onto her rug, took a pen from her cardigan pocket, together with a notebook. She wanted to write about what it was really like for her to live so far away from her childhood friends, and the places she loved. She wanted to write about her homeland, its people, and about everything that felt familiar and safe. Also, about the moments after waking up when she didn’t remember which country she was in. She thought she should write about the harsh summer spent on the farm in Whittlesea when not a leaf moved, when the grass aged overnight and retained its yellowness until the sun stopped torturing it. She did not enjoy the dried out earth; stripped of lushness and freshness it made her feel scared. Spooky bird cries that didn’t follow any melodies, smelly bat droppings, unable to evaporate from the land –

everything around so still and enclosed, dead. She also thought she should write about the Australian sense of humour. She should write about her Altay friends and her travels in the Soviet Union, about the hospitality of strangers and the endless memories she had of those times. She should write about love, but she was afraid of her feelings for Arūnas who pursued her in her dreams. She wanted him to be here by her side or else for them to be living in Lithuania together.

She had not thought about the meaning of home when she was in Lithuania. There she was a fish that knew no boundaries, enjoying swimming in deep waters, feeling her way around. She wanted to find words to explain how in Australia she felt like an ant, working hard, trying to build a future, forced to fight for space and recognition, but remaining voiceless and feeling like no one noticed she was here. In her dreams she walked the familiar streets of her hometown, Kretinga. She remembered the aroma of cut grass that smelt of freshly picked cucumbers. She remembered inhaling the sweet, cake-like aroma of the rye bread before eating it. She remembered how Algis had held the loaf of bread she brought to Australia, how it had made him weep. She gazed into the sleepy sea and soon detached herself from all noises, writing quickly, afraid that her thoughts might escape her before she could write them down.

Svajonių vartai

*Audrai pakilus, debesys skrieja,
Rūkas nusmelkia ryto drėgme,
Kenčiančių sielą skausmas užlieja,
Nebeužgyjantis praradime.*

*Plunksnos miklumas pažeria mintį,
Skleidžiasi lapo plataus baltume,
Liejasi raidės laiko upeliais
Ilgesio tyro slaptam laukime.*

*Lapai beformiai, lapai bekvapiai
Krenta nuo medžių, gula šalia,
Šniokščiantys vėjai, džiūstančios šakos
Gailiai dejuoja mano sapne.*

*Ažuolo šauksmas supa svajonę,
Sėdžiu prie lango, dėstau raktus.
Pakeliu spyną, tildau dejonę,
Stipriai užtrenkus svajonių vartus.*

‘Oh, how I want to be a writer,’ she whispered to the sea. ‘I want to be famous and my books translated into the many languages of the world.’ Then she stretched on her back and watched the stars. They were flickering on and off like lights on a Christmas tree. Watching them shining on her, she thought she’d been fooling herself that Paulius was the one for her. With Toivo left behind and Arūnas moving about between different countries, she’d thought that Paulius might be her companion and her saviour. But she didn’t really know him. It had been nice to have him come to dinner and to talk to him occasionally on the phone, but there had been no more than that. To Daina, his procrastination to join them at the farm explained his unwillingness to be a part of her life. He didn’t love her. She tried to recall what Paulius had said. ‘I’ll come when I finish painting.’ Is he painting the Great Wall of China or something? She felt angry with him. Arūnas was the only man who had made her feel special. She couldn’t find the words to describe her trepidation and excitement each time she found a gift from him in her letter box.

Arūnas made her sparkle, he aroused her desire; with him she became young and beautiful again. She longed to be with him, travelling, going out to expensive restaurants, making love. When he spoke to her, she believed everything he said. She was in love.

‘Where are you, Arūnas?’ she whispered. Daina’s torch dimly shone on a new page. On the half-empty beach at Mornington, she tried to persuade herself that she would find happiness soon. She thought of her sick mother too and wished she was healthier; she hoped her parents were getting along better. She wished her father was more loving. They had never been close. If it had not been for her grandparents, she would have had a miserable childhood. She had been so glad to leave her family behind, but now she missed them. Suddenly, they seemed so important. It surprised her that Australians were not afraid to show their feelings. In Lithuania, people kept their feelings to themselves. And when she received a compliment of some kind, she felt deeply embarrassed. She had been brought up not to show emotion, she thought,

realising that she had been pouring her feelings out into her notebook in a way she had never done before. She realised she wanted to free herself from her harsh upbringing, from the barriers she'd left behind. Only now, away from it all, she understood how bad things in her family were. She'd never heard her father telling her mother that he loved her; he'd never brought her flowers. Her grandparents didn't talk about love; they'd never looked at each other with warmth and affection, and they'd never touched each other in front of her.

She took deep breaths and inhaled the salty air. Words, written under the light of a torch, stared back at Daina from the pages of her notebook. The sadness saturating the pages was unbearable. She closed the notebook and waited for the sun to appear. It's my friend's wedding day and I must enjoy myself. How often does one have the opportunity to celebrate the union of two hearts? Maybe next time it will be me getting married to my tall, blond, and very handsome Prince Charming, she thought. She could hear the waves murmuring "morrow", "wedding", "love" as she drifted to sleep.

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At six o'clock in the morning, Daina lit a half-smoked cigarette and placed it under Saulè's nose.

'Where am I? Did we finish the champagne and strawberries?'

'Yes, my dear friend, we certainly did. Now it's time for your last puff.'

Saulè drew the smoke into her lungs and slowly got to her feet, but not before stretching out on the rug. They ran up and down along the beach, trying to warm up. When they returned to the house, Milda was already busy with the flower arrangements.

'Where have you been, girls? Can you imagine how I felt not finding either of you in your beds this morning? I was about to call the police when I saw you coming up to the house.'

'Sorry, my dear Aunty,' Saulè kissed her on the cheek and hurried to her room.

'Sorry, Milda,' Daina also apologised, and asked what needed to be done. She joined Milda in the kitchen and grabbed some rue stems. Milda told her to twine the rue wreath, as it was a sign of an unmarried woman's virginity. Milda wanted Saulè to follow at least some of the traditions.

‘I think it would be great if our bride could lose her wreath by letting it float out to sea. What do you think, Daina?’

‘It would be interesting.’

‘Once this ritual is performed, she’ll officially be a woman,’ Milda teased.

‘That’s right,’ Daina agreed. She’d suggested various tasks the bride and groom could do in order to be inaugurated into their duties as husband and wife. The women prepared some wood for Saulė to chop, which would exemplify her strength; a naked doll with nappies for Rolandas to dress, to show he was ready to help her with motherhood. They were both in good spirits, giggling as they talked about the traditional rituals.

Milda had already made the seventy-five centimetre high wedding cake, called *šakotis*, in the shape of a well. It had taken six hours to bake. It shone bright yellow, and had a pleasant vanilla fragrance. On the outside of the *šakotis*, there were many horns. They were sticking out in all directions. The horns were made of flour and fifty-five eggs, and were baked on a specially designed rotating spit.

In Lithuania, the *šakotis* was placed in the middle of the table, and the guests dropped notes with their wishes into the centre. During the wedding, these wishes were read out with great acting skill by the *piršlys*. They were often quite witty, containing jokes about the newlyweds’ first night together, as well as words of wisdom about how to make their wedded life work.

Daina’s friend Virga, who lived in the town of Gargždai, baked *šakotis* to sell. Once Daina had gone to visit her and they’d chatted away and drunk coffee after coffee, while Virga made the horns. She had stood near the hot spit, pouring the flour and egg mixture on the rotating spit for hours to achieve the circular horn formations. The spit turned around hundreds of times and Virga had given Daina the first baked horn that broke from the cake. It was delicious. It was a good business for Virga and she had become a famous *šakotis* maker; they called her the *šakotis* queen.

Daina sat on a chair inhaling the familiar aroma. She snapped the tiniest horn from the very bottom of the cake and began to chew. A tear rolled down her cheek. She had been to weddings and enjoyed eating *šakotis* many times in Lithuania, but this tasted the best. It had the aroma of home. She couldn’t swallow the last bite. She took a

deep breath and wiped her tears away. When she looked up, she saw Milda bustling around the room. She joined her, helping to count cutlery and chairs.

As part of the traditional rituals, Milda said she'd convinced her nephew Ray to play the "groom" during the wedding reception. She'd explained to Ray, who was Australian-born and had never been to a Lithuanian wedding, about the "role switching" with the groom. Ray was to pretend to be the bride's new husband, looking and acting like him. Rolandas, who'd be temporarily distracted by his best man, would have to pay the named impostor's price to regain his seat.

Milda also told Daina that she had invited a well-known musician, Laimutis Norvilas. She said that the wedding songs would be accompanied by the *kanklės*, a traditional Lithuanian wooden instrument, which was played on the musician's lap. Laimutis plucked the strings with his finger tips with great feeling. He was also a good tenor as well as a folk storyteller.

'It will be a great party!' she exclaimed. 'I can't think of anything else. I'm not sure whether we've done everything as planned.'

'Have you checked your "to do" list?' Daina asked.

'Oh, I don't even remember where it is. Sorry, I must go. I still have to put my make-up on and do my hair. What about you?'

'I'm fine. Thank you. I only need a minute to put my dress on,' Daina replied calmly, watching the finished rue wreath floating in a bowl of water.

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'Come here please, help me take my rollers out,' Daina heard Saulė's voice and rushed to her aid. Saulė was sitting in front of the mirror.

'I am having doubts about the whole thing. I am so scared,' she said quietly and looked as if she was about to cry.

'But you were so certain. You like Rolandas, don't you? He is a good provider who'll take care of you for the rest of your life. You wouldn't want to go back and start all over again – looking for work, trying to rent a flat, trying to find a husband who won't run away, would you?'

'Not really.'

‘Food or clothing was so hard to get, and after living here for a while you must’ve realised that capitalism is better than socialism, whatever stage of it we were at,’ Daina comforted her friend, helping her to wipe away her tears. ‘Sometimes we can’t have everything we want. I’m talking from my own experience, of course.’

‘It all makes sense when you say it,’ Saulė agreed.

‘You are a level-headed, strong-willed woman, aren’t you?’

‘If only I could speak to my mother, even for one minute, even for thirty seconds,’ Saulė sighed heavily. While she was adjusting her stockings, Daina left her and hurried back to Milda’s bedroom. She saw Milda sitting on a corner of her bed, putting on nail polish.

‘Sorry to interrupt you, Milda.’

‘You are not interrupting. Come in, come in.’

‘It’s just that...’

‘What? What is it?’

‘Saulė would love to speak to her mother,’ Daina said. She knew the cost of an overseas call, especially to the Soviet Union, and was afraid of what Saulė’s aunt might think.

‘No problem,’ Milda replied, asking Daina to find her Lithuanian address book in her handbag. Because Milda’s nails were still drying, Daina opened the book to the page with the letter Š, selected the surname Šalkauskienė and dialled the codes and number to Kaunas.

‘Where is Saulė? Bring her in,’ Milda said, waiting for her sister’s answer. Daina ran back to Saulė’s bedroom, grabbed her by the elbow and, without saying a word, encouraged her to follow. When they reached Milda’s room, they could hear her talking to somebody.

‘Here she is, my dear sister,’ Milda greeted her teary-eyed niece, passing the receiver to her.

‘Mama, I can’t go through with it,’ Saulė sobbed, but then as she spoke, with each sentence she became calmer, and even laughed a few times and finally returned to her usual self. Their conversation was cut off. Milda explained that sometimes it happened when the line from Australia to Moscow to Lithuania and back was bad, but Saulė embraced her aunt and whispered into her ear:

‘Thank you, thank you, thank you, five minutes was more than enough.’

When the friends returned to Saulė’s room, Daina was curious about what Saulė’s mother had said that had made her laugh.

‘She told me that she really likes Rolandas from the photos I sent her, and that she may come to Australia to visit us!’

‘See. You’ll have so many opportunities for your mother and family to stay here. Then you can return to Lithuania to bring back your favourite things. Have you got anything in mind that you would like to have with you?’

‘My photos, books, slides, amber – heaps of it. I have a good Italian pair of shoes, a fur coat, a jacket,’ she chatted away.

‘Look how strongly your hair sits in these big curls,’ Daina said, admiring Saulė’s thick blond hair, which just reached her slender shoulders. ‘You are the luckiest girl ever. All your friends will be jealous when they find out that you have married into wealth and quality of life. Rolandas will be taking you with him to his work parties and weekend seminars around Australia. You’ll be treated like a princess.’

‘I know, I know,’ Saulė agreed but Daina could sense the shade of uncertainty in her friend’s voice. Daina admired Saulė’s long eyelashes and her eyes, comparing them to sparkling opal brooches. The bride-to-be was impressed by such a comparison, glancing into the mirror a couple of times and smiling. Finally, she dressed in her wedding gown and put on the long veil, which covered her face. She held a tiny bunch of rue in her hand.

Guests began to gather around the chairs draped in white in the garden, where the ceremony was to take place. Daina left the bride and joined them. She overheard a couple say that Rolandas had already been married in a Catholic Church once and wasn’t able to do it again. She was surprised by such gossip. Saulė told her that they wanted to marry at home because it was the latest trend. Daina doubted whether the Moscow Immigration Department would have accepted that sort of wedding. It didn’t look official to her – in Lithuania people had to go to a Wedding Bureau to exchange their rings, and never did so in a garden! Afterwards, some couples secretly held a church ceremony, which was not recognised by the government, but was important to the believers in the newlyweds’ families. But then again, Saulė and Rolandas had both

been married before and probably wanted to enjoy something different. Saulė was an Australian permanent resident. She didn't have to worry about her obligations to Soviet Lithuania.

About sixty people stood around the garden, chatting and admiring white roses. With a gentle stroking sound from the *kanklės*, the guests took their places on the chairs in two lines, eight per row. A long strip of red carpet had been laid on the grass, leading to an archway of roses, where Rolandas and his new bride-to-be, standing side by side, held hands and listened to the celebrant.

Daina had just moved back to her seat when a man's voice whispered:

'Hello.'

She turned her head to the side to find Arūnas standing beside her with a bunch of flowers.

'What are you doing here?' Daina said, as a woman sitting next to her moved to let Arūnas sit down.

'I made no promises to attend, but here I am and I'm so glad to see you.' He passed the bunch of red roses to Daina who had thought they were for the bride. Confused, she squeezed the bunch to her heart, feeling her cheeks blushing redder than the roses.

'Where did you come from?'

'I sense your surprise,' he said quietly and gently touched the side of her leg with his. She glanced at his tanned face and smiled without a word. She could hear her heart beating, and his warm breathing close-by. His eyes shone and the black suit made his blond hair stand out. She observed his long fingers, his classic Greek nose, and broad shoulders out of the corner of her eyes and felt faint, adrenalin rushing through her veins.

When the bride and groom passed by and everybody stood up, Daina could see again how tall Arūnas really was. Feeling like a little girl next to him, she wanted him to embrace her, to protect her, to look after her, and one day to marry her. As if reading her mind, Arūnas squeezed her hand. She felt herself dissolving into his soft glance.

'You look like a rosebud, complimenting my bunch with your lovely dress and shoes that I've seen somewhere before,' he said bringing her hand to his moist lips.

They watched how the bride and groom mimicked the fulfilment of their marital duties. In the spirit of fun, Rolandas placed a nappy on the doll; Saulė chopped wood in her long dress, her veil ruffling in the wind. In the doorway of the house, the bride and groom were met by Milda and Rolandas' parents. The newlyweds had to taste some mead and eat a piece of dark rye bread dipped in salt. Judging from their faces, the new couple didn't enjoy their "treats".

'Married life can be as sweet as this mead and sad enough to make you cry salty tears. Days are full of different flavours. You will experience good and bad and learn to be patient with each other. That is the wisdom behind a long and happy marriage,' Milda said. The guests clapped and shouted '*Valio!*'

The bridal party entered a huge lounge, followed by the guests, to be seated at a long table, decorated with roses. Arūnas and Daina also sat down. Daina couldn't swallow her food, she was so worried about whether she looked alright. If only she had known he was coming, she would have put more make-up on and made an effort to tame her unruly hair. Even a brighter lipstick would have been nice...

During the evening, the groom disappeared and the impostor sat at Saulė's side. Everybody was laughing at his sweet talk and promises to take her on a trip around the world. He showed her his purse full of green notes. He said he wanted to be Saulė's new husband and tried to slip an onion ring onto her finger. As the bride rejected the ring, he attempted to kiss her on the lips and the guests began bad-mouthing the impostor. The game went on for about half an hour. Then Rolandas reappeared. He was surprised to see a stranger cuddling his wife and nearly got into a fist fight. Judging by his serious face, Daina thought he was probably not aware of this tradition, and only figured out what was going on when the impostor demanded a bottle of vodka and a different bride for himself. The groom found a bottle and another woman in a veil and a white dress sitting in a corner. When the impostor left his seat and removed the veil of his new bride, to everyone's astonishment, he discovered an old woman. He started to swear and wanted to return to Saulė, but by this time Rolandas was holding her hand, telling him to go away.

The guests complained that their vodka tasted bitter and that the newlyweds must kiss in order to sweeten it.

'Karti, karti, degtinė karti. Karti, karti, degtinė karti!' they sang in unison. And the newlyweds kissed. Not satisfied with a friendly kiss, the guests demanded more passion.

'Karti, karti, degtinė karti! Karti, karti, degtinė karti! Jei pasibučiuosit tai bus saldi! Jei pasibučiuosit tai bus saldi!' Their demands were fulfilled by the newlyweds giving each other a prolonged kiss. Cheers and clapping followed,

'Valio! Valio! Valio!'

After a few hours of enjoying each other's company and listening to the wishes and jokes, read from the notes found in the *šakotis* cake by the *piršlys*, Arūnas and Daina slipped outside. They stood on the balcony for some time, watching the sea. Daina felt a strong physical connection to Arūnas and stood very still, afraid a careless word or movement might spoil the moment. But she couldn't stop trembling with excitement each time their hands and shoulders touched.

'Let's go to Adelaide,' Arūnas suggested.

'What do you mean?'

'Let's spend some time together, just you and I.'

'But how can we do that? It's your cousin's wedding.'

'She is so happy, we wouldn't be missed.'

'I suppose we could escape.'

'Have you got any documents on you?'

'Yes. I always carry my Soviet passport,' she replied, opening her handbag and showing it to Arūnas.

He encouraged her to get her things.

'I've only brought my overnight bag and I may not have enough clothing,' Daina said with regret in her voice.

'Don't worry about that, we'll get you something tomorrow.'

'What about my uncle?'

'You can tell him you are staying with Saulė for a bit longer.'

'What do you mean staying longer? Aren't we going just for one day?' Daina tried to sound concerned but in fact was very pleased with all of this. The feeling of being alive, that had been suppressed by living with Algis in the country, resurfaced.

She called Algis and he was happy for her to stay longer. They jumped into Arūnas' hired car and drove to the airport. He returned the car and organised the tickets after chatting to an attractive young woman at the ticket counter for some time. About an hour later they boarded a half-empty plane, finally reaching his house by taxi at about ten.

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At eleven o'clock that night, they were sitting beside each other on his velvet couch, sipping champagne. The doorbell rang. A young waiter appeared, dressed in black pants and a white shirt, with a cloth draped over his left arm.

‘Room service.’

‘What’s going on?’ Daina asked, surprised.

‘I’ve organised some food for us,’ Arūnas said. The waiter rolled the trolley into the room and began to serve their dinner with silver cutlery.

‘Did you bring all this with you?’ she asked the waiter who was filling her plate with a Caesar salad.

‘Yes, Madam,’ he smiled.

‘This is to us,’ Arūnas pronounced. They clinked their glasses and looked at each other.

‘You deserve the dinner, the entertainment and much, much more. How unkind of your uncle to keep you in an outer Melbourne suburb amongst his creepy-crawlies. You are not a country girl. I sensed it from the minute I saw you.’

Daina smiled, sipping her drink. They ate fresh prawns, followed by strawberries which they washed down with champagne. After dinner was over, the waiter reappeared, gathered the dishes and left.

The night was breezy and the flickering candle lights blinked invitingly. Arūnas leaned towards Daina, kissing her on the lips. With pop music in the background and the embrace of the person she adored, she felt her dreams and desires were coming true. They stood up and danced. Arūnas held her by the waist and spun her around. Suddenly, he paused.

‘What are you wearing underneath? What’s that elastic for?’

‘My knickers...’ she replied, embarrassed.

‘How funny you are wearing knickers that come up to your belly button.’

‘And how should I be wearing them?’ Daina enquired, blushing. He left her standing in the middle of the floor. She stopped breathing and listened to his steps as he walked away. She could hear him in the next room opening and closing cupboard doors. Arūnas returned.

‘Do you like these?’ he asked, turning the light on and passing her a silky bra and matching knickers, as well as spreading a burgundy dressing gown, silk stockings, a short skirt, and a pink top with a low neckline on the couch.

‘Where did you get these? Are you running a shop from your house?’

‘They are size fourteen,’ Arūnas said, ignoring her questions.

‘I am serious. How did you know I was going to come with you?’

‘Well, I bought them for you when you were here with Saulė.’

‘But that was a long time ago! How did you know my size?’

‘It was easy. I asked a sales person in the lingerie shop to put aside the items you admired.’

‘I see...Saulė was also very generous to me. She gave me her new shoes. She actually told me I can keep them. I hope you are not angry?’

‘On the contrary, I am delighted. That’s why she bought two pairs instead of one. That was the only way to get something for you. You didn’t want anything, remember?’

‘I don’t know what to say. Thank you very much.’

‘Always a pleasure.’

‘Thank you.’

He approached her from behind and slowly hung a string of pearls on her neck. As she stood speechless, inhaling his strong aftershave, she kept glancing at the outfits and at him, not sure how to take all this in. Feeling embarrassed she sank into the sofa, holding her bright red cheeks with her hands.

Arūnas came to Daina’s side and refilled their glasses.

‘Oh, how I like you. You are so special, coming from the country of my ancestors. When I touch you, I feel so much more Lithuanian than I’ve ever been. You make me proud of being one. Capitalism spoils people and they stop valuing what they have. All they do is complain that this is wrong and that is not good. You are like a fresh flower in my bed of roses,’ Arūnas said.

‘And how many roses have you got in your garden bed?’ Daina teased. His eyes narrowed, his forehead broke into a sweat, and he spoke and laughed louder and louder. At times he had to put his glass down to save his drink from spilling. He lit a cigar and leaned back on the couch. As he pulled Daina close to him with his free hand, she was burning with yearning for him. They cuddled each other. The cigar went out. She wriggled out of his embrace, throwing the lacy knickers across the room, and, when he finally caught her, Daina covered his eyes with the silky bra, tying it behind his ears.

‘You look like a horse before the Melbourne Cup run!’ Daina exclaimed, once again running from him.

‘That’s exactly what I’m saying. I thought when I first met you that you were a sweet girl, but now I’m falling in love. You’re so wild and joyful. Little things make you happy. You wouldn’t ask me to buy you a Porsche, would you?’ He kept talking, at the same time making an attempt to undo the straps of her bra. She wriggled her way out of his embrace and switched off the light.

‘Where are you, my sweetheart?’ He started looking for Daina with his hands stretched out in front of him. And when he found her, they kissed and then he led her back to the couch.

‘I wish you would always stay the way you are – unspoiled and high spirited, like the Lithuanian *lakštingala* – a little bird with such small needs. Just sing all day and night to me.’ They sat quietly for some time, listening to the soft music and kissing.

The following night, Arūnas suggested they go out. Daina was surprised to see so many people and cars after midnight. The city was lit up with colourful neon lights. She observed a stretch of shops and cafés, and spotted the familiar *Casino* sign. As they walked towards the Casino building, she saw a few women standing at the curb. They were dressed in short skirts and revealing tops, and their hair was done up. They also wore heavy make-up. As if noticing her glances, Arūnas explained that they were prostitutes and that she shouldn’t concern herself with them. Prostitution was forbidden in Lithuania, and Daina had never seen prostitutes soliciting freely on the streets. She didn’t want to go to the Casino as she knew he’d be gambling and drinking again. She watched him, worried and unsure, but he grabbed her by the wrist and they were soon walking on a red carpet, which stretched out in front of them. The doormen greeted

them as they approached. Arūnas bought her a long stemmed rose with a silk heart attached to it. She thanked him by kissing him on the cheek. They entered a poker room where Arūnas placed his bets. Daina observed the nervous faces of the men, feeling the tension around her. She couldn't read Arūnas' expression. She followed his tanned fingers pointing at the cards as a streak of his blond hair hung down from his high forehead, slightly covering his right eye.

'You are my good luck charm and I won't let you go,' he whispered, patting her fingertips with his shaking hand, as he carefully watched the other players. She felt a bit nauseated from the sweat, shouts and clinking glasses. After an hour or so, in the room so smoky it made her cough, Arūnas took his winnings and they left the gaming table.

'Two thousand dollars?' Daina could hardly breathe. She felt dizzy from all the drinks she had had at his house. 'How can you win so much money? You are a real James Bond, a blond James Bond!'

'Well, that's what I do. That's my life. When I am short of cash, I come here and win some more and then buy what I want.'

'And you never lose?'

'That happens too,' he laughed, 'but not tonight.'

At the Casino restaurant they were seated at a table for two. To her surprise, the waiter she had seen the night before at Arūnas' house served their drinks. He looked at her, raising his eyebrows. Daina wondered why he was staring at her, and put it down to her big breasts – men were always looking at her chest. When Arūnas turned to the stage where the music began to play, she whispered to the waiter:

'If you know anything I don't, why don't you tell me?' But the waiter didn't reply.

She noticed Arūnas looking at her. She adjusted her fake water lily hair pin and gazed back at him. He drew his chair closer to her and took her hand in his.

'Are you cold? Why are your hands so cold, Daina?'

'I don't know. There is a Lithuanian saying *jeigu rankos šaltos, tai širdis karšta*,' she said.

'Does it mean if one's hands are cold, the heart is warm?'

'I suppose so; it doesn't sound the same in English though.'

'Anyway, Daina, I can feel you have a warm heart.'

Listening to his remarks, Daina felt reassured.

‘I have never heard so many compliments in my whole life.’ She glanced at her rough chubby hands, trying to hide them by crossing them under her armpits. Arūnas was staring at her.

‘You are beautiful. By the way, I need to visit my hairdresser tomorrow. I have an appointment to trim my curls,’ he remarked. ‘Would you like to have yours done as well?’

‘I don’t need a haircut,’ Daina assured him.

‘Maybe you don’t, but I am sure you would enjoy a bit of pampering. The first time you came here, you were telling me that you used to make regular visits to the hairdresser and that you used to polish your nails back home.’

‘Yes, I did, but...it was long time ago.’

‘It’s never too late to be who you wish to be. You should tell me too, what is it you would you like to do with your life?’

‘I want to travel, to learn better English. Maybe to go back home...later on.’

‘I can help you with everything, except the last wish. Although it’s the country of my parents and my grandparents, I would never be able to live in Lithuania. I don’t know...Do they have casinos over there?’

‘No, Lithuanians are not gamblers.’

‘I will tell you the truth, Daina. I love my life too much and, as you can see, I can easily afford it. Why would I go and freeze my testicles in the cold and miserable winters?’ he said in his tipsy voice. She couldn’t stop giggling. At four o’clock in the morning, they caught a taxi home. Arūnas unlocked the door, turned the light on and offered Daina a drink.

The following morning, she woke up, smelling coffee and opened one eye. Arūnas stood in front of her with a tray of food and yesterday’s rose across his teeth. They both laughed. He made himself comfortable at Daina’s feet, and they shared grapes, mango juice, scrambled eggs, toast and coffee.

‘Could you please let me know if we behaved appropriately last night?’ she teased.

‘All I can say is that you need a milk bath with red roses floating in it,’ he said.

These words made Daina wonder whether he was aware of what he did after they returned from the Casino. She knew exactly what had happened and was just testing him. He was drunk. After they'd had sex, she tossed and turned listening to his loud snores. Then she went to the kitchen and stared into the night through the window without turning the light on. Disappointed, but hoping things might get better, she wished for his prolonged kisses and his embrace, for his presents and surprises, for his disarming glances. Her body ached, wanting him badly.

'Daina, last night is history,' he said carelessly. She threw a grape at him. At that moment the tray tipped on one side, coffee spilling all over the bed. He pulled the bed cover off with everything on it and a pillow fight began. He was like a gusty wind in her still and boring life. She enjoyed the gentle touch of his soft lips and the way he stroked her naked body. Just then, the doorbell rang. Arūnas put on his dressing gown and left the room. She heard him talking to a man, then saw him go outside and close the door behind him. She cleaned up the mess, had a shower, then dressed and returned to the kitchen. She noticed a pile of unopened envelopes on a bench. They were from Vietnam, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Africa. The return addresses were of government organisations and orphanages.

Arūnas returned with a bunch of lilies.

'I asked my gardener to sell this bunch to me when I saw them in his van. I don't grow white lilies but they as beautiful and pure as you are,' he said.

'I am touched,' she said. He broke a stem and gently placed the lily between her breasts, kissing her on the lips.

*

After a week with Arūnas, Daina boarded the Overlander Adelaide-Melbourne train. At the platform they parted with a long embrace. She considered jumping off the moving train. Had it been a theatre play in which she was the main heroine, she would have jumped off and run after him. She stood at the window for a long time and when she couldn't see him anymore, she closed her eyes, listening to the train wheels slowly grinding against the steel rails as the heavy carriage started to trundle away.

When she entered her carriage, she saw the colourful luxurious seating laid before her. This was quite the opposite of the discomfort she'd experienced on the overcrowded trains with hard wooden seats during her long train journeys in the Soviet Union. She sat next to a middle-aged man wearing black-framed glasses who introduced himself as George. In the seat across from her there was an elderly couple, Pat and Paul. They were very friendly. George bought a bottle of Coca-Cola from the buffet for her and Pat offered Daina fruit and a chicken and avocado sandwich. They took care to speak slowly to make sure Daina understood them. In their company, she relaxed and opened up, telling them about her life in Soviet Lithuania.

'Where I come from people are different. They don't smile much. Australians are always smiling, and so polite. There is no tension, no pushing on buses or trains. It's quite different to Lithuania,' Daina said, sipping her drink and eating her sandwich. George agreed that a tourist could get that impression. Pat told Daina that she and her husband were retired and were travelling around the country. George explained that he'd been very busy during the year, teaching at the university.

'I know I need to relax more, but work takes up all my time,' he added.

'Oh, so nutty and thick like butter,' Daina said, licking her lips at the unusual taste of avocado.

'You are most welcome. What is it like to live in a classless society? I'd love to experience that. Imagine it, Paul?' Pat said.

'A bit strange, I'd say,' her husband nodded and continued to eat his sandwich.

'My life in the Soviet Union wasn't too bad, but for some it's not the case. Many want to go overseas, to explore how the rest of the world lives but only a few can get a visa to leave. I'd been dreaming about Australia since I was a teenager and the parcels from my great-uncle began to arrive. I thought one day I'd come to visit him and here I am.'

'Does that mean that your dream came true?' George asked.

'I guess so. Firstly, I received his invitation, and then I had to apply for a tourist visa, waiting six months for it to be approved via Moscow.'

'Oh, it must be really tough living like that, without personal freedom,' George said. 'I remember reading a story about a Lithuanian sailor who jumped ship. What was his name? Simo? Simai? Wait a minute, I think it was Simas. Simas Kudirka.'

‘I haven’t heard about Kudirka,’ Daina said. ‘What happened?’

‘In the early seventies, a sailor from your country, who worked on a Soviet ship, jumped across to an American ship begging for political asylum. His venture had a bad ending and he was sent to prison for attempting to desert his ship,’ George explained.

‘That’s a shocking story,’ Daina agreed. Then she kept silent for a while, absorbing what she’d heard. She felt like a school girl who never did her homework, burning with shame. She could just imagine her companions wondering if she had landed from the moon. These things had happened in front of her nose and she’d had no idea.

‘Such a price to pay for freedom,’ Pat said, as she finished eating.

‘Yes,’ Daina said. While her companions became absorbed again in their own conversation, she glanced out the window. It was already dark but the moon shone on the flat earth and on the tops of the trees scattered sparsely in the passing landscape. The night was still, reminding her of a night on a train to Ossetia. She’d been standing at the window watching the sky for hours – it was a long journey. Suddenly, the train had stopped. A young man had joined her at the window. He was Ossetian. He told Daina to beware of looking directly at the moon as it may bring misfortune. He said he learned this superstition from his grandparents. She didn’t stare at the moon that night. She’d been too busy talking to Kudar.

Daina’s thoughts drifted back to Arūnas. She glanced at the moon, searching for answers. Like the moon, she felt so alone. The more she thought of Arūnas, the more she doubted his feelings, her feelings, and the whole affair felt like Kudar’s warning – beware of looking in the moon’s face. She felt restless in her plush seat, her thoughts all mixed up. Arūnas was a business broker. Daina had no idea what he actually did for a living. He had invited her to stay with him, and to go with him on his forthcoming business trip to Queensland and Darwin. He’d nearly persuaded her to join him, and she had been tempted. But she’d only been allowed to stay in Australia because she was Algis’ carer and so she felt guilty leaving him to look after himself. She was not sure what to do. During the sleepless night on the train, she worried about returning to Algis’ farm. She was afraid he’d find out the truth about her week’s adventure and might get angry or jealous again.

In the early hours of the morning, as the train pulled into the station, she looked up at the tall buildings and momentarily forgot her worries, feeling a part of the greatest city in the world, Melbourne.

*

After the annual concert at the Lithuanian Club, Algis introduced Daina to some of the dancers. Later at the bar she met Povilas who offered her a glass of red wine. A slightly older man, Saulius, with a round freckled face, bought her a cup of coffee, and Viktoras, whom she also met for the first time, presented her with a box of chocolates. They chatted about the concert.

‘These young dancers were truly professional. They all have exceptional acting skills,’ Daina said.

‘Their teacher has been working with them since they were toddlers,’ said Viktoras, offering Daina a seat. The four of them put their drinks on the closest table. She felt comfortable in the company of young men, especially speaking in a mixture of English and Lithuanian. ‘Hi, *kaip einasi?* I am alright, *o tu?*’ – to her it sounded exotic. She watched others chatting and joking around. She noticed Viktoras’ straight short darkish hair with some silver streaks around his temples and decided he must be in his early forties.

‘I haven’t seen you dancing,’ she said.

‘Look how young these dancers are. I would be like their older brother on the dance floor. I am only helping with the lighting.’ He told Daina that he worked for a lighting company in Moorabbin.

More people entered the bar, pulling chairs out and joining tables together. As the youngsters had their soft drinks and ate sweets, the adults drank wine and spirits. Someone proposed a toast to the group’s teacher, Ona Bendorienė. Viktoras stayed close to Daina all afternoon and at one stage whispered to her that he’d like to take her out.

‘I’ll have to check with my uncle first,’ she replied. Algis didn’t seem pleased that Daina had been ignoring him, sitting with others. He also hesitated to let her go, but

then Viktoras appeared behind Daina, promising to bring her home no later than midnight.

‘You’re lucky I know you,’ Algis replied and they shook hands.

The couple arrived at Lygon Street about five o’clock and looked for a place to eat. Viktoras told Daina that this particular street was sometimes called “Little Italy” because it was full of Italian restaurants. The friendly waiter greeted them at the door and led them to a table for two, covered in white butcher’s paper. He also lit a candle and soon arrived with the menu. A bottle of wine appeared, followed by antipasto. In the background, the sound of the Italian music almost drowned out their conversation.

‘I’ve seen you at the Club before,’ Viktoras said, raising his voice.

‘Have you? When?’

‘You were reading poetry to people sitting around your table, twenty, maybe more.’

‘Were you there too? I didn’t notice you.’

‘I noticed you, but there was no opportunity to introduce myself.’

‘Do you like poetry?’

‘Don’t get me wrong, I do, but not that kind of poetry. Your poems sounded quite sad, but I can’t really understand Lithuanian. What were they about?’

‘Being caught in between two countries; living in Lithuania in my heart, and in Australia where I don’t really belong at the same time.’

‘Oh, you sound exactly like my grandmother! I spent enough time living in a morbid environment with my family as it is.’

‘Why?’

‘Because my grandparents came to Australia as DPs, that’s why. They told me their stories of being thrown out of their house while the Russian soldiers moved in. They had nowhere to go. So they escaped, apparently leaving behind their fattened piglet, carefully hidden in the logs. My grandmother still talks with regret about her pink piglet with the curly tail that she had to part with.’

Daina giggled.

‘The way you tell the story makes me laugh and I shouldn’t, because it’s a sad story,’ she said apologetically.

‘Sometimes I smile at her stories too. She is like a history book full of interesting images. She told me that when their house in the village of Pilviškiai was taken by Russians, the following night, they decided to return to fetch some belongings. She and my grandfather were going home like thieves, hiding in the fields, crawling on their knees through their own orchard, waiting until the early hours of the morning when the drunken soldiers finally went to sleep.’

‘Did they get their piglet?’

‘There was no time for anything like that. Imagine them trying to find the piglet buried inside the logs? My grandmother doesn’t think that anyone ever found it, unless, of course, the little pink piggy made a noise.’

‘Did they get their clothes?’

‘Yes, they fetched coats, jumpers and shoes that they’d hidden in the barn for emergencies. There was also a bundle with bread and salted meat hidden in some hay. They snuck out of the barn with extreme care and ran into the forest as quickly as they could.’

‘It’s so scary even to listen to these stories. What if we were to experience such injustice?’ Daina pondered.

‘I think the war deeply affected my grandparents. They had to start living all over again and to try to forget those nightmares,’ Viktoras replied. ‘Let’s go outside,’ he changed the subject. ‘Do you smoke?’

‘No, but I’ll join you.’

Viktoras inhaled quickly, blowing the smoke into the air. His hand holding the cigarette was shaking, his fingernails were long and dirty. She noticed his worn out sneakers and his old black jeans. His brown shirt was open, showing his sun-tanned chest. She thought he had a good figure and slender waist. She noticed his deep gaze but for her, the chemistry wasn’t there.

‘How long have you been in Australia?’

‘Since 1986.’

‘And you are still torn between here and Lithuania?’

‘Yes...You’d better finish your cigarette as I’d love to try some pizza before it gets cold.’ Following her back inside, he squeezed her buttock.

‘What are you doing?’ she said angrily.

‘Don’t you enjoy a bit of manly touch?’

‘No, I don’t. I am actually quite disappointed. I thought you’d be a real gentleman.’

‘I’m sorry. I can’t hide that I like you and I just want to show you. I didn’t mean to upset you.’

They returned to the table and Daina ate her pineapple pizza with bacon and cheese with little appetite. He had the one with the lot: shrimps, salami, cheese, and red pepper. Uncomfortable in his company, she couldn’t wait to leave the restaurant.

On their way to Whittlesea, they drove in silence for a while and Daina watched his strong grip on the wheel. He swore heavily at the passing cars and their drivers.

‘You didn’t have much to drink, just one glass of wine, why are you swearing?’

‘Sorry again. I feel like an idiot.’

‘Apology accepted.’

‘People appear casual here and don’t care much about the way they look, do they?’ she asked to keep their conversation flowing.

‘I guess that’s true. I go shopping in my tracksuit and t-shirt.’

‘Ah. I saw a woman with curlers in her hair once. Just like that, walking between the aisles and picking what she wanted from the shelves.’

‘That’s nothing. I saw a young woman putting her make-up on in a car while waiting for the lights to change,’ he said.

‘Unbelievable,’ she replied. ‘In Lithuania, it’s the opposite. When we step out the front door, we must look our best. Whenever my mother has to go out, even to take a rubbish bin to the garbage truck, she styles her hair, plucks her eyebrows, puts her lipstick on, and wears her better shoes.’

‘My mother would never do that,’ he replied, laughing. ‘When she is wheeling her rubbish bin up the street, she may have a towel around her head and cigarette in her hand.’

‘Does it bother you?’

‘No. I’m not fussed about how people look. My life is simple. I love football and soccer. My friends and I like to have a drink after the game. Life is great.’

‘I see.’

‘Melbourne is the sports capital, just in case you haven’t noticed,’ he said.

‘Really? What about Adelaide then?’

‘Have you been there, Daina?’

‘Yes, twice,’ she replied.

‘And what do you think of it?’

‘Well. I like that Adelaide is compact. I am confident that I wouldn’t get lost there.’

‘That’s for sure. It’s small. Ach, I forgot, the Casino!’ he said, hitting his forehead with one hand.

‘Yes, I know. I visited the Casino.’

‘Did you win any money?’

‘No, but my male friend did.’

‘Was he Lithuanian?’

‘Yes.’

‘What was his name?’

‘Arūnas.’

Viktoras began to laugh.

‘Everybody knows Arūnas – he is a business broker, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘He is a really funny guy. He was born in Melbourne like myself; we were scouts, played sports, did Lithuanian dancing together. He used to live in Mornington. After his parents divorced, he went to live in Adelaide. Top guy. Heavy gambler though, but supports various orphanages with his winnings. Which is great.’

Daina recalled the letters she’d seen on Arūnas’ kitchen bench.

‘How do you know him, Daina?’

‘Through my friend Saulė, his cousin.’

‘I remember. The blond woman who you were with when you read your poetry?’

‘You are so observant. But do you always tell the truth?’

‘No. I am a fibber,’ he said.

‘What is a fibber?’

‘A fibber is...How should I put it? Well, it’s when people promise things and don’t do it, or they talk a lot, but don’t say what they really mean. Others may make

things up.’ Listening to Viktoras, Daina thought about Arūnas. What was hidden behind his lovemaking, his tenderness, his gifts, and his words? Was he sincere about asking her to come and live with him in Adelaide? Was he ever serious about their relationship? She clutched her handbag tightly in her lap and felt her body stiffening up.

They arrived home just before midnight. Viktoras stopped the car in the driveway.

‘Can I come in?’

‘Maybe next time. Thank you for everything.’

‘That’s all? You must be pulling my leg?’

‘I haven’t even touched your leg!’ Daina exclaimed, jumping out of the car.

‘It’s only an expression. Wait! Sorry. I must admit,’ he spoke while getting out of the driver’s side, ‘I wish I could communicate with you in Lithuanian. With my Lithuanian “kitchen” vocabulary, so to speak, what we achieved tonight is one big misunderstanding.’

‘Didn’t your mother teach you?’

‘No, she is Australian. She calls me Victor, and only at the Club I am known as Viktoras.’

‘And your father?’

‘My dad? He is Lithuanian alright. But when I was young I hardly saw him. Working in a factory from five to five, he never had time for me. He said his job took all his energy from him. Not to mention the opportunity to teach me his language.’

‘Oh. I’m sorry to hear that.’

‘At least he taught me to drink vodka.’

‘Good night then,’ she said, waving her hand and running towards the front door.

‘Don’t you want to meet again?’

‘I’ll come to the Club sometime, I promise. Good night.’

Since her return from Adelaide, she had not been interested in other men. She told Saulė about herself and Arūnas, and Saulė was pleased that Arūnas had finally expressed his feelings.

‘What a lovely couple you are. Why didn’t you take up his invitation to stay with him?’

‘I thought about it then and am still thinking about it now, but if I’d stayed with him, Algis would’ve been left by himself, and I didn’t want that. He really needs to be cared for. He lives alone. If I’d stayed with Arūnas, I would’ve lost my self-respect, and would’ve lost Algis’ respect, too. It’s not like your cousin was proposing marriage to me, or even making a long-term commitment.’

‘Please don’t think like that. You are made for each other. He’ll soon come to visit you, you’ll see.’

Daina told Saulė about Arūnas’ monetary contributions to the orphanages around the world and they both commented on his generosity.

*

Most days Daina worked on the farm and in the house without having much time to think. She cleaned, cooked, cut the lawn, milked Star and gathered eggs. Days blended into each other and she didn’t have an opportunity to visit Saulė. Instead, they often spoke on the phone. They chatted about Saulė’s new car, her adorable husband and his daughter and son. She was happily taking care of them full-time. Daina was so pleased for her friend. They continued having a few laughs while sharing their memories of their lives back home. They had both worked in Kaunas, so they could reminisce together about the movies they had seen and the cafés they had eaten at there.

‘Life is strange,’ Daina said. ‘In our case it presented us with challenges when we both came here.’

‘Neither of us imagined we would meet in Melbourne,’ Saulė said. ‘Since we left Lithuania, neither of us knew what our fate would bring.’

‘That’s right, Saulė. Who would have thought you’d marry and remain in Australia?’

‘Who would have thought that you’d meet and fall in love with my cousin?’

‘Have you heard from him?’ Daina asked after a pause.

‘No, but I’m sure I will. I’ll ask Milda next time we visit her.’

Since her return from Adelaide, Daina hadn’t heard from Arūnas. Before Saulė married, she used to know of his whereabouts – New Zealand, Tokyo, Darwin, Hong Kong – but now there were no more calls from him.

Daina looked at her reflection in the mirror – a round glowing face, thick, well-shaped eyebrows, turned up nose, red cheeks and hair tied back in a ponytail. Although she looked well, it was not how she felt. Lately, she'd been feeling sick. Everything inside her was aching, turning, lifting, curling and twisting. She had a sharp pain in her right side. When it subsided, she walked downstairs. She couldn't recall Star kicking her, but she was feeling like she'd been beaten. She tried breathing deeply to take her mind off her pain. Her breasts began to swell, then she vomited several times. At first she'd ignored it, telling herself she was eating too much rich food, but finally she purchased a pregnancy kit at the pharmacy. The test was positive. She sunk on her knees and began to pray, making up her prayer as she went along: *sveika Marija malonės pilnoji, pasigailėk manęs nusidėjėlės ir atleisk man už mano naivumą. Priglausk mano negimusį kūdikį savame glėbyje ir išvaduok mane nuo pradėtojo vaisiaus*. When Algis was having a nap, she rang Arūnas' number in Adelaide, but there was no answer. She considered calling Saulė, but didn't want Milda to find out what happened between her and Arūnas as she thought so highly of her son. Instead, she cried herself to sleep.

The following morning, Paulius arrived. He came in the same old car and settled himself in the spare room. He'd been busy fixing his aunt's entire house, but now he was finished and ready to settle into his new life on the farm.

'It's great to see you,' Algis said. 'Maybe you could paint my fence and later on your bedroom?'

'With pleasure,' Paulius replied. Daina felt his glances while she served coffee and sweets. They also had some red wine. That night, the three of them watched a movie on television. As soon as Algis went to bed, Paulius tried to embrace Daina. As she pushed him away with her hand, his glass tipped onto his lap and the liquid spilled on his crotch and the carpet. Daina quickly brought a brush and some spray to clean the stains.

'What's wrong, Daina?'

'What's wrong with you? We don't even properly know each other and you are already trying to take advantage of me. You've taken more than two years to move here.'

‘You are right, Daina. I should’ve come earlier but somehow time went by and...I didn’t.’ Both on their knees, they cleaned the carpet. Then she dried it with her hairdryer. Paulius didn’t utter another word.

‘I’m going to my room,’ said Daina, after she’d finished cleaning up. ‘Good night.’

He grabbed her hand and tried to talk to her, but she only half listened to what he had to say. She was too worried about her situation to be interested in him. That night, she couldn’t sleep. She wished Paulius had arrived when he’d promised. Maybe things would have been different.

A week later, Saulė rang. With thoughts about Arūnas running through her mind, she listened to Saulė talking about her life; how she was spending her free time at the shopping centres; updating her wardrobe and wearing new jewellery. After Saulė had told Daina her news, Daina opened up about her pregnancy. Sharing the secret eased her tension and her worries. Her friend seemed surprised by the news, but kept reassuring Daina that Arūnas would be visiting his mother soon and promised to bring him to Whittlesea. Daina asked Saulė not to mention anything to Milda.

After putting the receiver down, Daina decided Arūnas didn’t like her anymore and had only suggested living together out of sympathy or something. He’d seemed so sensitive and caring and she’d fallen for him. He’d seemed to have a special power over her but where had it led? She felt stupid, so stupid. She didn’t know what to do. Being old-fashioned, Algis wouldn’t approve of her situation, nor would his friends. Daina was afraid he might ask her to leave. Where would she go? She didn’t know anyone who cared about her and she had no money to return to Lithuania.

Sitting in her room she observed the light blue clouds were hanging low, as if they were just about to land on her head. She wished they’d take her away from Whittlesea into the brightness of the sky, swallowing her whole and never bringing her back. Then her secret would be safe and nobody would ever find out. The sun was too intense – the summer heat unbearable. The open space around her made her feel so tiny in the vastness of her surroundings.

‘Just me and you, whoever is there,’ she said, running her hand over her belly.

She was not a whore, though the local Lithuanians would call her that and worse if they found out. She hadn't expected things to turn out this way. She didn't know what to do next. She didn't want to be pregnant, but she was, and she knew she couldn't leave the baby in the hospital or give it up for adoption. She had to do something.

Daina was careful around Paulius and Algis, making sure they didn't suspect anything. She wiped away her tears, adjusted her hair, washed her face and went to the shed to milk the cow. She saw Paulius in his overalls, his sleeves rolled up, painting the fence brown. Daina just nodded her head to him as she walked past. She also took her time leaving the shed. When Paulius had moved around the corner, she walked back inside.

She noticed how hard Paulius worked. He appeared to be a handyman – no job too small. He attempted all tasks with enthusiasm, and seemed happy to be living at Whittlesea. In the evenings they talked about what they had done during the day and what needed to be done the following day, usually dividing their tasks between Paulius working outside and Daina inside. She was pleased that he always asked her how she was. She began to see he had a caring personality. She even disclosed to him her love for mountains and her desire to travel around Australia.

'Why not?' Paulius asked.

'How could I? I have no money.'

'But you don't need much money. I have a car we could travel in and we could take some food with us. Let's go to the Grampians,' he suggested.

Daina shrugged her shoulders. 'Frankly I didn't think of it, but the Grampians may be a good idea. It's not far from here, a couple of hours or so,' she said.

'I have a tent. We could sleep in it and we wouldn't need any accommodation. What do you say, Daina?'

'We must ask Algis if he is alright with it.'

'Let me take care of this,' Paulius replied, disappearing into the hallway with two shot glasses and a bottle. Daina followed him quietly. As she approached Algis' bedroom, she could hear them talking. Then she saw him filling her uncle's glass. They both drank vodka.

She heard Algis was pleased with the idea. She also saw Algis showing his thumbs up approvingly. Her heart was beating fast. It was the golden opportunity to “get pregnant” and to cover her tracks. All she had to do was sleep with Paulius. He had frightened her by his attempts to get closer to her when her thoughts were already elsewhere. Now that her pregnancy was advancing, she wished she had not rejected him. She wasn’t in love with him but she liked him.

When Paulius joined her in the lounge room, she had soft jazz music playing in the background. The two glasses were filled with red wine. They drank wine and kissed, and then they made love.

That night, in her bed she weighed up his better qualities. Paulius had a good heart. He had become a friend and he could speak Lithuanian, which was so important to her. He was also entertaining and fun to be with until he had too much to drink. She sympathised with him. She knew the reason behind this. She understood his traumatic past. Her heart ached each time she heard his cries at night ripping the still air under her open window. His drinking did spoil things. When he was drunk, his wig slid to one side and made him look like a clown, a drunken clown telling his Soviet jokes, calling Algis’ friends traitors, and making them uncomfortable. But sober, he was alright. He didn’t wear his wig around the house. Daina asked him not to hide his short hair – patchy or not, she liked him better that way. He wasn’t stingy. He’d given her some linen fabric and an amber brooch as gifts. He was a fine man, though it worried Daina that he hadn’t talked about anything except Chernobyl. That made her wonder what he had left behind in Lithuania. She knew that Paulius loved her and even if she didn’t love him, she had to pretend that she did for her baby’s sake.

*

They reached Lake Fyans Holiday Park late on Saturday morning. The day was a little cloudy. Paulius and Daina put their tent up and rushed to the mountains. The Grampians were full of tourists; everybody was trying to get the best view. The observation deck was overcrowded with photographers. Paulius and Daina found themselves squashed amongst a group of Japanese tourists who had just stepped off their bus. The colourful

vegetation and the unusual stone formation, combined with the fresh air, made Daina lightheaded. She sat on a huge greyish stone and rested while Paulius ran around with his camera taking pictures of the valley. They had a snack back at the lake and later went for another walk around the camp grounds. Then they hired a kayak to explore the lake and watch the swans diving in and out of the water. Dead trees stood in the lake, swaying to and fro with the wind. Their thin, short branches were dry and white and, as the evening approached, stood out like ghosts.

They returned to the camping site to find that people were gathered around a fire place. Some sat around chatting, others played with children. Daina placed her sausages on a BBQ tray next to a frying pan with sizzling onions, potatoes, and sausages. The other person cooking appeared to be Dorothy. Daina felt immediately at ease. Dorothy turned the half-burned onion rings. Daina realised that the sausages she'd placed on the BBQ had also turned black.

'Ah, we both are so alike, Daina, not very successful in cooking. But then again, when I become passionate about a topic, I forget about everything else around me.'

'I am the same. I often catch myself daydreaming, Daina replied. They laughed, trying to decide whether to eat their overcooked meal or give it to the birds. They decided to eat it as it was getting dark and they were feeling really hungry.

Paulius joined in. Dorothy turned towards him, chatting about the weather. She sympathised with Paulius, hearing his Chernobyl story.

'We don't know how good we have it here. How wonderful life is on this side of the world. Listening to you makes me feel heartbroken,' she said, slowly shaking her head.

The three of them rejoined the general conversation around the fire, talking about the noisy rosellas that had landed close-by on a fence and were watching them eat.

Later that night, in their tent, while zipping themselves in their sleeping bags, Paulius and Daina heard strange noises and went to investigate. They thought they heard cats fighting, but soon realised that the trees above them were full of grey coloured possums with woolly coats, shiny black eyes and long tails.

‘Possums, possums, look, look!’ children shouted, trying to reach them. Dorothy was also there, greeting them, quietly inviting them to follow. They went further into the bushland and soon saw more possums scampering around.

‘They are, so to speak, the tourist attraction here: they come out at night to be fed by visitors. Watch me,’ Dorothy said, taking a piece of bread from her coat pocket. Two possums climbed down from the tree. She ripped the bread into pieces. Daina observed with surprise how one possum grabbed the piece with his tiny pinkish claws and disappeared up the branch. The second possum came down, and the third did the same. For a better view, Paulius aimed his torch up the tree. Daina thought their eyes shone with hatred and asked him to lower the torch.

It was pitch dark when they returned to the open fire area. The sky full of stars and the peace of the bush and the lake helped Daina to relax. Paulius took out his guitar and began to play. Soon other campers returned and sat around. Paulius continued to sing in Lithuanian in his soft and comforting voice. The fire place, the popping sound of the sparks, and the voice of the lonely guitarist reminded her of Toivo pouring his heart out, hugging a pear-shaped instrument and singing just to her in the wilderness of the Altay. She wondered if he still thought of her.

It was very late by the time everyone went to their tents and caravans. The dawn was already breaking and the early birds began screeching. Paulius had been drinking and it was not difficult for Daina to pretend she was enjoying his kisses and touching. Afterwards she listened to the noises coming from other tents. After Paulius began to snore, she threw up.

Upon their return, Paulius and Daina continued to make love, but slept in their own rooms. One morning, a few weeks after the trip, she decided it was time to tell him she’d missed her period.

‘Who do you think you’re fooling?’

‘I’m sure I am pregnant.’

‘Tell that to the kangaroos – they may believe you. Not me. You are a stupid girl. Haven’t you realised that I am sterile? Chernobyl has done more than enough to destroy me.’

Daina saw the kitchen floor opening in front of her and tried to grab onto a bench end. The next minute, she felt Paulius' strong grip.

'Are you alright?' he asked, helping her to get comfortable on the couch. 'Have some water, Daina, and try to breathe deeply and evenly,' he instructed. 'Relax, relax more. That's better,' he kept talking to her, checking her pulse. 'What happened?' he asked again.

She opened her eyes, studied the fat fly walking on the ceiling above her head, then slowly pushed his arm away and freed herself from him.

'Thank you. I don't need your help. I am fine. I'll go outside for some fresh air.'

'Alright then. Just be careful...'

She climbed the hill, her knees shaking. She sat on the grass in her usual spot and watched the still sky. She sobbed quietly, feeling foolish. She felt disgusted by the whole situation and angrily spat on the grass.

'Maybe I'll slip and lose the baby falling downhill?' she contemplated.

*

At the start of January 1991, Saulė came for a visit, bringing Arūnas along. Because they arrived without letting her know, Daina was dressed in her casual, milk-stained clothes. While the men shared some alcohol around, she jumped into the shower. Then she looked for a more appropriate outfit in her wardrobe. She selected a white top and charcoal shorts. Back in the kitchen, she spoke to Arūnas and soon Paulius joined their conversation. Arūnas was friendly and chatty, but Paulius was quiet. Saulė made a sudden announcement that she was nine weeks pregnant.

The men settled at a table on the veranda with a bottle of vodka. Algis seemed pleased having Arūnas and Paulius for company.

Talking to Saulė over a cup of coffee in the kitchen, Daina congratulated her on her pregnancy.

'Why didn't you tell me about it earlier, like I did? We are both nine weeks pregnant.'

'I wanted to be absolutely sure,' Saulė replied.

Daina listened to her friend's joyful voice, wishing she could talk of her own pregnancy with such happiness.

‘How long is Arūnas planning to stay?’ Daina asked.

‘Maybe a couple of days,’ Saulė replied.

‘I thought he was in Hong Kong. How come he is here?’

‘Oh, he had a disagreement with his boss and came back. But there will be plenty of opportunities for you to ask him yourself,’ Saulė said teasingly.

‘That’s good,’ Daina replied, already planning how best to break her news to Arūnas.

‘Good luck, Daina.’

‘I really need it. Thank you.’

After lunch, the men went outside to look around the farm. The women washed the dishes and began preparing the evening meal. They decided to bake *kugelis*, peeling twenty huge potatoes between the two of them. Then they fried bacon with onions and also made a creamy white sauce using flour, sour cream, beef stock and some water. They sang a song together about a young maiden going to a river to wash her clothes and meeting a handsome youth on a white horse. Only her sharp tongue saved her from losing her virginity and being taken to a faraway country by the horse rider. I wish, Daina thought, taking a deep breath.

The women decorated the dining table with a linen tablecloth and a vase of field flowers. The men returned at about six o’clock. They’d cleaned the yard, stacked the wood, removed some dead branches, cut the grass; their faces were tanned, and they seemed to be in a good mood. Arūnas, spread out on a couch, was telling jokes and making everybody laugh. Daina thought he was one of those lucky people, a born entertainer. He was graceful and his voice joyful. He always came across as a man with no worries.

When it was getting close to dinner time, he offered to help Daina and Saulė. He made cocktails, some with lime and pineapple, others with vodka. During the meal, the whole house exploded with sounds of laughter and singing from time to time to the accompaniment of a Lithuanian record. After dinner everybody relaxed. Arūnas joined Daina on the couch. They talked about the successful career he was making for himself.

‘I’m glad for you that you love what you do.’

‘I guess because I am persistent,’ he said moving closer to her side, their noses touching.

‘You are,’ she replied playfully leaning back. Daina realised how much she wanted to touch his face and to rest her head in his lap. She hesitated for a moment, took a deep breath, looking for the right words.

‘I am pregnant...’ she said, imagining Arūnas reacting happily to the news, but his smiling face suddenly changed.

‘You’re joking?’ he said, jumping to his feet – and then sitting back down. ‘I know about these things. The minute the woman gets pregnant, where is Arūnas? No, no, no funny business with me. I’ve seen Paulius staring at you, how do you know whose baby it might be?’

‘It was conceived last October in Adelaide.’

‘No it wasn’t. I always use a condom,’ he said sharply, getting up from the couch, turning his back to her and walking away. Daina watched him walk over to where the other men were standing and join their conversation. His behaviour confirmed to Daina that he was a womaniser. Why did she want to be with him? Her foolishness had landed her into trouble again. She’d lost Toivo because of her ignorance and distrust, and now Arūnas. She thought about the men in her life and decided that Toivo had been her perfect partner. If she had gone to him with news of her pregnancy, he would have married her at once. She was upset but kept her chin up until the guests had left. They sped up the gravel road in their white Commodore, raising a cloud of dust.

Daina realised Arūnas was gone for good and that she was on her own. There was nothing much in their relationship, she decided, just lust and more lust, and there were other women she noticed at the Adelaide Casino who were openly staring at him; he was a charmer, a good-looking charmer.

While going up the stairs, her body shook and she trembled. He’d passed through her life as fast as a heavy storm; she couldn’t even be sure he’d actually ever existed. She went to sleep clutching the pearl necklace in her palm that he’d given her in Adelaide. She remembered how Roma used to say that pearls are shaped like tears and are a sign of bad luck. She hid them under her pillow and began to cry. She couldn’t understand how Arūnas could be so generous and so careless at the same time. He was saving the

starving orphans and yet leaving her pregnant to fend for herself. How many children had he conceived on his travels around the world? He was obviously not cut out for being a father.

The following morning, Paulius knocked on her door, entering with a tray of orange juice, bacon and toast. He looked clean shaven and his pants were ironed. Daina was still not quite awake and stared at him with surprise. He took a seat on the side of the bed and offered her a cup of coffee. Then he took a sip from his own cup.

‘I’ve been thinking about you. Yesterday, when I saw Arūnas giving you a gift and chatting intimately with you, I put two and two together. Is he the father of your baby?’

Daina kept quiet.

‘I overheard you two exchanging some harsh words. I didn’t mean to listen, but Arūnas was rather loud.’

‘None of your business. Go away.’

‘I didn’t mean to offend you. I want you to know the reason I delayed my arrival here. I met this girl at the Polish Club. We went out for a bit. We liked each other, but she returned to Poland.’

‘I see,’ Daina said, finding it difficult to breathe.

‘It seems we both have had bad experiences and maybe this time things will work out. I just wanted to say I really feel for you, Daina, and I don’t care if the baby is not mine. I’d like to marry you.’ He lowered himself on one knee and took a white box out of his pocket.

‘Please don’t open it. Not now,’ Daina said, straightening herself up.’ They ate in silence, Paulius looking at her while she slowly chewed her breakfast. She told him she needed more time to think and he agreed, leaving her in bed.

A short time afterwards, she looked out the window and saw Algis and Paulius working outside. She shut the window and went to the bathroom, closing the door behind her. She ran a warm bath and sat in it. She noticed that she was bleeding. She felt weakness in her legs, just managing to climb out while vomiting up her breakfast.

Daina opened her eyes and looked around. The walls were white like those at the lawyer's waiting room. A young nurse leaned over Daina and asked her how she felt.

'I was having a bath...and that's all I remember.'

'I understand,' said the nurse checking her pulse and blood pressure. 'You've had a miscarriage.'

'Did I?' Daina asked, feeling instantly relieved.

'You should be fine. The doctor will talk to you later. Please rest now. You lost a lot of blood and need plenty of rest.'

Later that day Paulius came with some of her clothing and a bunch of flowers. He looked sad and spoke gently.

'I am so sorry, Daina...'

'What are you sorry for? It wasn't your baby, anyway.'

'But I wanted to build our future together. It would've been alright, you, me and the little one.'

'It doesn't matter now. I'm tired. Let me sleep.'

'Okay, you sleep. I'll just sit here quietly...'

Daina turned away from him and tried to rest, but she couldn't. She told Paulius that his presence annoyed her. He stood up, placed his flowers on a side table and left. She didn't want to see Algis. She felt embarrassed to call Saulė. She spent most of the day staring at the ceiling. Eventually, she drifted into a light sleep. She was swimming in a lake. Arūnas surfaced in front of her. Daina escaped amongst the tall reeds, hardly breathing, watching the moon above her head. She was ready to reach it, but her hand landed on his chest and he kissed it.

'I've lost my baby, I've lost our baby,' she cried, tightening her arms around his neck. Arūnas wiped her tears away, but he didn't ask her forgiveness; instead he was angry.

'It's my baby too. You are so cruel. You killed my lovely girl. Maybe she would have been like you – happy and beautiful,' he murmured, diving under the water.

'Why didn't you pin a lily to my hair?' she asked. 'Why didn't you propose to me? Why didn't you tell me you loved me, Arūnas? I wanted us to be together, holding our baby, standing in the lake full of water lilies. Our girl's face – the face of a white lily. I'll sing you a lullaby, my little one. Please don't fly away, please.'

‘You were talking and screaming in your dream,’ the nurse said. ‘Are you alright?’

‘I am fine...’ Daina replied, slowly looking around. After the nurse had left, she rang Dorothy.

The next morning, her friend arrived with strawberries and a couple of books.

‘I thought you might be interested in reading some Australian books,’ she said, placing the Edwardian catalogue *Australia in the Good Old Days* and *Wildlife of Australia* on her side table. ‘How are you? What happened?’

Daina hadn’t told Dorothy the real reason she was in hospital when she’d spoken to her on the phone. She’d said she was there for a check-up. Now she told her about Arūnas, the pregnancy, and the miscarriage, with tears in her eyes. Dorothy listened, nodding her head from time to time.

‘I don’t like the sound of this,’ she commented, learning of Arūnas’ behaviour. ‘Arūnas, well, he is a typical womaniser. What about Paulius?’

‘He is a good man, but not for me. He seems nice but I am afraid of what is under the surface.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Paulius appears obedient like a lamb, calm and gentle, amusing, and sympathetic, but when he has a few drinks, he starts banging his head against the wall, screaming and carrying on. At times I am afraid of him.’

‘He must be suffering badly from his memories of Chernobyl,’ Dorothy said.

‘He must be.’

‘That’s no good. What are you planning to do?’

‘I don’t know, but I am definitely not keen on seeing my uncle’s face. He is an old-fashioned man. He doesn’t approve of sex before marriage. Just as well I’ve lost the baby as even my parents wouldn’t have been pleased with me returning to Lithuania with a bundle of joy and no husband.’

‘Don’t worry, Daina, everything will be fine. Time heals all wounds. You are still so young and you will find your true love. You’ll see. In the meantime, would you like to stay with me for a while?’

‘Yes, I’d love to, if it’s not too much trouble,’ Daina replied, tightly hugging her friend, relieved.

*

The school where Dorothy taught was within walking distance of her Carnegie flat. She left early for work. Daina slept in the spare room. Every morning she listened to the noise of the running water of the shower, to the click of the key in the front door, and to Dorothy’s footsteps as she left. Then she put on the purple dressing gown and pink slippers Dorothy had given her, and walked around the two-bedroom flat, opening the blinds. In the kitchen she made herself an Italian coffee. She loved to sit in front of the television with a bowl of cereal on her lap, not having to worry about going to the shed to milk the cow, cooking a full egg and bacon breakfast for Paulius and Algis or weeding the garden. This morning the sun was breaking through the open curtains and it made her feel free and detached from her past at Whittlesea.

She spent most days reading, taking books from one of the shelves in the sitting room. She was content to be absorbed into other worlds until she heard the key in the door and Dorothy returning home.

A week after she moved in with Dorothy, she rang Algis. She felt awkward and apologised for leaving. He told her how disappointed he was. He also threatened to write to her parents. They exchanged harsh words and he hung up on her. That night, she composed a letter to her family and explained that the reason she was no longer living with Algis was that they couldn’t get along. She assured them that this was only a temporary arrangement until they reconciled. She didn’t mention her miscarriage. She wrote the same to Jovita, Ilona and Regina. Then she rang Saulè. She told Saulè about the miscarriage and Saulè was shocked to hear of Daina’s misfortune.

In March, Dorothy managed to find some casual employment for Daina through a cleaning agency in Bently. Daina didn’t hesitate to take the job. The following morning, she knocked on the door of a red brick house with huge windows, carrying a plastic bag with detergents, cloths and sponges. An elderly man with a tiny smile answered the door.

‘My name is Daina Leitaitė from the cleaning agency.’

‘*Labas rytas. Gintas Storpirstis,*’ he replied in Lithuanian, telling her that he recognised her nationality by her surname and her accent. ‘Come in, Daina. Do you love singing? Would you be singing, as your name implies, while cleaning?’

‘No, no. My parents gave me this name without realising the meaning. I am not a good singer.’

‘Here, here. Don’t be modest. All Lithuanians are good singers. Would you like some coffee?’

Daina nodded, following Gintas into an ill-lit kitchen with worn-out cupboards where he poured hot water into two cups.

‘Oh, you must’ve been waiting for me?’

‘Yes. I rarely have visitors, but this morning has turned out to be very special – a young lady from Lithuania is visiting an old man who is from the same place,’ he joked, winking. Daina felt at home. She told him about coming to Australia to visit her great-uncle, and that they’d had a falling out. She explained that she was now temporarily living with her friend. He didn’t ask why, and she relaxed and started cleaning. She dusted, mopped the floor, cleaned the stove, and ironed, completing her tasks by early afternoon.

‘You are very thorough. I want you to come again,’ Gintas said, looking around the sitting room and taking his wallet out. ‘Fifty dollars; this is for four hours, ten dollars an hour. Am I right?’

Daina thanked him for the money and the generous tip and promised to return a week later.

‘But my house gets really dusty and I need someone to water the garden as well as to wash the curtains. Can you come back the day after tomorrow?’

‘Of course I can,’ Daina replied, tightly squeezing her first wage in her palm.

‘Maybe you could even consider moving in here? I have a big house and would enjoy your company.’

‘I’ll think about it,’ she said, smiling.

He suggested she should leave her cleaning bag behind.

Daina reached Dorothy's flat in under an hour, unlocked the door and waltzed in. Her friend was already home. She offered her the money, but Dorothy hesitated, finally agreeing to put it towards the bills. Daina was proud of being able to pay something back.

She looked at how gracefully Dorothy moved around the kitchen, with a ladle in one hand and a frying pan in the other. She had her long thick hair gathered in a ponytail. She was slim and just a touch taller than Daina. She cooked on three burners, with the main dish, the garnish, and the percolated coffee steaming away. The ticklish aroma of meatballs and fried onion made Daina's mouth water.

'You are such a good cook, Dorothy.'

'No, I'm not. Remember the BBQ experience at the Grampians?' They both giggled, talking about their burnt sausages and onions.

'Seriously, Dorothy, who taught you to make all these dishes like banana fritters, lasagne, pumpkin soup?'

'Oh, it's my Italian and Belarusian cuisine in one, the best of two cultures makes everything possible,' she replied, smiling.

'How come you are from two cultures?'

'You see, my mother is Belarusian and my father is Italian,' Dorothy said. 'I know that sounds a strange combination but they met in Melbourne in the fifties, working at the same factory. My mother was a dressmaker and he was her boss. They liked each other. He used to invite her to his family gatherings and my mother enjoyed his love serenades. He played a guitar under her window when he proposed. They got married and I have a brother and a sister.'

'What an interesting story, so romantic. I'm really envious of your big family,' Daina said. 'I am an only child.'

'Please don't. We fight all the time,' Dorothy joked.

Daina sat at the table and watched how her friend drained the pasta, added the mince meat and the sauce, stirring them together with a wooden spoon. The pleasant aroma of fried bacon wafted through the kitchen, making her hungry.

'I can never repay you for being so hospitable when I most needed it. It's true that only in hard times do we find out who our friends are.'

'Oh, thank you.'

‘Truly, Dorothy, I have never had an Australian friend, and you are such a wonderful person, so easy-going, open-minded, entertaining, and very understanding.’

Dorothy laughed loudly and clearly like she always did.

‘That’s how people in Australia are. Others would’ve helped you out too.’

‘I’ll be sorry when I have to leave.’

‘Are you planning to leave me?’

‘Not yet, but I will have to go somewhere. I can’t keep imposing on you.’

‘You don’t. Did I do something wrong?’

‘The thing is, the house I went to clean today belongs to an elderly Lithuanian man, Gintas. He was so impressed with my cleaning that he wants more help.’

‘What a coincidence – a Lithuanian man! I see. Does he live alone?’

‘Yes. And he is very keen for me to move into his house, probably because he misses the company. I felt so useful today. I could occupy myself there and could help him out.’

‘We were just getting used to each other,’ Dorothy said. ‘But if Gintas badly needs your company and there is plenty to occupy yourself with, I don’t mind.’

‘We’ll see,’ said Daina and changed the subject. ‘May I ask why, being such a beautiful and good-hearted person, you are still alone?’

‘I had a boyfriend. We were going out for about five years and were about to be married. But it wasn’t meant to be.’

‘What happened?’

‘He was killed in a car accident.’

‘Oh, that’s terrible...Were you with him?’

‘No. He was driving home from work, and was hit from behind; his head hit the dash board, his neck snapped, and he died instantly.’

‘Oh. I am so sorry to hear that.’

‘Well, Daina, since then my heart has been frozen and I can’t deal with going out with men.’

‘That means he was the one?’

‘He was. He certainly was. Every woman dreams of having that special one, but they are a rare breed: gentle, patient, intelligent, romantic as well as soul mates. That’s

what Philip was for me. How about you, Daina? You must've had someone in Lithuania?'

'Yes. I had a boyfriend, Toivo.'

'Let's serve our dinner and then you can tell me all about him, alright?'

'Alright.'

Dorothy covered her small table with a white tablecloth, lit a candle, and poured red wine into their glasses. She dished up the meat balls and pasta, removed her brown apron and sat down. With the Italian music in the background and tasty food in front of her, Daina found it easy to talk about her fear that she had lost Toivo forever now that she had been away so long.

'Daina, you shouldn't think like that. You never know. You may meet him again one day and be together.'

*

'I am moving in with Gintas,' said Daina after returning from her cleaning duties.

'I see you've made up your mind,' Dorothy said.

'I think so.'

'From what you have told me, he seems a decent person, and I approve.'

'Apparently he was a teacher before the war but couldn't re-establish himself in Australia, and so he worked as a train driver until his retirement. Still, it's wonderful that he loves reading and sharing his knowledge with me.'

'That sounds good. You'll be in caring hands, enjoying intellectual stimulation. Just a word of advice, if I may?'

'Please tell me.'

'Don't pass up any study opportunity that may come your way. I've learnt that if you study, if you are determined and persistent, you can do anything you want.'

'I'll remember that and will try my best.' They clinked their glasses and made a toast to their friendship.

The following Saturday, Dorothy drove Daina to Gintas' house.

‘You can stay here,’ Gintas said, unlocking the door to a room she’d never been in before. The wardrobes and cupboards were full of costumes, glitter, make-up, hats, long gowns and shoes. Daina looked around her with surprise. Gintas then told her about his wife, who had passed away.

‘Rusnė died three years ago, but I can’t give away her things...as yet. She was an actress and a singer and played in different musicals at the local theatre company, even played a main part in *The Merry Widow*. Look at her coats, furs, feathers!’ he exclaimed.

While he spoke, Daina imagined herself wearing a huge black hat, see-through gloves to her elbows, and a long velvet frock, dancing gracefully and singing around the stage, making all her suitors jealous of her inheritance and of each other. First comes Toivo, but she rejects him for being too secretive; then Paulius – another rejection for lying about his age; then Arūnas for being not serious about their love. Once Toivo returns, she realises he is the one, and they live happily ever after.

Daina shook herself out of the daydream, glancing at the colourful coats, jumpers, dresses and handbags. Gintas unlocked a drawer and took out a wooden jewellery box. When he opened it, Tchaikovsky’s *Sleeping Beauty* played in slow motion. Then he sat on the bed, talking with admiration about his wife, and telling Daina how much the public had loved her.

‘Rusnė was very graceful. She used to nod her head and gently wave her tiny hand to the excited audience, being in no rush to leave the stage. The audience would clap and clap and clap.’

Daina listened, touching gold chains with pendants, necklaces, rings in the jewellery box.

‘You can have them. Please help yourself to everything.’

‘No, I couldn’t,’ she replied firmly, shutting the velvety top of the box.

‘I know you may feel shocked and think it’s all too soon but I can see you wouldn’t take advantage of an old man like me. I sincerely want you to keep the box and everything else. At least while you are living here.’

‘Thank you very much for your trust and kindness. And yes, you are right, I feel overwhelmed having these beautiful items around me. I am truly touched.’

‘Don’t hesitate to wear whatever you like. Now I’d be happy if you could cook us something to eat.’

Daina boiled four potatoes and they had them with sausages, green salad and some wine. They talked and talked and talked. That night, she thought of Algis and Whittlesea. She wondered how he was getting on with his life and his health and whether Paulius had stayed on to help him. She thought how nice it would be to see him again and to invite him to share a meal with Gintas, both men exchanging their war time stories. That night, she wrote to her family and her friends of yet another change of address.

Gintas told Daina that his wife Rusnė had been an opera singer.

‘It was 1928. Rusnė was eighteen years old when we met. I was twenty-one. She was a student at the University of Kaunas, also taking singing lessons. From the first minute I saw her, I was in love. She was petite. Even with high heels on, she only reached my shoulders. So beautiful. Her greenish-blue eyes sparkled. When she sang at my friend’s party, she swayed her body from side to side. Occasionally she shook her dark, shoulder-length hair that gave more “oomph” to her portrayal of Violetta in *La Traviata*. That night, I left my friend’s house at the same time she did. She walked slowly with her black stilettos echoing in the empty street. Out of the blue, three young men appeared, surrounding Rusnė in a circle. I hurried towards her calling “Rusnė, wait for me; you are always walking too fast.” The men looked at me and reluctantly stepped aside, letting her go. We held hands until they disappeared.’

‘That’s unbelievable how they let her go and didn’t beat you up.’

‘I never thought about it that way.’

‘And what did she say?’

‘She said something along the lines of: “Thank you for saving me. Who knows what was on their drunken minds. They could’ve taken my handbag or wallet from me.” We let each other’s hands drop and I reintroduced myself as one of the guests from the party. She hadn’t noticed me. She looked uncertain, and relaxed only when we began talking about her singing. I was beside myself, so nervous next to this sophisticated lady. She kept close to me until we reached her house. Before we parted she admitted to

me that the incident had made her realise she shouldn't be going out so late and I volunteered to be her bodyguard.

'Many times I stood waiting under her window. She was often more than half an hour late. She was late, but I learnt to be patient. It was not difficult. I loved her. We got married. We were so happy. We both taught at school. Our son, Zigmas, was born. When the war started we joined my parents. We went through a lot. My mother and her sister lived close to each other in the village of Dovilai. When my aunt's house was bombarded, our families moved in together. My parents decided we should all run away, but my aunt's family wanted to stay put. We parted, embracing each other and not knowing whether we'd meet again. No one knew where or when the danger was coming from. We left with little food or clothing. We had to part with our animals, crops, our well-kept farm, servants. A quarter of a smoked pig was divided amongst all of us. My mother wrapped her piece into her nightgown and my father wrapped his into his flannel shirt. We joined a lengthy line of horse carts on their way to Germany. When the bombs dropped from the sky, we had to drop down from wherever we stood. I covered our son's body with mine, wishing I could dig in the dirt and hide from the sight of the planes. When the planes passed and we were on our feet again, another loud explosion disorientated us. The bomb shell hit Zigmas. He was holding his teddy bear tight, and his fair hair swayed in the wind as if he was still alive.'

'I know someone else whose son died on the way to Australia,' said Daina, thinking of Algis and his son, Romukas.

'There were many horrible events during the war. Once I saw a man's head on the road and parts of his body scattered close-by. I hid my tears from Rusnė who was screaming. I had to be strong for her.' A lengthy silence followed and then Gintas continued. 'We settled at the DP camp in Tübingen. During those five years at the "safe place", we did our best to preserve our culture. We organised a school and Rusnė taught music. I volunteered with food distribution. At night, Lithuanians gathered together and had heated discussions about their plans for the future, followed by singing till the early hours of the morning. That was our way of mourning our loss. We planned to return home, but not until the Russians left.'

'What a difficult life you had,' Daina said.

‘Anyway, if you are interested in reading more about our life there and beyond, you’re most welcome to use my library.’

Gintas led Daina into his study and pointed out some books. She’d been in his library while cleaning, but now she was intrigued to find a large section on deportation. She’d heard so much from Algis, his friends, and from others at the Melbourne Lithuanian Club about Lithuanians being sent to Siberia. Now she thought she would find out why people had had no choice, no control over their destiny; why the Soviet leader Stalin was so strict and even sent his own family members to the death camps; why everybody was so afraid of the Soviet regime and KGB interrogations.

‘I’d love to read more about things I knew nothing about before coming here,’ she said.

‘And who are your favourite writers?’ he asked.

‘I hope you won’t get upset if I tell you that I read Dostoyevsky, Pushkin and Tolstoy?’

‘Not at all. They belong to the classics and are there to stay.’

‘My favourite Lithuanian poet is Justinas Marcinkevičius.’

‘You’ll find *Anna Karenina*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Captain’s Daughter* somewhere on the top shelf. I have a few volumes of enjoyable Australian poetry here too. Are you familiar with English and American literature?’

‘Not much. We didn’t have access to Western literature, although I read some translations of Dumas, Balzac, Stendhal. I wish I could read more, much more and in their original language.’

‘My library is at your disposal,’ Gintas said, pulling the history volumes and art books from the shelves. ‘All yours – read it, have it, take it, do whatever you want.’

Daina thanked him and assured him she’d be spending all her free time here in the library.

‘I never saw such literature on the shelves of the bookshops or libraries in Lithuania,’ she admitted.

‘It’s understandable. The events of the forties, fifties, sixties and seventies were kept hush hush,’ Gintas replied.

She was enjoying her new home. When she thought about Gintas' hospitality and the opportunity to explore his library, she knew how lucky she was. Gintas had no contact with the Lithuanian community and she felt relieved not to have to face their questions and distrust. Gintas was different. He was her friend and the father figure she'd never had.

*

Daina read non-stop. She learned about her country's determination and people's strength to survive in the camps of Gulag. Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* stories were in English translations and difficult to understand. Books like Edgars Dunsdorfs' *Baltic Dilemma* gave her an overview of what had happened in all the Baltic States before, during and after the Second World War; but it was the personal accounts that made her heart skip a beat. *For those Still at Sea*, the story of the Lithuanian sailor Simas Kudirka's detection, really moved Daina – how he'd jumped ship, how the American coast guard cutter *Vigilant* had had to return him back to the *Sovetskaia Litva*, how he was tortured and beaten, and imprisoned in various labour camps; how after eight years he was finally allowed to leave Soviet Lithuania for America because his mother was born there. She just wished she'd known Simas' story before she'd met George on the train from Adelaide to Melbourne...

Usually at the dinner table, she discussed what she was reading with Gintas. She was fascinated by the Stalinist era. The more she read, the more her grandparents' conversations came back to her. When she was little, playing with her rag doll in a corner, they had talked about the hard times. Now parts of those conversations returned to her. She recalled their longing for things lost. She'd been too young to understand. Algis had told her the truth about her grandfather, and now with the history she was reading she imagined him being forced to dig trenches with seventy-five thousand other Lithuanian men. And she realised he'd been lucky to survive.

When Daina was growing up, her family had been reluctant to discuss the war. Sometimes, there were whispered conversations, and her father swore while watching movies about the Soviet-German War. She remembered seeing German soldiers in the movies looking like beggars with ripped clothing and worn out shoes. They looked

stupid, not like the Russian soldiers who were depicted as bright and clever, whistling a song of victory.

She read about dissidents who were forcefully removed from society for their non-conformist behaviour. They were sent to prison camps or mental institutions as punishment for promoting national traditions and distributing folk songs, plays or other literature, for practising and spreading their religious beliefs, or for organising anti-Soviet demonstrations. She was not familiar with the word “dissident”. She opened a page of a ragged looking book missing its front cover and saw a tiny photo of the dissident, Nijolė Sadūnaitė. A religious freedom fighter who’d ended up as a political prisoner in a concentration camp in Moldavia, Nijolė had taken an active role in organising camp demonstrations. Intuitively, Daina recognised the truth in Nijolė’s words ‘when the stomach was empty, the head was clearer, and, as a result, the prisoners’ minds were clear and inventive’. Daina felt the power of her words – and understood why the other prisoners had followed her. She sympathised with their torment.

She read of another dissident, Henrikas Jaškūnas, tortured in the prison of Panevėžys, and then sentenced in 1946 to twenty-five years’ imprisonment in Vorkuta. Vorkuta, the “evil camp”, full of people like Henrikas who’d protested against the abuse of power by the Soviets. Holding a tissue box beside her, Daina continuously wiped away her tears, imagining how he must have suffered when his teeth had been pulled out without anaesthetic, and how he didn’t have a chance to say goodbye to his wife and daughters before dying from a heart attack.

Daina had never heard of Nijolė or Henrikas’ stories. She wondered how many books she’d have to read to discover and count the names of the brave people who’d paved the way for her existence. She couldn’t believe the story of the jazz musician who was declared a schizophrenic just because he wore long hair and loved a certain type of music or the stories of the innocent farmers and intelligentsia who were jailed because the Russians wanted to destroy the Lithuanian nation.

Sometimes Gintas talked of the partisan movement he had discovered before he’d left Lithuania. He told Daina how one year before the war ended, people began to whisper

among themselves of exceptional men and women who had united in their fight against the Soviet occupation.

‘There may have been one hundred thousand partisans in Lithuania,’ he said.

‘So many?’

‘They hid in forests; they communicated via people they trusted to exchange messages; they risked their lives; their family members were followed, questioned and persecuted.’

‘Who were these partisans? Where did they come from?’ Daina asked.

‘Former officers, students, teachers; they were engaged in a guerrilla war for nine long years.’

‘The families of the young students must’ve been scared of losing their sons and daughters. Were there many survivors? Do you know?’

‘About twenty thousand were interrogated, tortured and killed. Let me find some information on those heroes,’ Gintas said, leading his way to the library. He glanced at a shelf and quickly spotted Juozas Daumantas’ book *Fighters for Freedom*, passing it to Daina. She promised to start reading it as soon as she could.

‘By the way, have you had a chance to learn Romas Kalanta’s fate?’

‘Who was he?’

‘He was a fighter for Lithuanian freedom. He set his body on fire in front of the Musical Theatre in the *Laisvės alėja*.

‘How old was he?’

‘Not even eighteen! It happened on the fourteenth of May 1974, before he finished his last school exam.’

‘Ach. I was twelve then.’

‘After lighting himself into a living torch, he screamed that he was dying for a free Lithuania. He also shouted that the communist rule was wrong.’

‘Such a brave man,’ Daina said, listening to Gintas’ explanation of how this act of self-sacrifice ignited nationalistic feelings and protest on the streets of Kaunas; how in the following two days some thirty thousand people flooded the *Laisvės alėja* – saying goodbye to Romas, who was secretly buried under instruction of the KGB hours before the demonstrators reached his flat.

‘A prominent pedestrian stretch of the Alley of freedom, called the *Laisvės alėja* since 1919, witnessed protesters’ support for a quiet and reserved young man who wrote poetry and played guitar; who tried to disassociate himself from his father – a member of the Lithuanian Communist Party at the time.’ As Gintas spoke, he found Romas’ story. Daina looked at his photo, his high forehead, thick eyebrows, bright open face, dark hair, determined look and imagined him lying on the ground, unconscious, unable to witness the emotions his acts had inflamed.

As she read, the faces of the postwar Lithuanians at the Club resurfaced. Her new knowledge confirmed to Daina why they were so different. She’d come from Soviet Lithuania, but the postwar refugees had run away from the Soviets. Algis and his friends hated their power. She understood now why they were cautious of her. The word “Soviet” was like poison to them. To them she was a product of the Soviet education and mentality that they, the postwar refugees, hated so much. Daina thought about Algis and their visits to the Club. How the postwar Lithuanians had been strange and distant. But now, she was beginning to see she had much in common with them. Their stories of loss and disappointment resembled her own life in many ways. Some of them were non-educated farmers, some had been rich, others were young school-leavers, others were established in their professions as doctors, engineers, architects, lawyers, and musicians. When they arrived in Australia in the late forties, they all had to work as labourers on the railways, bridges, and roads or as domestics in hospitals and hostels. Most of them never returned to doing what they knew best – to their previous professions. She understood how they felt. She liked working for Gintas but not being able to work as a theatre producer, she too had lost her self-esteem.

Daina smiled, remembering people listening and appreciating her poetry at the Club. She had absorbed their stories like a sponge, but until now she had not understood them or why it was so hard for her to fit into their circle.

When she was little, she didn’t have toys, but it was the memories now of her grandmother’s lullabies, of thick forests full of summer berries and mushrooms, and of her friends’ faces that made her homesick. Her life had turned out better than she had expected. She had a good life in Australia. She knew if things had worked out differently between her and Algis, she would have still been looking after him today.

But each time she tried to have a phone conversation, he kept reminding her of her loose behaviour with men and how her miscarriage would affect his reputation if anyone ever found out. He was also angry that she'd left without consulting him. He was unable to forgive and forget.

Gintas was now her only Lithuanian friend. He was kind and generous. He'd never shown any hostility towards her and that was so refreshing. She recalled her grandparents' saying: 'one can't put all vegetables in one basket as they don't look and taste alike.' It was the same with people.

She heard a loud laugh outside and glanced through the half drawn curtain. Children across the road were playing in a sandpit. Someone passed on a bicycle, and a postman dropped a letter in their letter box. Soon she saw Gintas going outside, bending his knees, trying to pull the envelope from the letter box, ripping it open on the way back. His medium build, lean figure, straight grey hair and tidy appearance didn't give his age away, but Daina knew he was suffering from ill health. He was eighty-four and he had asthma and chest pains. His family doctor had recommended a pacemaker operation, but Gintas had asked for more time to think about it. Daina watched how he shuffled up the front steps, slowly opening and closing the front door.

Sitting in her room and sipping her strong coffee, she realised that life with Gintas amongst his resourceful library would not last forever. She decided to value every moment, acknowledging that her life in Australia was carefree compared to the lives of those she was reading about in the books on Gintas' dusty shelves: books that were still not accessible to the people of the Soviet Union. She was glad to be in Gintas' study, safe from the police and the KGB interrogations. At the same time, she felt sad for her compatriots who had risked their lives to keep and distribute the illegal literature – forbidden brochures, journals and books defaming the Soviet state and the socialist ideals. She doubted she could have been as brave as these people who had fought for the freedom and independence of her homeland. Her life compared to theirs was heavenly.

What surprised Daina even more was that during the years of the Soviet occupation, any attempt to flee from the Soviet Union without official permission resulted in ten or fifteen years' imprisonment. How fortunate she was that Gorbachev had come to power in 1985, the following year introducing his policy of economic "acceleration" and relaxing the restrictions on people venturing abroad. Of course, as a

Soviet citizen, her personal profile would have been carefully checked, but she'd been given permission to visit her relative in Australia. She was glad the Australian Embassy in Moscow had let her leave, but she knew it was only because her friend's father had helped with the paper work – and even then the process had taken more than six months. Others waited for much longer, and some were never allowed to leave, with no explanation provided. Without her friend's help she may never have found herself sitting in Gintas' house amongst the books that revealed so many of her country's secrets. She would never have been able to experience the Australian lifestyle or enjoy the exotic fruits of this continent. She knew she should be thankful for what she had. She realised how short-sighted she'd been to ever consider returning to Lithuania where things were still politically distorted, even though positive changes were taking place and Lithuania was free again. She started thinking of her grandmother and felt a sudden urge to talk to her, to find out what had really happened between her and her husband, and what they had had to endure before and during the war.

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'I ordered the books through the Lithuanian Community in New York. Back home nobody has read these accounts. It's only in the West that it's possible to tell the world what was really happening in the Soviet Union; how the Russians refused to admit that our homeland had been independent between the two wars and should have stayed that way,' Gintas told Daina at dinner.

'Gintas, I am confused. The more I read, the more I am convinced I grew up in a bubble. Since my kindergarten days, I had thought that Russia was the Soviet "motherland" and our bread-giver, that Moscow was our ruler, keeping us protected under its wing. There was no doubt in my mind of the necessity of a close national and cultural cooperation between its fifteen republics.'

'I don't envy you.'

'We were led to believe in the reality of Marxist and Leninist philosophies,' Daina said.

'I am not surprised. But their ideals didn't reflect living reality, did they?'

‘No. Their theories appeared too utopian and all we wanted was to have enough money for food, shoes and clothing. The ideals of a future classless society were somehow not convincing, but we just took them at face value, in reality not expecting any changes. We lived the way it was, laughing at ourselves. Now I am realising the world was actually laughing at us.’

‘Yes.’

‘The overseas fashion and the colourful magazines in Lithuania were mostly accessible through the wives or close friends of seamen. The seamen of the Soviet fishing liners, bringing back wool, underwear, leather jackets, make-up and jeans, profited well. These items circulated around Lithuania at four times the original price.’

‘I see.’

‘Yes, the hard life made people smarter. My friend copied the fashionable dresses and pants from the magazine pages, taking the Wrangler or Levi labels from the worn jeans and sewing them on to her homemade pants, and then selling her creations for an astronomical price.’

‘Well. This is the outcome of the Soviet mentality, my dear. In Australia, clothes are made properly without cheating. The shopkeepers give the exact change back. It’s a huge difference from what you are talking about. But then again, many strange things were happening back home. I’d heard on the *Amerikos balsas* that customer service in the Soviet Union was poor. In Australia, it’s all about competition – rude behaviour by staff does not work well.’

‘Oh, but I am so mixed up, Gintas, between here and back home, between Soviet thinking and Australian attitudes. Now, after reading your books, I don’t care much about clothes or shoes. I realise there are so many needy people in the world. My heart goes out to the postwar refugees like you, who were forced to flee their homes.’

‘It seems you feel deeply for our past.’

‘It’s only because I now know so much.’

‘I am glad.’

The following evening Daina asked Gintas if he still had his son’s teddy bear.

‘Yes, I believe my darling wife kept it.’ Gintas led the way to the shed outside. Soon he spotted an old suitcase on top of a wardrobe and asked Daina if she could reach

it. She pulled the suitcase down with both hands. Back inside, Gintas found a rusty key in a cupboard drawer and had to oil it first before unlocking the dusty case, which was covered in spider webs.

‘See, I kept everything that survived the war, the German DP camps, and our long trip to Australia. That suitcase was made by my father. He was good at carving,’ Gintas told Daina. She felt the torn material lining, gently taking out German coins, a mouldy jacket, some mended socks, a cigar holder.

‘What is this for?’ Daina asked, pointing at a metal grater.

‘Ah, this is a souvenir from a German pilot. His plane went down and after he recovered from his injuries, he made this grater from the airplane wing. Would you like to use it? It’s as good as new! My wife used to grate the potatoes with this grater all the time when she was alive,’ he reassured her, stroking the holes and cutting his finger in the process.

‘No, thank you. I’d rather not. Let’s leave it here as a relic. Or maybe give it to a museum or something,’ Daina replied, hurrying to the medical cabinet for a band-aid.

Before Gintas could reply to her suggestion, she was back bandaging his thumb, tucking the rusty grater back into a corner of the suitcase. Gintas kept lifting other items out. He found a faded green photo album and invited Daina to sit on the couch to view the photos. He slowly put his glasses on and began to turn the pages.

‘This is my father and my mother upon their arrival in Australia in 1949.’

‘They make a very nice couple. Is this photo taken in Melbourne?’

‘No. In Adelaide.’

‘Did you live in Adelaide?’ Daina asked, feeling a hot flush reddening her face. Gintas was talking about his parents but Daina, lost in her memories, had missed what he’d said. After a while, she asked what work his parents did upon their arrival.

‘Like the others, we did our duty, so to speak, to pay for our passage here. My mother worked as a domestic in a hotel and my father cut trees in the bush. Rusnė worked in a factory. I worked on the railway, as you know. My father joined us once a month and we counted how much money we’d saved and discussed what we’d do after our contracts expired. My mother’s boss, Ron, was very friendly and when he learned that my father had found a caretaker’s job in a school in Adelaide, he negotiated a

cleaner's job for my mother. Ron's brother owned a pub in Adelaide and she worked for him for the next ten years.'

'What about Rusnė?'

'She found a job in a clothing factory. She also joined a drama group and, being as talented as she was, started to participate in plays and musicals.' Then silence followed.

'Is there something wrong, Gintas? Maybe you are already tired? We can stop now if you wish.'

'No. No. It's alright. When my parents died in a car accident in 1975, I couldn't bear living in that house with all its memories. I sold it and moved to Melbourne with Rusnė.'

'Such a tragedy. I am very sorry.'

'That's alright, dear, life at times is so unpredictable. No one knows what may happen tomorrow.'

'How did they die?'

'A drunken man was driving on the wrong side of the road and collided with their car.'

'It must've been devastating for you.'

'To the point that I couldn't live in Adelaide anymore.'

'That's terrible,' said Daina, trying to imagine his grief.

'But I like Melbourne,' Gintas said.

Do you know any Lithuanians in Melbourne, like my uncle...' she stopped mid-sentence.

'What's his name?'

'Algis, he is actually my father's uncle and my grandmother is his sister.'

'What's his surname?'

'Baniulis.'

'Baniulis, Baniulis. When did he come to Australia?'

'In 1949.'

'Well. I did too. We may even know of each other, maybe not personally. We refugees lived all over Germany, mostly in the American and German zones, and we

also arrived here on different ships,' he said inspecting the contents of his dilapidated suitcase.

'That's true,' said Daina.

'Do you know which ship he arrived on?'

'No.'

'I came on the *General Langfitt*. That was at the end of November.'

'I see.'

'We sang and danced on the way to Australia. We made many friends, but in Australia, Lithuanians divided themselves. I speak here of those in Adelaide who are strong-willed and stubborn.'

'What happened?'

'Many of them didn't have the same outlook. They split into Catholics and Atheists and built two separate Houses. One has its own church, the other hasn't. Strangely enough both Houses offer Sunday lunches and people call each other each Sunday to find out where the tastier dishes are being served, and then hurry to one or the other location.'

'Algis is also stubborn, but it's because he is from Samogitia. People from the Samogitian region are usually hard to sway. After his disagreement with one of the choristers, he didn't attend the choir for a couple of years. Then, sometime after my arrival, we both went to sing,' Daina said, realising she didn't want to reveal more about the Lithuanians she knew to Gintas. She could have told him of how some of Algis' friends didn't trust her, believing that if she spoke Russian, her soul had been sold to the Soviets and she was not pure Lithuanian. In a way, Daina felt content not to tell more than was necessary. She had learned to be careful.

Gintas found Zigmas' teddy bear. It was dirty and ripped in places, its head hanging on by a fragile piece of string. Daina offered to fix it and make a new jacket and pants for it.

'That would be lovely,' Gintas said, closing the case. He asked Daina to put it back up on the wardrobe. That night, she took a damp cloth and cleaned the album's cover, then sprayed it with perfume, leaving it near the open window, hoping that in a couple of days the mildew might lift. But it didn't and each time she handled the album, she sneezed.

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In July 1991 Daina began her business economics course at Box Hill TAFE. It was Gintas who'd suggested she should go back to study. He even took care of the financial side of things, paying her fees. She didn't forget Dorothy's words that one must take any opportunity offered to study. Learning brought Daina's confidence back and she now felt like one of the locals, rather than a misunderstood, isolated stranger. Each time they met, Dorothy praised Daina for making a future for herself.

The studies and her home duties took all Daina's time and she was too busy to think about anything else. Settled in her routine and material comfort, she realised how quickly time passed. She wrote home as usual and sent her family parcels by sea.

Daina's friend Jovita sent her a Lithuanian flag and the occasion to use it soon materialised. Gintas helped her to hang it up at the front door. They attached a black ribbon to the flag to mourn the first anniversary of 11th January, 1991. By then, the Soviet Union had disintegrated. Australian television showed last year's footage of Russian tanks approaching the Television Tower in Vilnius. She watched people standing in front of the tanks defending themselves with their bare hands, singing patriotic songs; the rolling tanks squashed and killed thirteen and injured hundreds. Even though she had been preoccupied with her unexpected pregnancy, she had made a record in her notebook. She opened her notebook and reread the thoughts she'd had while living with Algis.

I should've been there, shoulder to shoulder at the barricades with my people, pushing back the approaching tanks with my hands. But I am not helping in any way, not freezing in the cold like my brothers and sisters. I am not a part of my country's history and it hurts. I feel guilty not standing in front of the tanks like they do.

Gintas and Daina watched a young man on SBS television recalling how he hoped that the tanks wouldn't kill Lithuanian freedom. He said that a year ago, when the tanks had approached the crowd he'd been a part of, he'd experienced the strongest

attachment to his land he'd ever had. 'When the Soviet tanks stopped, I thought a miracle had happened,' he recalled.

'And that's what I would've liked to experience,' Daina said.

'People's lives were in danger, Daina,' Gintas said. 'I know we would've been there if we'd lived there.'

In her sleep she saw herself wandering the empty streets of Vilnius, trying to get to the crowds, wishing to join in, but unable to find the Television Tower. She woke up in a cold sweat.

On the 16th February, celebrating Lithuanian Independence Day, Daina wore a linen apron and placed a tiny flag of yellow, green and red on the mantelpiece. She wondered whether Algis had invited his friends for champagne and folk singing to mark the occasion. Maybe they would all go to the Club and drink at the bar.

Soon the consequences of secession from Soviet power began to worry Daina. She read that the *Sąjūdis*' movement was gradually diminishing. Daina's parents wrote about how people in Lithuania, like in other Soviet republics, were fearful of rising unemployment. Food and petrol prices increased, making it harder to survive. Jovita wrote that the Russian military remained in the country, with the army barracks still stationed in the popular sea resorts of Palanga, Klaipėda and Nida.

Daina had been living with Gintas for over a year, hoping that Algis would forgive her and invite her to return to his farm. She had given him Dorothy's number but apparently he had never rung. Daina didn't tell him she was boarding with Gintas. It would have made him even angrier if he'd found out that instead of looking after him, she was caring for another elderly man.

Daina liked living with Gintas and had adjusted to his requirements. Not that he had many. He was also thoughtful about her future. He made such a difference in her life by supporting her in all aspects while she persevered with her education. She was proud of her achievements: she obtained a greater knowledge in accountancy and bookkeeping. Now her main goal was to find a part-time position. After several rejections, she put it down to her accent.

‘Maybe jobs in general are difficult to find. After all, there are so many unemployed people,’ Gintas tried to reassure her. ‘You’ll find something, don’t worry.’

She had only worked in Australia as Algis and Gintas’ carer. She also looked after Gintas’ finances now, making fortnightly pension withdrawals on his behalf. She was receiving a carer’s allowance for looking after him and she’d been putting her money away. He wasn’t charging her rent. Life was good. Even without a job, she was proud of herself. Finally, she learned better English. Gaining more understanding of business ventures was a bonus. She thought she should return home and become either a private English language teacher, a translator, or work for an international firm.

If Gintas got very ill, he’d have to go to a nursing home, and then she would have to leave. For the time being, his family doctor advised that Gintas should be under constant care. The doctor helped to organise a district nurse, Noel, who came to shower Gintas and to administer his medication, placing his tablets in a square plastic container with dividers. On the weekends, a male nurse, Ron, helped Gintas with his bathing and exercise routine.

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One Sunday, Daina found Gintas sobbing in the kitchen.

‘What’s the matter, Gintas?’

‘Take a seat. We need to talk,’ he said.

Daina felt faint, as if her heart was about to stop.

‘What have I done? Did I upset you? Please don’t cry.’

‘I want you to know that my son Zigmās lives in London with his wife Margaret and their daughter Michelle.’

‘But you said he...he had passed away.’

‘Sorry. I lied to you and believed in my own lie for years.’

‘But why? Why did you tell me before that he’d died during the war?’

‘Because we don’t communicate, he doesn’t write to me. He only returned to Australia for his mother’s funeral and went straight back to London.’

‘What happened? Did you have a fight or something?’

‘Remember how you told me that you were on bad terms with your uncle?’

‘Yes?’

‘I know how hard it must’ve been for you having no other relatives around. It’s the same for me – we had a disagreement with Zigmas over his choice of wife and that was it. For a long time he was dead in my heart. But now, at the end of my days, having plenty of time to think, I’ve decided to fix things up. I want to make sure that he is alright. I admit that I used to believe it was best to regard him as dead, but not anymore. I also want you to know, just in case you need to find him. He is the only one I’ve got.’ He opened his wallet and gave her his son’s address and phone number. Daina suggested they call him at once. Hesitating at first, Gintas admitted he’d wished to do so for a long time. Daina dialled the overseas code 0011, then the London number and Zigmas answered the phone. She introduced herself, explaining who she was and passed the receiver to Gintas. They spoke for a while and afterwards Gintas told her he was very pleased that his son and his family were happy and well.

‘I was foolish to stop him from marrying the person he loved. It’s not my business anyway. I don’t have to like her. She is not my wife. If he is happy...As long as they are happy. I wish they could’ve given their daughter a Lithuanian name. But no – they named her Michelle, but that sounds like *maišelis* – the Lithuanian word for little bag to me. Imagine a child called little bag? But that’s how it sounds in Lithuanian! Don’t you agree?’

‘Well, what can one do? Love is blind, as they say,’ Daina said.

Several days later, Zigmas rang.

‘He is coming in a couple of weeks,’ Gintas reported excitedly. There was plenty of time, but the very next morning they went to buy presents for Zigmas and his daughter, whom Gintas had never met. Zigmas had promised to bring her along. Daina volunteered to wash the windows and change the curtains, which made Gintas pleased.

During their dinner, he philosophised about becoming wiser and feeling ashamed of disliking the woman Zigmas had chosen as his life companion.

‘As we speak I think – so what if she isn’t Lithuanian? We tried to preserve the purity of our nation but many men in Australia married non-Lithuanians anyway. There simply weren’t enough of their own women to marry.’

‘I see.’

‘Do you know that the first ship, called the *General Heintzelman*, brought about four hundred Lithuanian men and only twenty-two women?’

‘No wonder there was a shortage of women then.’

‘That was the same for other nationalities. But anyway, the past is past, there’s no point talking about it now. What happened, happened. Everyone should get on with their new life here; forget their family history and where they came from. It’s hardly relevant to my son...’

‘I will never forget what you had to go through. I will read and learn more, and tell the others.’ Daina patted Gintas’ hand, watching his white face and dim eyes opening and closing slowly, worried that his son may not come in time...

Zigmas and Michelle arrived at the end of May. The father and son embraced. They stood like that for a while and then Michelle joined them. Gintas stroked her fair curly hair and gave her a box of chocolates. He kept glancing at her and she kept appearing at his side, sharing her chocolates with him. Zigmas had brought souvenirs for Daina, treating her with great respect. That night, Zigmas gave Daina an envelope with \$500 in it and she was touched. It was his token of appreciation for the great job she was doing looking after his father, he said. They decided that the following morning they should go to the Ballarat gold mines in Zigmas’ rented car. He was keen for Michelle to see Sovereign Hill, the mock nineteenth-century township where people dressed in period costumes, and there were horses and carriages, and old-fashioned shops.

In the morning, after clearing away and washing the dishes, Daina found Gintas on the couch, the album on his lap, holding a photo between his fingers. She was surprised he’d drifted back to sleep straight after breakfast. She tidied the kitchen and mopped the floor, then returned to the lounge room. Gintas was in the same position, wearing his glasses, but this time his mouth was ajar.

‘Gintas! Gintas!’ Daina screamed, shaking him by the shoulders. Zigmas appeared in his pyjamas, still half asleep. They touched Gintas’ hand and it was cold; his heart was not beating, his face lifeless. Shaken, Zigmas called the ambulance. Daina gently took Gintas’ glasses off. Zigmas shut his father’s eyes, and unsuccessfully tried to remove the photo from his fingers. The corner of the photo of his wife remained in

Gintas' grip. The ambulance officers arrived, followed by the undertakers. Gintas was pronounced dead and they began the funeral arrangements.

After the funeral, Daina helped Zigmas around the house. A few days later, he told her of his plans.

'I haven't got much time. Michelle and I have to return to London and I was just wondering whether you would be interested in renting the house?'

'I'm afraid I can't afford it,' Daina said and her body went numb. What should I do? Where will I go? Is this really happening to me? she thought.

'You see, Daina, due to my work commitments, I can't deal with the sale of my dad's estate, but I'll return later in the year. I need to find someone to maintain the property and to pay the bills, otherwise, if it stays empty it will not be worth anything. And I need the money.'

'I'll leave as soon as I arrange other accommodation.'

'Don't you have anywhere to go?'

'Yes. I have a friend.'

'That's great then,' he smiled, excusing himself to attend to business. While Zigmas was dealing with the property agent over the phone, she weighed up her options. I can't become a burden to Dorothy for a second time around. I must return to Whittlesea, she decided. That afternoon she gathered her things, and the following morning said goodbye to Zigmas and Michelle. Before she left, Zigmas reiterated that she could stay on until a tenant was found, as long as she paid the bills, but she declined his offer.

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Daina walked down the road lined with gums towards the house, carrying her heavy bag. From a distance, Algis' farm looked deserted. The fence, once painted by Paulius, now swayed in the wind. Six kookaburras sat at the top of a tree, watching her every move with their black eyes. She glanced at the empty shed that had once housed hay and cows. She couldn't see any sheep in the paddocks. The grass was long and the garden overgrown with weeds. There were no chickens or roosters in sight. Huge

magpies were circling above her head, making her feel uncomfortable. They looked like oversized crows and her grandmother used to say that a circling crow is a sign of death. Her heart was beating fast. She knocked on the door. There was no answer. What if Algis was dead?

‘What do you want?’ A young woman pulled the door ajar giving Daina a fright. Algis appeared right behind her.

‘Let her in, it’s my great-niece,’ he said and the woman with false lashes moved out of the way, still staring at Daina with her unfriendly gaze.

‘A long lost relative! Come in, come in.’

‘What do you want here?’ the woman asked.

‘Daina is here for a visit, aren’t you?’

‘Yes.’

‘This is my wife, Raminta,’ Algis said. Raminta excused herself, telling Algis she had to go out.

Daina placed her hand over her mouth in disbelief. Her eyes followed Raminta as she walked out the door. They watched her disappearing amongst the trees, magpies flying above her red sports car.

‘She is beautiful, isn’t she?’

‘The car?’

‘No, my wife!’

‘No doubt she is, Uncle, but what happened, where did she come from?’

‘Well, well, settle down, it’s none of your concern, is it? When you were here, I didn’t need anyone. But I had plans to marry one day. I was even hoping it might be you, but you disappeared.’

‘How could you marry me? I am your great-niece.’

‘So what? Raminta is your age. I must confess I always wanted a woman in my life. You know I was married before for a long time and was accustomed to having a female around. People get the impression that the elderly don’t want sex. But we do.’

‘At your age? Please be serious and tell me who she is.’

‘Better make us some coffee and then we’ll sit down and have a quiet chat,’ Algis said, settling in his chair. Daina moved her things out of the way.

‘Don’t leave them here, put your belongings in the spare room where Paulius used to sleep,’ Algis suggested.

‘Used to? Where is he?’

‘He left after Raminta’s arrival. When she settled in with us, she asked me to dismiss him. Paulius was a good man. He used to tell interesting stories about his kids and wife.’

‘He didn’t tell me he was married. All he said was that he couldn’t have children.’

‘There, there, it was before the Chernobyl accident. He had a wife, Vita. She only left Paulius after he returned from the danger zone without his hair, teeth loose in his gums, and sterile.’

‘What a liar,’ she said, letting her handbag drop to the floor.

‘You could’ve been his new wife as far as I understand, but you didn’t want to. Now you’ve healed yourself from life’s misfortunes. Am I right?’

‘I suppose so.’

‘Oh, I miss how we used to discuss politics and have a couple of drinks with Paulius. He brightened my days. He was a good worker, but I had to let him go. I had no choice, I wanted to keep Raminta happy,’ Algis spoke while Daina stood still, clutching her fists. Then she sat down in a chair, feeling ill.

‘Put your luggage in my spare room,’ he insisted. She stood up, hesitating.

‘I can’t stay here. Raminta wouldn’t want me to interfere with your lives.’

‘Don’t worry, she won’t be coming back for a few days.’

‘How do you know?’

‘We have a cabin at Mornington and she often goes there.’

‘Cabin? At Mornington? What is happening here, Uncle?’

‘My life has changed. I am not the same as when you left me. I had a lot of time to think about things. Like why you didn’t return from the hospital, going to live with a stranger instead.’

‘But Dorothy isn’t a stranger,’ Daina replied, feeling relieved that he didn’t know she had stayed with Gintas as well. ‘She is a dear friend. I met her at the Grampians where Paulius and I went. I didn’t want to burden you with my personal problems. I knew that you were not happy with what happened to me. Your reputation was at stake.’

‘Sure, sure, we could’ve survived together and Paulius and I would’ve looked after you.’

‘Why are you telling me this now? Why didn’t you visit me at the hospital or invite me back to your house in the first place?’

‘I came to see you but you were already gone.’

‘Came to see me? I had no idea...’

‘We thought you could marry Paulius. It would’ve worked, but you couldn’t wait to run away, could you?’

‘Well. It’s too late for confessions, it’s my stupid past. How are you feeling, how is your heart?’ she said, changing the subject.

‘Oh, everything is fine. I am strong enough to look after myself.’

‘Are you taking your prescribed medication?’

‘I don’t care about that. I am a new man! I don’t need drugs when I have a young and gorgeous wife. Sometimes I feel dizzy because I am so much in love.’

‘It’s because of your vertigo. ‘You’re not taking any tablets?’ Daina asked, worried.

‘Occasionally, when I feel really dizzy, I take some. They are in my bedside drawer.’

‘How often is the doctor coming to see you?’

‘What for?’

Daina understood that there was no point arguing with her stubborn uncle.

‘I am young again,’ he said, walking in front of her slowly, leading her into the spare room. She placed her luggage on the bed. Paulius’ room was stuffy and unaired, making Daina giddy, and bringing back unpleasant memories of their sexual encounter. Such a pig! All that time never mentioning his family. That’s the real reason he wanted my child, she thought to herself, feeling frustrated and angry. But then she began to cry. She didn’t want to remember Paulius that way. He had been such a good man to her, and had suffered enough as it was. It was her fault that things had not worked out between them. It was her fault that things had not worked out between them.

After drinking some coffee to which Algis added whisky, he announced that he was ready for a chat. He told Daina that she was the one who inspired him to return to what was most pleasant in his life.

‘Remember, you said that my wife was dead and I should move on.’

‘Yes.’

‘Then I started to dictate the letters to my childhood sweetheart and you wrote them on my behalf.’

‘Sure. Yes. I remember. But who would’ve thought you’d take it seriously?’

‘When you left, I continued to correspond with Morta.’

She listened to him with a heavy heart.

‘What for?’

‘Why not? You’d left. I was lonely.’

‘But Raminta is not Morta. Where is Morta?’

‘Well, we kept in touch for a while.’

‘And?’

‘I bought bargain materials, clothing and shoes, cans, dried food, and posted those parcels to Šakiai.’

‘And?’

‘One day I received news from Morta’s grand-daughter. Guess who she was?’

‘Raminta.’

‘Yes. She knew of our correspondence all along and was enjoying the items I sent to Morta. Apparently, Morta loved Raminta so much that she generously shared my parcels with her. Raminta wrote that Morta had passed away but we should continue to be in touch. I waited for each letter; they never arrived fast enough. She sent photos. I was taken in by her thick rosy lips, wide blue eyes and blond hair. I couldn’t sleep. Suddenly, the fountain of youth sprayed me with its miracle water, making me more alive than I had been since Valerija departed from this world. In the photos, Raminta was the image of Morta, my dear Morta, whom I had loved so deeply. Morta had hurt my feelings by dating me and my friend Linas at the same time, then marrying him instead of me. When I studied Raminta’s photos, I knew this was my chance for revenge.’

‘Can’t you see her black roots coming out?’ She is a bottle-blond!’

‘It can’t be. She is a natural blond. You are just jealous. Oh, you should’ve seen what happened at the airport.’

‘What happened?’ Daina asked, intrigued by the story.

‘Well, I posted Raminta an invitation to come to Australia and she arrived in September last year. Paulius cleaned the house and ironed our clothes. He also helped me to shower, scrubbing my back and everywhere, using so much water, but I didn’t care. We dressed, helping each other to select well-fitting shirts, ties and suits. We wore Paulius’ best aftershave as it was a special occasion.’

‘I see.’

‘We waited at the airport carefully viewing the arrivals and instantly recognised Raminta. We had studied her photos many times before. She walked through the exit door with a trolley, looking around, and finally spotted us waving in her direction. Paulius ran towards Raminta to help her with her case and brought her to me. I stood there, with my feet stuck to the floor, hardly breathing. I smiled – but not too widely – making sure my teeth were sitting properly in my mouth. You know, they move about if I don’t put enough powder to hold them in place.’

‘What was her expression when she approached you?’ Daina asked, trying to hurry him up.

‘After I greeted her and kissed the back of her soft hand, she looked into my eyes and said that I appeared a bit older than in the photos she’d received.’

‘You sent her photos as well?’

‘Yes, I did. But I was smart, choosing ones from the past, where I was more handsome.’

‘Oh, dear me! What happened then?’

‘Well, after we greeted her, Raminta walked in front of us, shaking her long hair, swaying her curvy bottom.’

‘That’s so inappropriate, Uncle. I am sure you’ve realised that she looks like your grand-daughter! Didn’t that occur to you?’ Daina asked, trying to suppress her growing anger.

‘No. She took me by the hand and we walked through the airport. She kept pointing at the shop windows with her red fingernails. She ran them through her hair, separating her loose curls. Oh, the thought that I was holding the hand of the girl I had

once lost in my dreams made me light-headed...All I wanted was to take her to the altar. We caught the escalator and men were openly looking her up and down, her tiny red dress revealing a well-shaped body and incredibly long legs. By the way, did you notice her perfect when you arrived today?’

‘No. I didn’t. All I can say is that she is a barracuda!’

‘What’s that?’

‘Haven’t you heard of a fish called the barracuda which eats men alive? That’s what people here call women who prey on older men who might have lost their partners, but have a house, a car, some money.’ Seeing Algis’ worried face, she added: ‘Now you are getting it. Finally, you’re realising that you have been caught by a barracuda yourself, ah? Who was she in Lithuania anyway?’

‘A sales person at a food store. My sweet Raminta is not a barracuda. She is different. She said she needed a man like me to protect her and give her everything she’d ever wanted but couldn’t have because she came from the deprivation of the Soviet system.’

‘And what did you give her?’

‘I haven’t finished yet. Why are you getting so upset? My love life shouldn’t be any concern of yours.’

‘Alright then, sorry I interrupted. Go ahead.’

‘Well. On our way to Whittlesea, Raminta complained a little that it seemed so far. I joked that it only seemed that way but in fact it was not too far from the city. I love Raminta’s sense of humour. She replied that she’d find a way to make it even closer. When we returned from the airport, Paulius took her suitcase to your room. Raminta walked around the farm in her high heels but they got stuck in the dirt. Paulius helped her to remove them from the dry cracks in the ground. The heels of her shoes broke. He carried her inside. I apologised that I couldn’t help her because of my sore back and she said it was alright.’

‘Oh, my God, I hope Paulius could carry her. She is not a tiny person. She is tall and not as slim as you say.’

‘Well. She might have put some weight on after she arrived, but only a little.’

‘What about your livestock then?’ Daina asked.

‘We had to get rid of the animals. One morning she stood in a cow pat and became agitated, smiking heavily and swearing loudly. What a spirit! I sent Paulius to the neighbour’s house for help. Luckily John, you remember John Smith?’

Daina nodded.

‘John was kind enough to bring his truck a few times, and take away the cows, sheep, chickens, and the rooster, as well as our dog Rusty, who wouldn’t stop barking at her.’

‘You didn’t have a dog when I lived here.’

‘Well, Paulius wanted a dog for company after you’d gone and I bought one. If I’d still been living alone, I’d never have bought one as they cost too much to maintain. The money received after the stock was sold paid for the sports car she loves. Some I also put away.’

‘Oh. I feel for you, dear Uncle. My poor Star, the only milking cow, she is no more. No animals, nothing. What’s the point of staying here?’

The telephone rang, interrupting the conversation, and Algis picked it up. He confirmed to the person that Raminta had left about an hour back.

‘Whenever she goes out, people ring looking for her. That man said he was from the Mornington Council.’

‘Sure he was,’ Daina said digging her fingernails into her palms. She wanted to shake him like a cocktail and bring him to his senses, but he kept talking of his Raminta.

‘About a week after her arrival, she asked me why Paulius lived here. I explained that he maintained my farm. Raminta announced she didn’t want him in the house and wished to have it all just for the two of us. She said that it was too difficult having two men in the house as she couldn’t run around naked if she wished to. She complained Paulius might see her like that and fall in love with her. I couldn’t stand the competition, and admired Raminta’s straightforwardness. I had to let him go. We had a man-to-man conversation and he understood. Paulius agreed that it was hard to live in the presence of such a gorgeous woman. I didn’t hesitate in telling him of my intention to make her my wife, and he advised me to do it sooner rather than later as she could be snatched from me at any minute.’

‘So Paulius thought she was beautiful, this clever little snake?’

‘Yes. To him, she was a gorgeous, glamorous and sexually-appealing lady. To me, she is a virgin rose.’

‘You men are all the same. You have sleazy, slimy minds!’

‘I was upset at losing him and Raminta was so kind, making me a cup of tea to soothe my heart. I was missing him badly as a person, not to mention as a gardener and a farm manager. But after the animals were gone, there was nothing to do. Also, the woman from the council comes once a week to clean the house.’

‘Raminta can’t do it?’

‘No. The chemicals are bad for her smooth hands. She looks after herself to make sure she doesn’t lose her beauty. In the morning, she has a shower but at night she bathes with essential oils. They are very expensive – some of them are 300 dollars. I give her the money she needs.’

‘You never paid me for looking after your farm, your animals, and for looking after you, and she just lifts a finger and... Does she go with you to the Club?’

‘Yes. Raminta regularly accompanies me there and the men truly envy me. I am honoured by her company, and happy that my friends have given her the thumbs up. When she is around, I feel special. She looks into my eyes, smiles, opens her tiny mouth shaped like budding rose petals. From the moment I saw her photo, I knew I was ready to give my life and everything I have to her.’

‘And you did, I see how you did it,’ Daina said, lifting her arms in the air. ‘What about the will? Did she tamper with your will too?’

‘Wait a minute. Wait a minute. I am not at that point yet.’

‘Sorry, please go on,’ she said, trembling inside with disgust.

‘Firstly, after Paulius left, I proposed and gave her a diamond ring. My lovely Raminta replied that she needed to think about it. She said she would give me the answer in one month. I didn’t mind and used that time to prove how strong my love was. I took her shopping, allowing her to purchase whatever she desired, and picked up the bill. I have never spent as much money in all my life as I have since she arrived.’

‘How unfair, how unfortunate,’ Daina commented, upset.

‘On the contrary, I feel very fortunate that she agreed to marry me, even with a few conditions.’

‘What conditions?’

‘To adjust, I like how she put it, to adjust the will and to give her breathing space. That was too easy. We invited the lawyer to the house and my last will was changed.’

‘Was it Mr Hall?’

‘The same. Also, she required freedom and privacy, so the new phone line went in. She wants to go out and I respect that. Sometimes I feel too weak to travel. She is a fast driver, you know. Anyway, I am her companion and I help her to forget the mental trauma of once being a Soviet citizen.’

Silence followed and Algis lifted a glass half full of vodka to his mouth, drinking it quickly and chewing a piece of ham with his dentures sticking out.

‘Sorry for being straight to the point, but am I out of the will completely then?’

‘Yes, you are. Not only because of Raminta, but because of your behaviour. Paulius told me about the baby you conceived somewhere in Adelaide. He told me how you’d rejected his marriage proposal and how you’d gotten rid of the unborn child. He wanted to save you from shame. I know he never touched you. What can I think? That means that all this time you had someone on the side, having sex in my shed, with music in the background, playing around in front of my very eyes, day and night, you whore. Who were they? How many boyfriends did you have?’ asked Algis, raising his voice. Daina screamed:

‘I’ll leave now if you think like that!’ Then she added that his behaviour was even more revolting than her own. ‘An old, sick man acting like a teenager. How about you, didn’t your proposition of sex make a young woman blush?’

‘Oh, Raminta would never blush. She was born for bed. When she bends down naked with her legs apart and touches the insides of her curvy thighs...her hair reaching the floor...’

Daina blocked her ears with her fingers and shook her head.

‘Enough, enough, that was quite graphic. Keep it to yourself.’

‘At least we didn’t have sex like you did. I only watch. She performs all the movements in front of the lit fireplace, or amongst the dim light of hundreds of candles. That’s the way she likes it – just lights the candles, so many of them. They smell so sweet, like her perfume when she walks past, leaving me wetting my lips, fantasising about her virginal body she says nobody has ever touched. I’ll wait as long as it takes.’

‘Why? She is your legal wife. You can touch her and kiss her and do whatever old men do.’

‘No, I can’t. That was the third condition I agreed to – no touching. I have no problems with that. I go to sleep and dream of her breasts and one day...’

‘Stop it, stop it!’ Daina shouted, wondering why she was sitting here, continuing to listen to his ramblings.

‘Calm down. We haven’t seen each other for a long time and we should be friends, not enemies. I can sense you are jealous of her, but she is like you, just trying to establish herself. Given an opportunity, I have no doubt you would’ve done the same. I have money and am enjoying spending it on her. She reminds me of my beloved so much. What I couldn’t give to her, I can give to Raminta. They’ve blurred in my mind and in reality become as one.’

‘I see,’ said Daina disappointedly, thinking of Raminta, feeling sorry for her having an old man for a husband. The very thought of this marriage made her shiver. But then again, she might have done the same. As if reading her thoughts, he said:

‘Don’t you think I know why you came here? Without any farming skills, without any nursing skills, a theatre producer arrives in Whittlesea to wait until I die!’

‘But that’s what you wanted, and I cared for you,’ said Daina.

‘We both know how long your caring skills lasted.’

Daina’s cheeks reddened and she couldn’t look at Algis. They sat in silence. It was getting dark.

‘Maybe you could cook something for me. Raminta is too busy to make a proper meal like you used to. I only eat sandwiches these days. I haven’t forgotten how you used to make fresh salad with mashed potatoes, *balandėliai*, *kugelis*, *blynai*... Maybe at least you could scramble some eggs with onions? I loved the smell of your cooking and the way you dished out the meals. What do you say?’

There was a long silence which was interrupted by the banging of pots. Daina was frying eggs and bacon, then stirring sliced onion rings in a buttered pan. She cut slices of bread, spread them on a plate, made a green salad, and invited Algis to the table. They ate, glancing at each other, the tension building between them. Daina spoke first, letting Algis know that she wished to return to Lithuania.

‘I see no place for me here.’

‘Why not?’

‘Let’s face it. We both have changed. Other people came into our lives. We are going in different directions now. You’ll probably have many years of happiness with your young wife. I have to start everything afresh. Don’t you agree?’

‘You can stay at least for a week or two and think about it. Raminta won’t be coming home until the end of the month.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Look at the calendar. The days she goes to Mornington are marked in red. What’s today?’

‘It’s the sixteenth of July,’ Daina replied, putting her fork down, unable to swallow her last piece of bacon. ‘Would you be able to buy me a ticket?’

‘I guess, if you really want...Maybe it’s for the best. This situation is no good for either of us. I am a married man now and we don’t need a housekeeper. The council woman is good enough to vacuum and mop.’

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The following morning, Algis drove Daina to the travel agency. Daina had Australian residency but had been reluctant to become a citizen. The travel agent studied her passport for some time, finally returning it to her along with her one-way ticket. Her departure date was set as the 28th July, 1992. Daina placed her passport in the zip pocket of her handbag. She knew it was useless as there was no Soviet Union or Soviet Lithuania anymore. She worried that at Vilnius airport, she might be questioned about why she was travelling with her old passport. They may not understand that in Australia, citizens only have passports if they wish. But then again, they would see her permanent Australian residency sticker there.

Daina thought about the things she needed to do before she left. She rang Dorothy and organised a day to see her in Carnegie. Before they parted, Daina gave Dorothy her address in Lithuania and they promised to write to each other. She hadn’t seen Saulė since she’d come to visit with Arūnas in Whittlesea. They met at Melbourne Central and chatted for hours in the café. Saulė talked about how much she enjoyed her life with Rolandas and their little daughter Loreta. Daina told Saulė how she had thought about her often but hadn’t contacted her because of Arūnas. He was one person she never

wanted to hear about. Saulė admitted having her doubts about him since their trip to the Adelaide Casino where she saw him with a blond woman at the bar.

‘Watching his relaxed posture and the way he was leaning so close to her, I was under the impression he knew her from before.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me of your doubts?’ Daina asked.

‘I realised how much you already liked him and it seemed to me and Milda that he was also taken in by you, so we thought there was something special between the two of you.’

The friends parted with a long embrace and tears, wishing each other luck.

Daina was relieved to be going home. It had been six years. It would be summer in Lithuania. She could go to Palanga beach, run up and down the Baltic shore, collect the tiny pieces of amber trapped in seaweed after the storm. She’d see her dear friend Jovita, who was still the editor of a newspaper. She thought about Algis and how he’d been taken in by Raminta. That he looked thin and exhausted. But there was nothing she could do about it. She wished she had been around to support him. But it was too late – *šaukštai po pietų*.

On Sunday, Daina and Algis visited the Lithuanian Club. It was after midday and the bar was steaming with hot food. People gathered near the kitchen door, waiting to be served. Daina ordered three *bulviniai blynai* and Algis a portion of *balandėliai*. Then they squeezed in at his friends’ table.

‘Nothing has changed,’ Daina said to Algis.

‘It never does, does it?’ Vytenis, Rimvydas and Ramunė nodded their heads, tasting their *balandėliai* and *bulviniai blynai*, covered in sauce.

‘Frankly, we don’t want anything to change. Otherwise there wouldn’t be any point coming here,’ Ramunė said, trying to roll a cabbage leaf around her fork.

‘That’s right,’ Vytenis agreed. ‘We bonded by cementing our identity at DP camps. We are like brothers and sisters – most of us know each other from the war or even from back home.’

‘How are you, Daina?’ one of the choristers, Romas, asked. ‘How was America?’

‘Alright. I lived in Detroit with my aunt and helped her around the house,’ she said, giving them the story she and Algis had agreed on.

‘Now that you have mentioned Detroit, do you want to hear the story of my amber beads?’ Ramunė asked mysteriously, pointing a finger at her chest.

‘Tell us.’

‘Go ahead.’

‘Please do.’

‘Well. In 1979, I went on a tour to America with our choir. After a concert in Detroit, this woman comes up to me, holding a program in her hand. “Are you Ms Ramunė Skeivytė?” “Yes,” I replied with surprise and she began to cry: “I am your maid, Ona. Do you remember me?” she asked. I recognised her. “I am a sinner. Please forgive me. I am so sorry. I took your amber beads when your family ran away. I was left behind to mind the house...I was afraid. One morning I gathered your best china, grabbed your grandmother’s amber beads and joined the others on their way to the German border.” While I stood speechless, Ona presented me with these very beads I am wearing now. “Please take them back,” she said. “Until today I was living with a sin and am happy to return them. Each time I took them out of my drawer or wore them, I thought of your grandmother Aleksandra. What a lovely woman she was. So lady-like. I always wanted to be like her – to curl my hair, to wear a nice dress, to sit on a leather couch, reading, exactly how she used to do.” After all of this, I was glad to get my amber beads back and Ona was pleased that I didn’t tell her off.’

‘That’s a miracle.’

‘What a story.’

‘That’s almost unbelievable,’ everybody agreed, trying to touch and feel Ramunė’s necklace.

‘They are still like new!’

‘Look at the size of these beads – they are round and huge like a 50 cent piece.’

‘They are definitely worth big money.’

‘Can you see the insects inside?’

‘Look, look. There are a few visible mosquito legs and other bits and pieces.’

‘Take them off, Ramunė, let us feel their weight,’ Rimvydas asked and she passed her transparent, beeswax-coloured beads around.

‘How are you, Algis? How is Raminta?’ Vytenis asked.

‘I am fine, thank you. My wife is in Mornington for a few weeks.’

‘What a sweet woman. You are so lucky to have her.’

‘I know. I’m very lucky.’

‘Are you enjoying Daina’s company?’ a choir singer, Stasė, enquired.

‘She is going home,’ Algis replied.

‘Going home?’ Stasė asked, surprised.

‘Yes. I decided to return. Lithuania is free today. So I don’t see any reason to stay.’ While talking to them, Daina recalled that when she had sung in the choir they had viewed her with suspicion. Now they smiled at her, congratulating her on her decision, but they were probably still suspicious about her reasons for coming to Australia in the first place.

‘I agree people shouldn’t be leaving our homeland,’ Rimvydas said. ‘That’s exactly what I told one family some time back. They came here to seek information on our support for new arrivals. I just laughed in their faces. “We don’t have any support for those who left their home. What a cheek, like real gypsies!” I told them. How can they do it? Just get up and go? We were forced to leave; we had to defend ourselves from deportation and death.’

‘Who were they?’ Algis asked.

‘I don’t know, but I told them straight to their faces to go back where they came from. I said, “Lithuania is free today and you should stay there!”’

Algis shook his head.

‘You are wrong, Rimvydas, and short-sighted. How could you turn people away? They are Lithuanians like us. Maybe today they are still boarding at some crappy backpacker’s hostel with no health cover. Did they have children?’

‘Two,’ Rimvydas replied reluctantly, adding, ‘but Lithuania is losing its population with everybody running away. Soon there won’t be a Lithuania.’

‘If you are so worried about the numbers, why don’t you go home yourself, eh?’ Ramunė asked.

Daina stood up and excused herself, telling Algis she needed to go to the bathroom and would wait for him outside. Oh, if only I could say what I feel, she thought. Then I would tell Rimvydas it is alright for him to live here in Australia, away from the threats of the KGB and the Soviets. I haven’t heard any stories of postwar Lithuanian refugees in Australia starving, while those in Siberia and Gulag were

freezing to death without clothing and shelter. I wish I could look into Rimvydas' narrow eyes and ask why he felt he could insult a Lithuanian family that had done him no harm.

She'd been insulted in that same bar herself, but now it was irrelevant. She stood outside the Club, watching a slowly-moving tram, people walking past or sitting in a café across the road – smiling and laughing. A few minutes later, Algis joined her.

'Let's go,' he said, waving his hand and she followed him.

Rimvydas, Vytenis and Ramunė also appeared, saying their good-byes.

'All the best back home,' an elderly couple said as they waved.

'Thank you,' she replied, waving back.

'Pray for us in Lithuania, and we'll pray for you here,' said a woman with ash-blond hair.

'Thank you all for your good wishes,' she replied, smiling and thinking deep down how lucky she was to have been exposed to this other life that she otherwise would never have known about. She felt relieved and when Algis drove past the Club, she followed the *Lithuanian Club* sign with her eyes until she couldn't see the building anymore.

In the morning, Algis gave her some money and Daina went to Queen Victoria Market. She walked up and down each row first, comparing the prices of kangaroo and koala key rings, letter openers, Aboriginal paintings, eucalyptus oil, pens, t-shirts, and bags decorated with images of native animals. She found a long wooden case lined in bright yellow with a pressed eucalyptus leaf inside and decided to buy it for herself. There were plenty of leaves in Whittlesea, lying on the ground, but this one was special, smooth and clean, neatly placed in its box, ready to take away, a souvenir for Daina to remember her time in Australia. She purchased a silk scarf for her mother and five packets of koala key-rings for souvenirs.

By the time she returned to Whittlesea, it was late and she walked slowly among the huge gum trees for the last time, inhaling their tranquil aroma. She put her shopping down and embraced the trunk of the tree she'd slept under the first time she'd arrived.

On her last night, she listened to the leaves of the trees rustling under her open window. She heard the flapping of birds' wings. She was sure that she heard flying-foxes swooping past but was too lazy to get up and look. Finally, she fell asleep and woke up early to the sound of the kookaburras' laugh.

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Daina's parents met her at Vilnius Airport. They looked so much older and shrunken. She saw her mother's smile and wanted to cry. They held hands while her father carried her luggage to the car. It was a five-hour journey by car back to Kretinga. On their way home, her parents told her that her grandmother had recently passed away.

'Oh no,' said Daina and began to cry. 'What happened?'

'She ate at her friend's place; the meat was off. They tried to revive her at the hospital but it was too late – severe food poisoning,' her mother said.

'When did she die?'

'One week tomorrow,' said her father.

'But she wasn't ill beforehand, was she?'

'She was still a strong woman, but food poisoning is something older people are vulnerable to. They can't see the produce dates properly. They try to hold on to their old meat, thinking it's smoked and can be used forever. The pork she ate wasn't smoked.'

'I missed her so much while I was away. I was really looking forward to seeing her. I wanted to ask her so many questions about her youth, her marriage, what happened during the war. Was she buried with my grandfather?'

'Yes, they are now both at rest at the local cemetery,' her mother replied.

Daina sat quietly for a while, taking the news in. Her mother told her that their neighbour Aldona, a photographer, had just left for Canada, and Rūta had won a green card and gone to America.

'People can't wait to go abroad, taking every opportunity to seek employment, not necessarily in their profession,' her father said. 'Our neighbour's son Marius, remember?'

'Yes?'

'He's an engineer and he's got a job now as a factory hand in London. Of course, he's working there illegally but the money is good.'

‘Your mathematics teacher, Elena Šorienė, is staying with her aunt in New York and cleans houses for a living,’ her mother added. ‘Also, your school friend Sonata lives with her third husband in Germany.’

‘Third husband? What happened to the previous ones?’

‘Well. She divorced Darius soon after they had their daughter; then she married an older man who loved drinking. One day he was found floating in the River Nemunas; he had drowned. Now she is going okay and is apparently doing well for herself.’

‘And what happened to their daughter?’

‘Aušra lives with Darius. Sonata didn’t want to take her to Germany. Darius is a good provider, married to a lovely young woman. They have twins,’ her mother said.

‘Ah.’ Daina thought of Darius. She had once had a crush on him but it seemed so insignificant now. Through the car window, she observed elderly women carrying shopping bags, young mothers playing in a park with their children, crowds standing at bus stops. At first glance, it seemed like nothing had changed. But there were huge billboards on the buildings advertising Western products and there were English names on shop windows.

‘What do these shops sell?’ she asked.

‘They are full of clothes, shoes, perfumes, and food,’ her father explained. ‘Now we have everything, just no money to buy things. The prices are too high, and we simply can’t afford them.’ The radio station the car was tuned into was playing a mixture of English and Lithuanian music. She wound down her back seat window for fresh air. The black smoke coming from the exhaust pipes of the passing vehicles made her giddy so she closed the window again.

‘Such contaminated air,’ she said.

‘The car dealers bring old cars from Germany,’ her father replied.

‘But they smoke like chimneys and pollute the air.’

‘Nobody cares about that. You simply need to get from A to B and second-hand cars do just that,’ he said. ‘Seems like you’ve stepped out from some fantasy book. Welcome to post-Soviet reality!’ he added sarcastically.

‘Although nearly every adult drives a car in Australia, the air is not polluted like this. You are not allowed to drive a vehicle that is not roadworthy. Also, even though

some people own two or three cars, they pay huge loans and mortgages. So, money doesn't grow on trees.'

'What do you suggest we should do when public transport is so overcrowded? At least driving is faster,' her father said, overtaking a truck and nearly swiping his own side mirror.

Daina was petrified, realising that others were driving in a similar style to him, pulling out in front of each other, tooting their horns and swearing through the open windows of their rusty, dilapidated vehicles. People standing at pedestrian crossings and waiting for the traffic to clear looked too afraid to walk across the road. Her mother said the crossings were often unsafe, with people knocked down regularly, the drivers leaving the scenes of accidents without stopping.

'Welcome home, foreigner,' her father laughed, increasing his speed on a bridge. 'Why did you come back? How can anyone be so stupid?'

Daina took a deep breath and held her tears back. She wanted to jump out of the car. Oh, how she wanted to punch him, kick him, and scream at him. At that moment, she thought she'd never hated anyone so much.

She closed her eyes and thought about her grandmother. She recalled the day Roma had taken her to a village where her cousin lived, to see an old priest. He had long hair growing out of his ears. How frightened she'd been of his stern look and dark eyes. He had listened to her saying the rosary. She hadn't made a single mistake. The following morning, she'd attended her first communion, holding a candle in her shaking hands. Her grandmother had asked her not to mention anything at school about the communion. She was eight at a time, so she'd promised obediently, and kept her promise. She'd kept the rosary under her pillow. At night, Daina, her mother and grandmother would pray together, kneeling at the end of the bed. Her father never joined in, calling them *davatkos*. Sometime later at school, they had to fill in a questionnaire. One question asked whether or not she believed in God. She had ticked the "yes" box. Soon after, her parents had been called in to see the principal. That night, Daina found her rosary beads broken, the beads scattered around the bedroom floor and for a long time after she'd occasionally step on a bead protruding from a crack in the floorboards. They felt like dried peas. After that she had never prayed again.

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Her parents' flat was tiny. The kitchen tap was leaking.

‘Mum, why is there a bucket in the sink?’

‘We are saving water for toilet flushes. When the tap is only dripping, it doesn't register on the water meter, so this water is free. It's a big saving. Many people do that.’

‘People in Australia also save water, but don't count drops.’ Daina looked around the kitchen with its familiar cracks in the walls and the broken oven door.

‘I see nothing has been fixed in six years,’ she said, and her mother nodded. ‘I'll take care of things,’ Daina said, already thinking she would use the \$500 Zigmas had given her for renovations to the flat.

Her father brought in her suitcase from the car. Daina unlocked it and presented her parents with gifts. She also found Algis' letter in her handbag, addressed to Roma. But it was Tadas who opened and read it, then asked Daina to explain what had happened with his uncle. She hesitated, not knowing what the letter said, but then told her parents about Algis' marriage. Tadas became angry, stood up, grabbed the car keys and left the flat.

‘Do you know why he is so angry?’ her mother asked.

‘Because he won't get anything from Algis!’

‘I see. Now he has to continue with his factory job. He was planning to stop when the inheritance came, but it looks like it's not coming.’

‘No. It's not coming. Algis married a young woman from Šakiai and has changed his will,’ Daina said.

‘Your father doesn't deserve the money. Still, it would have helped us all.’

Then Daina asked her mother a question that had been on her mind for a long time.

‘I know that you two don't talk much. Is there a reason?’

‘Why do you think I am an epileptic?’

‘Because you got sick and couldn't go back to work.’

‘Yes, but the reason I got sick was that he threatened to throw me off the balcony if I raised my eyes to look at another man.’

‘Surely this can't be true!’

‘I still walk up the street with my head down out of habit. And he still conducts his affairs with other women.’

‘How do you know of these women?’

‘Because they call and even turn up at the door looking for him.’

‘This is a terrible situation. Why don’t you leave him?’

‘Well. I don’t really have anywhere to go. At least he is here to help if anything happens to me.’

‘Is he really? How could he be here for you if he is always out, conducting all these affairs? Don’t you see, Mother, you have become too dependent on him and you have forgotten that you can take care of yourself.’

‘But I can’t.’

They hugged each other and Daina shook her head.

‘He is an animal. I hate him so much.’

After a long pause, her mother said, ‘It will be hard for you to readjust.’

‘I have no intention of living in this flat. I’ll find employment and will move out. How is he now with you? Is he still violent?’

‘I am fine. These days it’s not difficult to get good medication for my anxiety. He goes out more and leaves me be, so I am not as stressed out as I used to be.’

‘Did you tell your doctor about the root of your problem?’

‘God forbid. If I did, the doctor would’ve talked to Tadas and...Anyway, I think because he knows what caused my fits in the first place, he is treading carefully.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well. He makes sure I see my doctor on a regular basis as I often forget things.’

‘How can you live like that?’

‘We have been living like acquaintances for many years.’

‘What a nice life,’ Daina said, gazing outside their kitchen window where the crows made a mess on the veranda again. Children were playing in the sandpit, people were leaving their flats or returning with shopping bags. The neighbours were going about with their lives without knowing that all her married life, her mother had been abused by her father. She was pleased that he’d left them alone. She told her mother about her own romance, pregnancy, and miscarriage, the life with Gintas and her eventual reunion with Algis.

Her mother was quiet. After hearing what Daina had to say, she hugged her tightly. They sat for a while holding each other.

‘You are like me, you have no luck with men. You know, your father forced me to marry him.’

‘How?’

‘Well. He stalked me for a year and then one day followed me into the park.’

‘Did he harm you?’

‘No. He emotionally blackmailed me. He said if I didn’t marry him he’d kill himself. Oh, I was scared. I felt sorry for him.’

‘And?’

‘And I agreed to marry him. I was only sixteen and he was twenty-two. My parents didn’t bless the marriage. They didn’t attend the wedding. They were always distant and preoccupied with their worries at their Agluonėnai farm, growing cabbages and carrots for the Gargždai market. Your father bribed the official at the Wedding Bureau and the celebrant married us under the pretence that I was eighteen. But he was good-looking, and still is – tall and slim. His green eyes have a sparkle in them. I thought he’d protect me and look after me. He told me he was very well-off, and gave me gifts – scarfs, hats, jewellery. Only later did he tell me that he’d stolen these things. He said we would start our own life, but it never happened. Soon after we were married, he brought me to this flat where we have struggled for so many years.’

‘Oh, my God! He lied to you. He had nothing.’

‘That’s right. We had to start from scratch.’

‘Don’t tell me you still need him.’

‘It’s more that I am used to his ways.’

‘You must be jealous of him.’

‘That’s my problem. Women chase him, call him, he goes out to restaurants and bars. Why does he need a wife like me? I am so useless.’

‘You are in love with your worst enemy and that’s all there is to it.’ Daina thought how ironic it was – one always acts as a magnet, making another victim! She and her mother were both victims, drawn to the physical attractiveness of the opposite sex.

‘Mum, you should leave him. You should look after yourself by starting a new life.’

‘I’d like to but where would I go?’

‘Go and stay with your cousin Liuda for a while.’

‘I don’t know. I suppose so. Since her husband died years ago, she has lived by herself.’

‘What’s her phone number?’

They rang Liuda. Liuda was happy to hear from them and was even more pleased that Marija wanted to stay with her for a while. She said she could help Liuda in the knitting business she ran from home. Marija had more than enough experience in knitting and was pleased with the prospect.

Daina helped her to pack and to catch a bus to the railway station, just in time for the night train to Vilnius.

That night, Daina found it difficult to sleep. She could hear strange noises from all directions. As she lay stretched out on the sofa bed in the lounge room, she listened to the angry voices of the neighbours on her right, arguing with their disobedient children. Then she picked up the sound of running water on her left, and waited until a drunken man’s voice finished singing *O, Ramunėle, pasakyk*, and the drainage pipes in his flat stopped making noises. She hated the man singing and yet, in Australia she would’ve probably cried to hear any Lithuanian melody, which would have soothed her homesickness. Directly above her, she tuned into the noise of squeaking bed hinges that made her shiver. She felt as if at any minute the ceiling might open up and a bed might drop on top of her. The smell of cheap *Prima* cigarettes, the clinking of glasses, and the sound of loud music with people singing the tune after the record has finished, made her get up and step onto the balcony where the mixture of sweat, oil and the fumes of heavy traffic under the windows and screams of orgasms echoed around her.

She shut the balcony door, lingering near it, watching the lights disappear from the other flats. She was back in their cramped lounge room where the sofa during the day became a bed at night; where the bed linen was stored in the sofa base; where everybody knew each other’s secrets; where she would have to put up with banging, spitting over the balcony, water dripping down the walls because a man had fallen asleep in his bath and it had overflowed.

Daina sat in the kitchen, waiting for the kettle to boil. She shivered when she thought of her father, wishing he would never come back. But well after midnight, he returned to the flat. She looked at him as he entered the kitchen and poured himself a glass of homemade wine. His grey hair was cut short.

‘Happy to be back, fairytale princess?’

‘Yes.’

‘And how are things here? Where is she?’ he asked, opening all the doors and turning the lights on.

‘She has gone. She went to visit her friend.’

‘Which friend? How long will she be away?’

‘It depends.’

‘What do you mean, depends?’

‘She needs time to recover from her stressful life with you.’

‘She doesn’t have a stressful life. I look after her.’

‘You do, but you are the one who caused her anxiety in the first place. Leave her alone or I’ll go to her doctor and also tell all your neighbours what you did to her; how you treated her.’

‘Alright, alright. Don’t get smart with me or you’ll get one over your mouth.’

Her heart was beating quickly and loudly. She was afraid of him but on the surface she remained calm, sipping her tea. He refilled his glass with wine. They sat for a while without saying anything. Then he cleared his throat.

‘Do you know how beautiful your mother was when I first met her?’ he asked, slurring his words.

‘She was still at school when I first saw her and fell in love with her wide bluish eyes, long blond hair and her warm smile. She had a glowing face and pink cheeks. She was a farmer’s daughter. She was shy and didn’t talk to me for about a year, but I was a young man, prepared to wait. I met her at the market where she helped her parents. I found out where she lived.’

‘Did she love you?’

Without answering her question, Tadas kept talking.

‘Sixteen was a good age. Women blossom at that age. I wanted her as my wife.’

‘You did. That’s what you wanted and you achieved whatever you wanted.’

‘No, I didn’t. I couldn’t keep her by my side. She was so beautiful that men smiled at her and hugged her slim figure with their hungry eyes.’

‘And you punished her every time someone set their glance on her. Is that why she got so ill?’

‘Don’t exaggerate. You weren’t there. You don’t know how she hurt my feelings as I tried to make her love me.’

‘I am going to bed now. *Labanaktis*,’ Daina said hastily and went to the lounge room, locking the door from the inside. She stood there hardly breathing, listening, fearing that he may come and kick at the door. After a while, she heard him snoring loudly. She unlocked the door and tiptoed to the kitchen. She found her father sitting on a chair with his shaven head resting in a plate of sandwiches. Although he was already fifty-five, he was a father she’d never known. Does he have anything to look forward to? He had tortured her and her mother long enough, she thought, feeling relieved that her mother was gone.

Suddenly, life was so complicated.

‘Why am I not like a scorpion who can walk backwards? I can’t go backwards. I have arrived home,’ she said.

*

‘I am afraid to restart my life. I hope I can readjust,’ Daina said to Jovita when they met for lunch.

‘Maybe your boss in Kaunas is still holding your position open for you?’

‘It’s funny you say that,’ Daina replied. ‘My mum told me that he’d rung her a couple of times, asking when I would be back. He said he had a message for me.’

‘What did she say to him?’

‘She said she’d let him know if I came back.’

‘Did she ask about the message?’

‘No.’

‘You must go and see him. He may have kept your position open and you might be able to slip into it straight away.’

After the waiter brought their coffees, Jovita spoke of Daina's stories. She admitted she hadn't been able to publish them when they first began to arrive because she had been called in to see a government apparatchik and had been given a warning.

'An elderly man sat me down in his office and showed me your first letter. He told me that there was no place in Kretinga's newspaper for such fantasies. He said that stories praising Australia might spread propaganda amongst the readers and may give them the impression that life in Soviet Union was not good enough.'

Daina sat speechless, covering her mouth with her hand.

'Don't worry Daina, I was not in trouble. When I received each of your letters, sometimes opened, sometimes closed, I kept them locked in my drawer at home. When independence came, we published them all without hesitation.'

Daina was looking tense, but Jovita laughed.

'There was no way other than to think what we wanted but to do what *they* said. We never knew who the informers were and who filtered information at school, at work, or in the neighbourhood. But it's the past, Daina, cheer up!'

After an hour or so, Jovita had to return to work. Before she left, she begged Daina to write more about Australia. People of the freed homeland were keen to explore the world, but Australia remained like a faraway dreamland, and there would be a lot of interest in Daina's stories. Daina promised to bring some more writing soon.

Walking back home, she looked around Kretinga, wondering about what Jovita had said. All the hidden stories, she thought. Would they ever resurface? Would she ever know the whole truth behind the distortions and lies? She tuned into her surroundings. Kretinga's main street was full of run-down flats; passers-by with shopping bags and preoccupied faces hurried in all directions; people spoke Lithuanian much faster than before, making her aware how much the language had changed. A group of young people, waiting for a bus, were conversing in blended Lithuanian words, using English phrases, intermixed with the local *žemaičių* dialect. Daina wondered how much these young people cared about their ancestors' stories. Regardless of her new reality, she knew that she was home, ready to face any challenges.

Daina decided to visit her school friends. The next day she caught a bus to Klaipėda to spend some time with Regina and Ilona. Regina worked as an accountant at the superannuation office *Sodra*. She told Daina how poorly her boss managed transactions and how they could never balance their books. She sounded upset that democracy was coming too slowly.

‘The main problem is that we wait and talk of changes that never come. We feel like blind kittens taken from their mother, weak and unsteady on our feet, unable to fend for ourselves. “Mother” Russia is not there anymore to lean on – we are all by ourselves, but the attitude hasn’t changed. You’ll realise this after staying here longer.’

‘I work for a modelling company,’ said Ilona. ‘I’m about to fly to Dubai.’

‘What do you do?’ Daina asked.

‘Design lingerie.’

The trio had eaten their way through potatoes, carrots and chicken. Then they had a piece of *šakotis* each. Daina recalled how miserable she was the last time she tried *šakotis* at Saulė’s wedding. Today was another matter. She didn’t have to miss her homeland. She was here, sipping champagne with her friends.

Ilona and Regina wanted to know about Australia.

‘It’s a wonderful country, girls,’ Daina said after a while. ‘The countryside is picturesque, the people are kind and the food is plentiful. It’s a great holiday destination – to me, *only* a holiday destination. I had to work on a farm. I didn’t enjoy the hot weather. Also, I longed for company. Look at us – we grew up together and have so much in common. I missed you. I missed the sound of our language. I missed the smell of real bacon, dripping with fat. I missed the fragrance of flowers. They don’t have any fragrance there. No, some do, but it’s very faint. Oh, I am so pleased to be back.’

‘You mean, for good?’ her friends asked.

‘Yes.’

‘How can you be so detached from reality? Don’t you see what’s happening here? Now everyone is just concerned for themselves, no more collectivism with a pitchfork in one hand and a red flag in another!’ Regina laughed.

‘Personally,’ Ilona spoke, ‘I’ve had enough of being faceless. I am designing the undies we used to be so short of!’

‘Good for you,’ Daina said.

‘You should see my colleagues in Dubai – constantly kissing my hand, finding me new clients. And the photographers are so kind and gentle to our models, smiling at them as if they’d found a diamond – wanting photos of their bodies from all possible angles. I’ve never experienced anything like that, not at school, at home or at the office where I used to work. I get a lot of attention. I can’t understand why you’d wish to stay here, Daina? You must’ve had an awful time in Australia.’

Daina changed the subject.

‘What about the regained freedom?’ Interrupting each other, her friends explained how the government wanted to return the country to the glory enjoyed in the twenty-two year period between the wars, but things had gone wrong.

‘How can you return from collective to individual farming when the facilities are not there, equipment destroyed, goods and produce constantly stolen? As an accountant, I can see no bright future,’ Regina said.

‘I can,’ Ilona said, ‘but only when at least two generations affected by the Soviet regime have passed away.’

The friends talked into the night. She laughed as they told her Russian and Lithuanian jokes about the current living standards. Despite all the changes going on in their lives, deep down they were still the schoolgirls she knew. The aroma of the food they ate, the music they listened to while chatting away, the way they incorporated the Russian words into their conversation – it was what Daina had missed so much. That was why the last cup of coffee they shared before her departure brought tears to her eyes.

Daina caught a bus to Kaunas. She decided to surprise her colleagues at the cultural centre where she’d worked before leaving, and catch up with her boss, Rimas. Inside the centre she discovered long tables covered in clothing and shoes. Apparently it had been converted into a market. Even the nearby cinema was overcrowded with white goods and electrical appliances made in Poland and the United Arab Emirates. She crossed the *Laisvės alėja* twice and didn’t meet any familiar faces. But at the Western style shopping centre Daina bumped into her friend Audra. Their meeting resulted in Daina getting a job at the clothing shop where Audra worked and then moving in with her. Audra admitted that it was difficult to get a job at the theatre but she was hopeful.

The women, both ex-theatre producers, put their heads together about how to best utilise their talents. Audra inducted Daina into her workplace culture and how they were marketing their clothing. They had to be friendly and smile at their customers.

‘When I was on my own, I didn’t do nearly as well,’ Audra commented after calculating the week’s takings. ‘If we continue in the same spirit, we’ll get off the ground so fast, we won’t know ourselves. The whole population of Kaunas will be wearing *our* clothing!’

Daina glanced around the shop, tidied coat hangers, and adjusted scarves. She remembered seeing coats in Melbourne being sold with a free scarf. She suggested this to Audra and they ordered some giveaways to go with the main purchase: purses, pouches, stockings, handkerchiefs and hair pins. Once these extras arrived, Daina thought of children’s beanies, socks, stockings and tiny make-up kits.

Daina did her best to improve the business, dealing with suppliers, checking the quality of the goods they received, and making sure they had the full range of sizes. Her studies in Melbourne were paying off. She was good with figures and also managed the store well. She tried to be friendly to everyone, but also assertive. She didn’t hesitate to express her dissatisfaction with the drivers for late deliveries or to the manufacturers for damaged stock. She realised how many valuable lessons she’d learned in Australia: how to engage in conversation with clients as they entered the shop, how to present the clothes, how to stretch a raincoat or jumper around a client’s shoulders and pull it down evenly, so that it felt and looked its best. Audra and Daina made a good team, but soon Audra re-established herself at the theatre and left. Daina regretted not being able to find any work in her profession, but she soon realised that acting and going to the theatre was not people’s priority. She discovered how difficult it was to find actors for her play, even though she ran her ad in *Kauno diena* newspaper for two weeks. People were struggling on low wages and living costs were high. They didn’t care much for entertainment.

The new assistant, Sandra, was the opposite of Audra, openly admitting after observing Daina on the floor that she wasn’t cut out for sweet talk. Sandra didn’t care how many items they sold or what reputation they obtained; instead she constantly spread her

misery around. She had some personal problems, and was working as a waitress at a night club, and found it hard to fit two jobs into her life.

‘I have no intention of being kind. We are paid the minimum wage and no extras, why should I care?’

Listening to her, Daina began to realise that maybe, for people like Sandra, the regaining of independence had come too quickly. Maybe there should have been a longer transitional period to get into the Western lifestyle.

Daina found that after living under the Soviets for half a century, Lithuanian people had adopted their attitudes. She remembered how as a teenager she used to wait for the sales person to complete their personal conversation over the counter before being served. And how people had not objected when shop assistants let their friends squeeze in front of them. The shoppers waited twenty minutes or more to be served. Those who dared to complain were told off. Rudeness was one of the common features of everyday life. But people knew no different. The borders had been closed. She might have been happier with the new Lithuania if she hadn’t had the opportunity to live in Australia. She had seen, learned and experienced more than those who had never lived abroad and felt different because of it.

‘Even though Lithuania has regained its independence, customer service staff still follow the principles of the Soviet regime. Sandra, can’t you see the way you behave? You make people wait for so long, they run out of patience and leave the shop; you attend to the rich clients and show them the best items, the ones that you have hidden behind the counter; you serve your friends and acquaintances first, singling them out of the queue. Our customers will spread the word about your rudeness and we’ll lose business.’

‘Oh, you think because you’ve lived in Australia, you know better. You know nothing! You are a foreigner here and your ideas and suggestions are foolish. Look at yourself. Customers don’t like you. They think you are trying to sell damaged stock or something; you get right into their faces, pushing this and that at them. Who needs your capitalist scarves? They’ve all got scarves here – plenty – people still know how to knit. You are a naïve and immature woman!’ Sandra shouted in her rough voice. Then she disappeared to the back of the shop for her hourly cigarette.

Daina didn't reply, feeling insulted and misunderstood, making comparisons between Lithuanians and Australians in her mind. She'd thought she would never want to live in Australia again, but already, after only a few months in her homeland, she'd become disillusioned. She and Sandra were the same age; they'd both grown up under the same system of values and beliefs. But they were strangers to each other. If she'd never left, never been abroad, she might be like Sandra too.

After work Daina walked through her favourite *Laisvės alėja*. Passers-by looked like Algis, Gintas, Mėta. Daina saw Saulė standing near the intersection and ran towards her. But it wasn't Saulė – only a stranger glancing at her with surprise. Daina wanted to scream 'Where is my home?', but the words stuck in her throat. She reached the end of the *Laisvės alėja* and disappeared into the crowd...

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One morning, a well-built, moustachioed man walked into the shop. He approached Daina and introduced himself as Toivo Mūūrsepp, their new coat supplier. She stood speechless for some time, then brought her hand to her mouth and began to laugh.

'Don't you remember me, Toivo? It's Daina.' Toivo took a couple of steps back and, after recognising her, rushed to her, pulled her from behind the counter and spun her in the air. A rack of coats moved on its wheels, the neatly spread scarves falling to the floor. They were hugging in the middle of the gathering clientele, not caring about anything.

She left the shop with Toivo. Sandra was pulling the coat rack back in place, cursing Daina in a loud voice.

'We should go to the cable car,' Toivo suggested.

'Let's do that!'

As they walked to the cable car station in the nearby suburb of Žaliakalnis, they couldn't stop talking about what had happened since their parting. Toivo was surprised she wasn't married, and admitted to being a divorcee with no children. He took Daina's hand and gently squeezed it, telling her she looked even more beautiful than the last time they'd seen each other.

‘Oh, thank you,’ she replied, blushing.

‘I had a feeling that I’d meet you again, no matter how long I had to wait,’ he said.

Daina thought how right Dorothy was to say: ‘You never know. You may meet him again one day and be together.’

‘How did you learn Lithuanian?’ she asked him.

‘My ex-wife was Lithuanian. Also, I have to speak at least basic Lithuanian at the coat factory where I work.’

‘Do you work here?’

‘Well, I work between Kaunas and Helsinki.’

‘Why Helsinki and not Tallinn?’

‘Tallinn is close to Helsinki anyway, although the Finns have a much better life, a much higher standard of living than in Estonia. My parents live in Tallinn, but my father was born in Helsinki.’

‘I see.’

‘But the main reason I wanted to learn to speak Lithuanian was that I firmly believed I’d see you again.’

‘Oh, I’m overwhelmed. I had no idea that after all these years, you still hoped to see me. I thought you might have your life all sorted by now. But that’s wonderful. Did you really believe we’d meet again after such a long time?’

He didn’t answer. They held hands, looking down at the buildings and cars from the cable car carriage, which they had to themselves. Daina wanted to kiss and hug him, and she knew he wanted the same as he kept her hand firmly placed in his. Then he lifted her hand to his lips and slowly kissed each of her fingers. Looking into his smiling face, she realised that the sparkle of love was reignited. They moved closer to each other and the warmth of his body made her feel faint.

‘I wish life was always as uplifting as it feels now, here with you,’ Toivo said.

Daina smiled, nodding her head in agreement.

‘I wish I’d never gone abroad as now I’m divided between two worlds,’ she replied.

‘Do you think you’ll be able to settle in Kaunas for good?’

‘I don’t know. It seems that I’ve outgrown the dreams of my youth,’ she admitted.

‘If that’s the case, I’d love to invite you to Helsinki, where I am also working as a part-time ski instructor. We are leaving soon on an expedition and I need some help.’

‘How long are you going for?’

‘Three weeks.’

Daina laughed, agreeing to accompany him to the mountains.

‘I’ve been contemplating leaving the shop anyway, and this would be the perfect opportunity.’

‘Why didn’t you write to me, Daina? I would’ve waited for you if I’d known you were coming back, but I never heard a word.’

Looking at the breathtaking scenery of roof tops, gigantic churches, the lushness of the surrounding *gluosniai*, *qžuolai*, *alyvos* trees, listening to the soothing whistle of the *karveliai*, she found herself pouring out her feelings to him. She told Toivo how she had been embarrassed to write about the life she’d had in Australia. How she’d expected to arrive and settle close to Melbourne but had discovered that Algis’ farm was far from the city. How she’d hoped to find something to do involving the theatre, but instead was milking his cow and feeding his chickens – she hadn’t realised that there would be so much work to do. How she’d imagined going to the opera, ballet and concerts, but was only taken to the Lithuanian Club, where she mingled with postwar Lithuanians. They were mostly elderly people, preoccupied with the preservation of their version of their homeland culture that hardly exists now in Lithuania. And how she found herself yearning to travel around Australia, but had no means to do so.

‘Oh, how stupid I was just thinking about the inheritance from Algis, and how long I had to wait for it. And I was stupid assuming that by going away, my family problems would just disappear.’

‘I understand. We all have goals and dreams, but most of the time our goals and dreams do not come true, which makes us try harder. I’m glad you didn’t give up in the end and you followed your dream to return.’

‘Yes. I really wanted to come back. You’re so right. It was too hard to live without the sturdy ground of home. Six years ago, the ground suddenly shifted under my feet. In Australia, I felt like I was walking barefoot; I carried with me the pain of learning, the gravel digging into my feet. After constantly walking on sharp pebbles, I had a new scar in my heart. The scar kept reopening each time I had an unpleasant

experience, and I really wanted to get out of my painful situation. Do you understand what I mean? Do you know what it is like to live in one place and think of the other?’

‘I understand. Commuting between Kaunas, Tallinn and Helsinki, I find myself trying to determine where I truly belong. But moving freely between the neighbouring countries is nothing like being stranded on the other side of the world in Australia. There was nothing wrong with you feeling as if you didn’t belong. It happened because you couldn’t go backwards and forwards. Why didn’t you return earlier if you felt that way?’

‘Well, Algis was ill and I had an obligation to remain. Our family had a chance to inherit his wealth...Remember, I told you about it before I went there? But things didn’t work out between us.’

‘That’s too bad.’

‘I should have returned after six months.’

‘Well, sometimes life is not as perfect as we wish it to be.’

‘All I want now is to hear my native language around me, to be woken-up by the gentleness of the Lithuanian sun, and the song of the *lakštingala*; to inhale the smell of *gubojas*, and to drink amber tea when I please. I don’t want to ever feel like a temporary guest at a table, overcrowded with strange food.’

The cable car stopped to pick up new passengers, and Daina and Toivo got off.

‘I feel I have just arrived at the place of my next destination. Could I have a ticket for my future happiness, please?’ Daina asked the worker and he smiled, readjusting the ropes for the next ride.

‘Life is like a bumpy ride, Miss, and the secret is to know where to get off,’ he said jokingly, closing the door, pressing the button and letting the carriage move off again.

‘Did you hear what he said?’ asked Daina.

‘From the way he said it, I gather we got off at the right place,’ Toivo replied as they looked out at the panorama. He gently embraced her and told her that he’d never stopped loving her. Daina looked into his eyes, hidden under his glasses and was overwhelmed by his sincerity. They stood still for some time before facing each other, and finally, slowly kissing.

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In November 1992, after a couple of months of dating, Daina and Toivo moved in together. Toivo had been married before and Daina was unsettled by her previous experiences and thought easing into their relationship slowly was the best option. There was a strong bond between them and she was happy.

With Toivo's help, Daina set up her own business. She provided travel advice to those wanting to go abroad and ran intensive English language courses.

When Toivo was away on business, she became fully immersed in her job. In her office, she hung a map of Australia and had a *G'day – Welcome to Australia!* sign above the door. Although there were not many who could afford to go to Australia, she enjoyed talking to those who were interested in the country and who dreamed of going there one day. She showed them videos of Melbourne Zoo, Adelaide Casino and Queen Victoria Market. She talked about these places enthusiastically as she knew them well.

While looking for her belt one day in a drawer, she came across the eucalyptus leaf she'd purchased at the market before her return to Lithuania. It was still in its original box. She took it to work and kept the box on her desk. The leaf reminded her of Algis' farm and the first moment of excitement and uncertainty in her new country. It also made her realise how much she'd become attached to the exotic land in her mind.

She'd read Ričardas Gavelis' book *Vilniaus pokeris* and was taken aback by the book's dark mood and the irrational behaviour of the characters. At times she thought she had crossed from Gavelis' conceptions of free Lithuania to the scenes of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, where nearly every character needed guidance and moral support to try to find their way out of the misery they were living in. In her notebook, she questioned why there was so much ugliness and why people's lives were so out of balance. Why was there such a dreadful feeling of fear and why wasn't the author inclined to help his heroes to escape from the world he'd created for them? Daina felt sickened by the eroticism and philosophical ramblings that made no sense to her. Was that the free Lithuania that postwar Lithuanians in Australia yearned for day and night,

year after year? What had happened to the Lithuanian people? They were not free inside. Gavelis locked everybody up!

Caught between her reality and her memories, Daina continued to write about the ever-changing Australian sky, the naked eucalypts and the mythical Tasmanian tigers. It helped her to cope with her day-to-day life that didn't provide her with any inspiration and was sometimes much bleaker than she'd thought it would be. Job losses and a shortage of money made people angry and even jealous of each other's success. The Soviet past was present everywhere. Many taxi drivers were Russian, cafés often played Russian music, people still swore in Russian.

She continued to find Lithuanians stiff and unfriendly. Their facial expressions were either full of envy or anger, as if the whole world was about to collapse. Their problems with their leaking cars, broken relationships and shortage of money made Daina sad. She was well-off. With her agency booming, she allowed herself to go out to restaurants and to wear fashionable clothing, not to mention having manicures and pedicures at her friend's beauty salon. Daina's hair grew and she wore it loose around her shoulders.

Toivo usually rang every night from his mountain base. After talking to him, she'd put the phone down with an empty feeling in her heart. Their life was more fantasy than reality – they were strangers. They had nothing to talk about. Their trip to the Altay Mountains long ago didn't really matter anymore. They spent most of their time in different countries. Worst of all, he didn't want children – he loved his freedom too much. They had been together for five months, but she had a feeling Toivo didn't want to commit. She was lonely and didn't like Finland because of its freezing winters. She hated skiing but skiing was in his blood and the blood of his parents – they all loved going to the mountains. She didn't anymore. At least not in winter. She worried that she had rushed back into a relationship that wasn't properly resolved. Could she trust him? He was free to come and go. His lifestyle was flexible, his work not too difficult. His clothing factory was managed by his trusted colleagues – he was just overseeing their success and budgeting using the figures they provided. Life was great for him, but she didn't fit into his life. She wanted to settle down, to have him by her side, and to enjoy

their time together. Instead, she found herself working in her office after hours. The prospect of being by herself in their relationship frightened her.

After Toivo returned from one of his usual trips, Daina helped him to unpack his suitcase and sort out his dirty washing. After he had had a shower, they sat in the living room. Daina decided to raise her concerns.

‘We don’t really have much in common, do we?’

‘What do you mean, my dearest?’

‘I like to be home and you – in the mountains.’

‘So?’

‘It’s not enough for me.’

‘I love the feeling of reaching the peak of the mountain, the breathlessness, the sense of freedom. What’s wrong with that? I thought you were the same. We used to travel together and you loved the adventure. Why is it different now?’

‘Because I’ve noticed that we have great cultural differences. Your limited knowledge of Lithuanian is really annoying. You never get the subtleties of my conversation. I admit to feeling the same in my ability with the Estonian and Finnish languages that you speak so well! Your parents are probably laughing at my Finnish pronunciation.’

‘No, they aren’t. Please don’t make such assumptions. What has happened to you? Where is that carefree girl I met on top of the most picturesque mountain? Do you love someone else?’

‘No, I don’t, but what annoys me is that we can’t talk to each other properly.’

‘We can always speak in Russian,’ Toivo suggested, approaching Daina and trying to put his hand around her waist. Daina pushed him away.

‘I’d rather use English, a language you don’t know, but that is beside the point. There is a barrier between us – a cultural, emotional, physical barrier we can’t cross. Also, I don’t like the things that you like.’

‘Let’s sit down and have some coffee. I bought chocolates in Helsinki. Then we can talk.’

She watched him carry a tray with two cups and the chocolate into the living room. He placed the tray on the table and sat next to her on the couch. He reached for her hand but she withdrew it.

‘I don’t know if I love you. I’ve realised that you are someone from my past who doesn’t mean so much now. Why aren’t you taking what I say seriously? You pretend you understand Lithuanian, but you don’t. You pretend you understand what my friends say, their jokes and stories, but you simply don’t!’

‘I’m sorry,’ he replied quietly. ‘I’ll try to learn. You can teach me.’

‘We can’t share the important things with each other. I can’t teach you.’

Toivo looked at her and slowly adjusted his glasses. She observed him getting up from the couch, walking towards the front door, taking his coat from the back of a chair. Then she listened to the sound of the door lock and his steps on the landing. She could hear him running down the stairs. Her heart was beating fast. She was scared. What if he didn’t come back? Where would she find another partner? She knew he was a good man. She looked out the window and watched him walking away. He looked up and screamed:

‘You have to stop with the stupid fantasies of the never-ever-whenever land.’

She sat down and stared at his untouched coffee. She drank hers. It was cold. Part of her wanted to be free of him, but part of her regretted what she’d said. Part of her was scared of losing him. She should have tried harder. She was worried it might be too late now – that she’d gone too far and that the relationship might be over. Maybe there was no way back. She’d have to move out of Toivo’s flat.

‘Toivo is a foreigner. We are not compatible. I did the right thing,’ she repeated again and again trying to convince herself. She put some Lithuanian music on and a sense of relief entered her body. She’d always loved music. She vowed to go to more concerts, to more cafés where musicians performed. Maybe even dancing. She’d not been dancing for years. She would transform herself and become a new person. No matter what, she would continue to write.

‘Why on earth did I let him go?’ she screamed from the bottom of her lungs. ‘What is happening to me? I feel like an ugly witch. What came over me? How could I abuse him with such harsh words?’ She only stopped screaming when her next door neighbour banged on the wall.

In the morning, Daina was late for work and then she couldn't concentrate. She cancelled all her appointments and locked her office. As she walked by the River Nemunas, she thought about what had happened. Toivo's words 'You have to stop with the stupid fantasies of the never-ever-wherever land' echoed in her head. She began to see the irony of her situation. Before she went to Australia, she loved Toivo. When she returned they reunited. Everything followed in sequence – friendship, departure, return, and reunion. But there was a *but*. There was Arūnas, love, lust, yearning. He'd been a force that drew her in so strongly. Being with him, she'd forgotten herself, she'd lost herself in his kisses and overwhelming attention. She'd melted from his endless compliments, dissolving in their passionate lovemaking. Since then, she'd changed. What was it? With the words 'your stupid fantasies' resounding inside her head, she knew she didn't want to fight with a man who gave her so much joy. She needed him badly and wanted to lie her spinning head on his shoulder.

Daina reached the cable car. The same worker tightened the ropes and pushed the button for the carriage to move on. She was the only passenger, glancing around the old town from above. She thought of Gintas, and how he had admitted to her that he'd been unhappy that his son had married a non-Lithuanian woman and how he had reconciled himself to the idea afterwards. Now she realised that pushing Toivo away just because he was not Lithuanian was foolish. She also placed her thoughts of having children on hold. She realised that she needed to work on her relationship; that things wouldn't change overnight. She needed to see Toivo and talk to him about these issues, to see if they might resolve them together.

That night, when Daina unlocked her flat door, she inhaled a pleasant aroma coming from the kitchen. Toivo was cooking dinner. She noticed roses on the kitchen table. He had the radio on and didn't see her entering. He was chopping an onion and looking out the window. She dropped her handbag on the floor and approached him from behind. He turned around and put the knife on the table. She felt his strong embrace and a wave of warmth spread through her body. He lifted her up, spinning her in the air. Daina gave him a kiss on his pink cheek. He returned the kiss on her lips. Suddenly, their tiny kitchen transformed into an imaginary castle. She was Cinderella and he was her Prince

Charming. She knew that now she had all she ever wanted, and her heart was beating heavily. She could not take her eyes off Toivo, watching how he was boiling potatoes and making a creamy sauce to go with their veal chops. Their dark kitchen seemed so spacious and brightly lit. Toivo stood at the stove, humming a cheerful tune. After dinner, they made love and promised each other never to fight over insignificant matters.

After their reconciliation, Daina learned to be patient. While Toivo was away, she missed him and realised how much she loved him. He was reliable, trustworthy, full of praises for her, a friend for life – that's exactly how Dorothy had once described her ideal man. *Now I have a man like Philip*, she wrote to Australia, telling Dorothy how much she had learned from their conversations at the Carnegie flat.

Daina and Toivo continued spending time away from each other, but she learned to occupy herself with other things. Her mistakes had taught her to be grateful for what she had. She realised she was being given a rare chance to reunite with a loved one. She promised to herself to never let him go, to value Toivo, who loved her and gave her space to figure out what she really wanted.

*

One evening, during the third autumn after her arrival back in Lithuania, Daina sat in a café and looked out at a street full of leaves. The chill air made her shiver and her thoughts took her back to the warm summer nights in Melbourne. Maybe she'd go back one day. Maybe Algis would leave her the farm after all and then she'd have her own place in Australia. Daina took her notebook out of her handbag and was about to start writing, but she stopped, hearing English words. A song sung by a man at the café's piano made her shiver.

*Please don't go to a foreign land,
Please don't leave me be.
Treasure your dreams of the present day,
Stay, o stay with me.*

*Many years I've been waiting alone
For the past to return –
Past that took you away from me,
But I'd never learned*

*How to be the person I was
That you liked so much.
Why do we need to live apart?
I want your love and your touch.*

As she immersed herself in the stranger's words, Arūnas' face returned. She remembered him sitting in front of her and telling her how beautiful she was, refilling her glass with champagne, giving her presents, clothing, flowers. She remembered Whittlesea, Star, who used to kick the milk bucket, Saulė, Paulius, Dorothy, Gintas, the postwar Lithuanians having their lunches at the North Melbourne Lithuanian Club. She thought of her trips to the Queen Victoria Market, where she had enjoyed the blend of Asian and European food and Australian-grown produce. She recalled walking through the streets of Melbourne, listening to the noise of the passing trams, and admiring the blossoming camellias and magnolias in people's gardens. She thought of her lonely evenings accompanied by the music of the accordion player Raimondo Milano, who used to soothe her youthful fantasies in the cow shed.

She enjoyed the words and the soothing melody very much but she noticed that others in the café didn't care about the singing. They were absorbed in their loud conversations. She wished to be on stage. She wished to tell them what she'd experienced living away from everything that was dear and familiar; she wished they knew how it felt to be surrounded by rare beauty, but at the same time feeling alone in the emotional emptiness of a strange land. She wished to ask the singer to sing in Lithuanian. Instead, she remained in her seat. She didn't want him to stop, because regardless of everything, he was right. She imagined Toivo singing to her:

*I'll cross the mountains and the seas,
I'll reach your broken heart.
Please don't forget your native land,
Promise me not to part.*

When the music stopped, Daina took her mirror out of her handbag, wiped the mascara that had begun to run and re-applied her lipstick. Then she stood up, collected her coat from the cloak room and walked out into the evening. It had started to rain. She tucked her notebook into her handbag, checked her watch and hastened her speed. She realised that Toivo was due home in an hour but she had other plans. It would've been too convenient to greet him, help him unpack, to listen to him talk about his trip.

As she walked, her red stilettos echoed through the *Laisvės alėja*. She reached her office and placed the overseas call. Dorothy answered and was pleased to hear that Daina decided to return to Australia.

Writing the migrant story: nostalgia, identity and belonging

Exegesis

Introduction

Constructing my PhD novel

Initial ideas

More freedom

If only my imaginary wings
Could take me over the oceans and grey roads,
Through forests and forgotten paths,
To silent years of disappearing friendships.

Into the shadows of distorted worlds
Attached to old grandmother's tales,
Where darkest secrets of unsaid desires
Still hidden in the child's fears.

My wings, my growing wings,
Give me the strength to reach the other shore
Where I could breathe with ease
And face my past I left behind so sore.

And when I get there
I'll free my shoulders from the sticking feathers
And spread my arms across the raining fields
So free, desirable and close; yet, still too distanced to reach.
(Pranauskas 1999, p. 153)

I wrote the poem *More freedom* as an expression of my own yearning for my "lost" homeland, Lithuania. I was working as a professional choir conductress in Lithuania when I came to Australia in 1989 to visit my relatives. I met my future husband, married, and did not return home. Through my writing, poetry and prose, I aim to communicate my experiences of being a migrant; the process of writing also helps me to come to terms with my experiences and to meet the challenges of living in Australia.

The experience of leaving one's homeland, with its particular political, socio-economic and cultural climate, to move to a new country has a major impact on most migrants and refugees (Cauchi 2002; Rushdie 1991). Some immigrants, placed outside their conform zones, and 'swallowed up in a strange and hostile world' become overwhelmed 'by the uncertainties and anxieties of facing the unknown' (Grinberg and Grinberg 1999, pp. 159, 158). The difficulty of adjusting and settling into a new, or diasporic space is related to a range of issues, linguistic and cultural as well as personal: separation from

family and friends, and the inability to find the same type or level of work. Not being able to speak one's language in a host country or share one's memories of collective upbringing can be a traumatic experience because a sense of belonging has been shattered (Bel 2011; Assmann 1992; Corby 2010; Coman et al. 2009).

I thought making links with the existing Lithuanian community in Australia – both those who had settled here since the 1940s and their descendants – would give me a sense of belonging. Instead, I found they had different linguistic and cultural practices that left me wondering where I belong. Lithuanians of the postwar era (1940s-1950s), Soviet era (1970s-1980s) and post-Soviet era (1990s onwards) had very different life experiences in Lithuania and very different motivations for coming to Australia. This PhD thesis has been inspired and shaped by both my personal experience of migration, and the contrasting experiences of other members of the Lithuanian community in Australia.

Contextualising the novel and exegesis

This creative writing thesis, made up of two components, a novel and an exegesis, is an exploration of the Lithuanian migrant experience in Australia, through fiction and analysis. My motivation for writing this thesis was to discover my voice as a fiction writer so that I could capture the voice of a refugee and migrant with particular life experiences, and contribute to the documentation of the diverse experiences of displacement and migration. I have chosen fiction as a vehicle for a number of reasons. Firstly, I decided to write a novel and not an autobiography, because I did not want to risk offending members of the Lithuanian community in Australia who might recognise themselves in the text. Secondly, fiction provided me with the opportunity to create a compelling contemporary narrative that I hope will give readers an insight into, and some understanding of, the lives of migrants. Thirdly, I wanted to write a narrative that would be accessible to a broad audience of migrants and non-migrants. Fourthly, fiction allowed me to use my imagination as well as my experiences, and to incorporate stories of the 1940s postwar Lithuanian refugees and contrast those with stories of more recent Lithuanian migrants in Australia. Finally, through my novel – the first attempt by a recent Lithuanian migrant to create an imaginary piece of writing, a fictional work that reflects on the arrival of Lithuanians to Australia during the social and political

circumstances of the 1980s – I wanted to contribute to the body of Australian literature about migration.

My exegesis, a reflection on the creative processes – imaginative and intellectual – at work in my writing of the novel, is situated within a body of theoretical work on nostalgia, memory and identity as projected by refugees and migrants in diaspora. The ideas and theories come from different disciplines – what might be termed a nomadic theoretical approach – and are found in both fictional and non-fictional works exploring immigration and its impact on diasporic communities in Australia, especially, but not only, the Lithuanian community.

My central research focus has been the challenges of writing fiction which effectively captures the experiences of Lithuanian refugees and migrants, especially in relation to nostalgia, memory and identity. My first research question asks: To what extent and in what ways is the migrant and refugee experience of life in Australia affected by “nostalgia”? The term “nostalgia” as used here draws from its twin etymological roots of “returning home” and “pain”. This first question gives rise to the second: Is it possible or even desirable to move beyond nostalgia?

A second group of questions focuses on memory: How do memories of the homeland impact on migrant and refugee feelings and emotions? How much does the “truth” about particular historical and political events vary between individuals and groups?

The third group of research questions asks: What happens to a person’s identity when they leave their homeland? Why and to what extent do some migrants and refugees need to attach themselves to a particular identity? How do migrant and refugee nostalgia and yearning impact on a particular identity?

My aim was to incorporate the history of Lithuanian settlement in Australia in my novel. In *Torn*, I refer to the historical and political differences between Lithuanians who are from the same place geographically but who were born in different eras. While writing my novel, I researched, analysed and reflected on the significance of the particular twentieth-century Lithuanian historical and political events. I also included

my own life events and used my creative imagination and experience as a published writer and poet in my first language – Lithuanian. In the process of writing, I read and reflected upon the writing of other migrant writers who question displacement, memories and nostalgia. These themes are raised in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of the exegesis. In chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4, I highlight the extent to which relationship between refugees, migrants, and members of the host society in Australia is fractured. Through observing the narrative and linguistic devices used by other migrant writers to convey their characters' thoughts, responses and emotions, I worked on the development of a specific vocabulary that would allow me to show how my novel's characters react to challenging life circumstances such as war and living in a totalitarian regime. Through this vocabulary, I aimed to convey the warmth and affection between my characters, as well as their reaction towards each other's life values.

Each time I read my novel, tears come into my eyes. In Daina's story I hear my own voice, full of regret that I stayed in Australia after coming here on a six-week holiday. Like Daina I battled with postwar Lithuanian attitudes towards me as a Soviet citizen with my "Sovietised" education and life values that appeared so foreign to them. I can recall my struggles trying to "fit" into the version of Lithuanian identity they had brought to Australia. I can feel the chill going up my spine remembering the many occasions during choir rehearsals when less experienced people felt they could "teach" me how to conduct, or tell me which songs should be omitted from the repertoire due to their "Russianised" style. While my conducting practices were questioned and new ideas dismissed, I did not fully understand the reasons for the hostile attitudes towards me until I embarked on my PhD research. Reading my novel, I can also imagine myself returning to Lithuania like my protagonist Daina, and not finding what I had left behind. I miss the sense of collective upbringing. I miss the friendships and intellectual stimulation formed in that particular environment. I miss the meetings in cafés where we discussed the latest book or shared jokes on clothing and food shortages. Until I came to Australia, and became a migrant and started dealing with the physical and psychological issues associated with migration, I did not know that life behind the Iron Curtain was so different.

Literature review

Nostalgia, memory and diasporic identity

Swiss physician Johannes Hofer developed the concept of nostalgia in the late seventeenth century. It originated from the Greek word “nostos”, referring to a yearning to return home, and “algos”, meaning suffering (cited in Bassett 2006, p. 1). Scholars including Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (1989), Vijay Agnew (2005), Roberta Rubenstein (2001), and Janelle L. Wilson (2005) have characterised nostalgia as an evolving and constantly transforming phenomenon. While each of these theorists brings a slightly different understanding to the concept, there is general agreement that for some migrants and refugees, nostalgia for the past may never disappear.

From my experience of “nostalgia” over the past 25 years in Australia, I agree with these theorists that although nostalgia is an evolving and transforming concept, it remains attached to a particular time and place in history. Therefore, migrant and refugee interpretations of the events they witnessed and lived through differ from individual to individual and from group to group.

In my novel, I address the impact of nostalgia on postwar refugees, their descendants and more recent Lithuanian migrants in Australia. The postwar Lithuanian characters in the novel yearn for their lost homes and loved ones and for a free Lithuania that, in their mind, is a necessary condition for their return. Soviet Lithuanian characters yearn for their friendships and a sense of collective upbringing that provided them with job security in their field of expertise and emotional satisfaction through what they did. Post-Soviet Lithuanian characters tend not to be nostalgic for a homeland and wish to distance themselves from their collective upbringing. The Australian-born descendants of the postwar Lithuanian characters romanticise their ancestors’ land and its people. The novel shows how these differences are often a point of difficulty and conflict within the Lithuanian community in Australia.

Daina feels nostalgic for her tours around the Soviet Union (pp. 40, 124), admitting that her ‘life in the Soviet Union wasn’t too bad’ (p. 123). But such statements anger my postwar characters and raise their suspicions about her (p. 18), and make her question

her nostalgic longings for the Soviet Lithuania they hate (p. 189). Some Australian-born descendants of the postwar Lithuanian characters romanticise their ancestors' land and its people (p. 121). The novel shows how these differences are often a point of difficulty and conflict within the Lithuanian community in Australia. Therefore, nostalgia for the past may not disappear, but the type of nostalgia people experience may differ between generations.

Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (2003), Svetlana Boym (2001a, 2001b), Ben-Yehuda Nachman (1995), Alin Coman et al. (2009), Jan Assmann (1995), James Wertsch (2009), and Slava Gerovitch (2011) have identified a strong connection between memory and the different ways people compare, contrast and reinterpret their living history in relation to their past. For Gerovitch (2011), the process of “reliving” or “recalling” the memories associated with particular events is open to various interpretations, allowing memory to bring in ‘a new version, totally overwriting the old one’ (p. 461). This revision brings the possibility of memories “shifting” from their original meaning that keeps evolving overtime (Nachman 1995; Rigney 2004; Assmann 1992; Coman et al. 2009; Portelli 1998, 2003; Walzer 2008).

The relationship between “history’s claims to objectivity” and memory can be illustrated in the ongoing Australian-Lithuanian commemorations of war or deportation, such as the June 1941 Deportations to Siberia Day. The twentieth-century Lithuania’s historical evidence, documented by Baranova (2000); Kelertas (2006), Daugirdaitė Sruogienė (1990), Josef Šeštokas (2010), coupled with individual and collective memories, bring out the sense of extraordinary human pain and loss. By retelling their stories and recollecting the past events, people construct new versions of the events that add to the collective experiences whether in their homeland or the diaspora. Some memories might vary because they are told in a different historical and political environment. Other memories, due to emotional trauma or partial forgetfulness, might blur or complement each other, contributing to the development of new meanings that “evolve over time”. My novel shows how the postwar Lithuanian characters, regretful of their displacement (pp. 17, 111, 246), share their memories that “shift” from their original meanings, resulting in the creation of various versions of the “truth”. The “shift” to various versions of the “truth” is apparent in the behaviour of the characters,

who may choose to change or withhold their own, and recycle their ancestors' stories (pp. 226-27, 93, 130). This helps in maintaining group and individual identity in relation to particular historical events.

Differences over time can also be seen in relation to personal identity. Researchers on diaspora, such as Conner Walker (1986), Avtar Brah (1998), Stuart Hall (1987, 1990, et al. 1996), Paul Gilroy (1994), Nira Yuval-Davis (2009, 2011), and Homi Bhabha (1993) approach identity as shifting, multiple and subject to change. By maintaining their national and cultural values, as Brah suggests, people "recognise" themselves and relate to similar life experiences. Hall et al. (1996), like Gilroy, situate identity between 'the personal and the public worlds' or between the "inside" and "outside" (pp. 597-598), which are exposed to different influences. Exposure beyond one's cultural boundaries, according to Bhabha and Yuval-Davis, is a consequence of changing life circumstances and ideologies. These diaspora theorists draw attention to migrant and refugee awareness of "otherness" in their host country.

In the exegesis I use the term *race* to highlight that it is a category commonly used to classify people – an *othering* technique that often masks prejudice and discrimination. I will take up on this point in chapter 3. According to Genovaitė Kazokas (1992), the postwar Lithuanian refugees escaped racial discrimination as part of their assimilation in Australia because they were white. Kazokas quotes Walter Jona, the then Victorian State Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, speaking to Melbourne Lithuanians on 26 December 1976, '...But the best thing about you Lithuanians is that on the street you are indistinguishable from ordinary Australians...and the worst is that there are not enough of you' (p. 55). To highlight migrant 'marginalisation' in Australia (Bhabha 1993, p. 5), Sneja Gunew (1993) notes how

In practice, multiculturalism celebrates post-Second World War migration (white, professional, European) and distinguishes this new establishment from more recent (and less acceptable) Asian immigrants whose arrival has sparked off a new grass-root version of the racist White Australia policy (p. 104)

Racial and cultural differences are also articulated in my novel. The postwar Lithuanian characters, gathering at the Lithuanian Club in North Melbourne, believe that 'Here we

treasure everything Lithuanian, because once we go outside the Club walls, it's another world' (p. 50). Also, racial tensions are obvious in Algis' hatred of Russians in Australia (p. 31), exposing migrants using *othering* to segregate themselves.

Diaspora researchers such as Brah (1998), Hall (1987) and Homi Bhabha (1993) helped me to discover the reasons behind my own sense of "otherness" in relation to the postwar Lithuanian cohort in Australia. In addition, they made me realise the extent to which that sense of "otherness" could be experienced between different cohorts. This shift in personal identity within different contexts is also central to Bhabha's claim that identity is never fixed (1993), and Hall's notion of positionality (1987, et al. 1996).

These ideas are explored through my novel's central character, Daina, who does not "fit" into the Melbourne Lithuanian community. Similarly to my own experience, Daina is faced with the community's national and cultural values which are different from her own.

Gender relations in the Soviet Union and Australia

A discussion of Daina's identity in the novel requires an examination of theories related to gender and its representation in the Soviet Union and Australia. Maxine Molyneux (1995), Beverly Dawn Metcalfe and Marianne Afanassieva (2005), and Dalia Leinarte (2010) point to lack of gender equality within the context of women's participation in the workplace in Soviet society. They point out how women were expected to be mothers and workers at the same time, and how the question of gender equality within communist societies was silenced or restrained by traditional sexist expectations. Leinarte (2010) explains that Soviet propaganda focused on the balance between women's motherhood and work commitments, and the media emphasised the model of "heroic" mothers. "Heroic" mothers were awarded medals for bringing up many children, working two to three jobs, and following the ideas of Soviet propaganda. Women were not only caught in the 'double burden' of work and family commitments (Leinarte 2010, p. 19; Molyneux 1995; Ghodsee 2010), but the additional pressure to participate in the country's political life placed women under a 'triple burden' (Einhorn 1993, p. 56).

As Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (1978) notes, ‘Despite the high rates of female labor-force participation in Soviet economic life’, women were ‘portrayed in situations that emphasise their maternal roles’, whereas the male activities were identified as ‘almost exclusively outside the home’ (p. 143). In the 1970s, women generally occupied “feminised” workplaces: Soviet women made up 91 per cent of all employees in trade and public catering, 98 per cent in nursery school personnel, 96 per cent of telephone operators, 95 per cent of librarians, 99 per cent of typists and stenographers, and 75 per cent of teachers, doctors and dentists (Warshofsky Lapidus 1978). Therefore, the role of the “mere housewife” was sharply devalued by Soviet ideology’ (Warshofsky Lapidus 1993, p. 141).

In the 1980s, the Soviet government tried to readdress the “woman question” and to redefine male-female roles. However, the process of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (openness and restructure) exposed previously taboo topics of rape, prostitution, homosexuality and contraception that had been hidden by the totalitarian regime (Warshofsky Lapidus 1993; Ghodsee 2010). These disclosures shattered the “flawless” image of communist society (Vitaliev 1990). The promotion of social equality in the Soviet Union provided women with child care, child allowances, and up to three years of maternity leave, as well as the option to work part-time. However, after the collapse of communism, most of these rights for women diminished, resulting in fewer options available for child care and an increase in the number of female workers (Molyneux 1995; Roudakova & Ballard-Reisch 1999).

Given that my novel’s protagonist, Daina, is faced with patriarchal attitudes in Australia, further debated in chapters 2 and 3, it is important to foreground women’s representation in the Australian context. Intellectual women’s participation in 1960s and ’70s Australia, as Sneja Gunew (1988) notes, was greatly constrained. According to Gunew, women found it difficult to express themselves in writing because they were represented as “minority writers”. They also felt “imprisoned” in their attempt to bring out their voice, and felt uncomfortable participating in activities outside of family commitments. Thus, gender relationships were patriarchal. Like other women, my novel’s protagonist, Daina, feels “imprisoned” in her attempt to speak of the sexist ways

she is treated in her great-uncle's house. She is devastated at finding out the level of control Algis exercises over her. He tells his neighbour:

‘She didn’t come here to collect information on us or anything like that. I checked her room and her notebook. The only thing she does is listen to the Russian news and that’s hardly a crime, is it?’ (p. 65)

Similarly, to illustrate male unwillingness to embrace the change in societal expectations, Miriam Dixon (1999) suggests that women in 1970s and ’80s Australia continued to be caught in patriarchal relations, highlighting male dominance and female domestication. This development, suiting the corporate environment, occurs ‘with the emergency of a new form of male domination or code of authority’ (p. 224). My novel’s character, Algis, learning that Daina hardly cooked in Lithuania, is relieved that she attended cooking classes before coming to visit him in Australia.

‘Thank God for that. For a moment I thought I was going to starve if all you could give was your artistic imagination!’ (pp. 24-25) His reply highlights the level of sexist expectations.

However, due to women’s increasing determination and technological progress, as Bettina Cass and Heather Radi (1981) observe, women became engaged in administrative, executive, clerical and technical employment. Similar to the situation in the Soviet Union, entering the workforce meant that Australian women had to juggle their family and work commitments. This in turn led to a decline in family size (Cass & Radi 1981). At the same time, Dixon (1999) adds, only a few women were elected to higher political ranks in the government and therefore equalisation between the sexes did not in fact improve. In my novel, Daina’s coming to Australia is an escape from her abusive father that has scarred her as a person and a woman (pp. 8-9). She hopes to do what she wants away from him, but enters in unsuitable relationships in her host country instead. This highlights women’s vulnerability and inequality. Women migrants have different experiences to male migrants (Jardine 1985).

Navies Ghafournia (2011), Hoan N Bui and Merry Morash (1999), and Das S Dasgupta (2005) agree that, due to social, economic and cultural factors brought from the home countries, migrant women are disadvantaged in their new country. I agree with Bui and

Morash in their suggestion that some 'Immigrant women arrive with disadvantages in social status and basic human capital resources relative to immigrant men' (p. 774). This may depend on what their status was before and after arrival to the host country. In Lithuania I had a rewarding and exciting career, but in Australia my status changed to that of a married woman, where I felt trapped by my household chores, and my husband's expectations that I would only work part-time. During my first ten years in Australia, I experienced low self-esteem and depression because I was not able to find a job as a choir conductress and I felt I only partially belonged in the Lithuanian community. Based on my own experience, I concur with Ghafournia, Dasgupta, Bui and Morash in their claim that it is difficult for migrant women to re-establish themselves in diaspora regardless of their previous social and professional status and this is reflected in the novel.

Living in the Soviet Union, I was not aware of feminism and I did not question my position as a woman. Neither does my character Daina. However, living in Australia, I became more aware of the sexism operating in both Lithuania and Australia; this disillusionment is also reflected in the character development of Daina. As my novel is an exploration of the woman migrant's experience, gender issues are crucial. Throughout the novel I deal with particular issues faced by migrant women who are coming to Australia from a very conservative culture where women must combine more traditional domestic roles with their work and other commitments. This was the case for me, coming from Lithuania where women worked and had professions but where worth and value were still judged by marriage and motherhood. In chapters 2 and 3, I focus on various fictional representations of migrant women and the difficulties they experience due to their racial and cultural dislocation and their attempts to free themselves from societal expectations and judgements.

Migrant writers in Australia

Part of my research involved reading fiction, autobiography, memoirs, biography, articles and history written by Australian migrant writers exploring issues related to life in diaspora. I have read the works of Elena Jonaitis, Raimond Gaita, Viktoras Baltutis, Luda Popenhagen, Josef Šeštokas, Rosa R. Cappiello, Alistair Thomson with Phyllis Cave, and others exploring concepts of nostalgia, memory and identity in diaspora.

These works have developed my understanding of migrant writing and its potential to tell the stories of life in diaspora. They have also helped me to think about ways of representing migrant characters in fiction, including how to depict behaviour patterns that reflect the characters' particular upbringing that might not be readily understood by Australian readers. Furthermore, these writers led me to reconsider the representation of historical events: how to relate these events to memories of different generations, and how best to make my characters project the sense of place and time in their living histories, while not overpowering their narratives with dry recitals of dates, places and people.

For the purpose of my research, I chose to focus on two particular texts because of their detailed exploration of nostalgia, memory and identity in the diaspora. They are Eva Sallis' novel *Hiam* (1998) and Ale Liubinas' trilogy *Homeland lost. An autobiographical novel: Aviete and after, Under eucalypts, Home no more* (2003). I also selected the works of these female authors because, in exploring the lives of women migrant characters, and their insecurities and struggles in patriarchal relationships, they deal with the same issues as my novel *Torn*.

While the works of the above authors explore some of the conflicts arising between the different generations, none of them explore in any detail the differences between migrants of the same nationality and the way in which nostalgia, memory and a sense of belonging is affected by their relationship with the community of origin in Australia. These I explore in my novel *Torn*.

Synopsis of *Torn: the story of a Lithuanian migrant*

Torn is written in third person from Daina's point of view. The novel is a creative exploration of a Lithuanian migrant's experience in the diaspora, particularly in the 1980s when the political, socio-economic and cultural environment radically shifted under Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika*. It is during this period that Daina comes to visit her great-uncle Algis, a postwar Lithuanian refugee, in Australia. While the underlying reason for her visit is to try to stay on and build her financial wealth to support her family back home, she is also a young woman in search of adventure and excitement.

A well-educated woman, she finds herself working on Algis' farm. She misses her family, her friends and even the national celebrations she previously ignored but which have now assumed an enhanced significance. In desperation, Daina turns to writing, where she can imaginatively transport herself back to her homeland and experience a sense of her former self. When she meets another recently-arrived Lithuanian, Saulė, their friendship eases her loneliness and isolation.

During her visit to Adelaide, Daina falls in love with Saulė's cousin, Arūnas. She becomes pregnant to Arūnas but he rejects her. The pregnancy is discovered by Algis when she has a miscarriage. This causes a rift with her great-uncle. After leaving the hospital, she moves in with her friend Dorothy, who helps Daina obtain a house-cleaning job where she meets another postwar Lithuanian, Gintas, and looks after him until he dies.

After six years of not being able to fulfil her or her family's expectations, Daina returns home, anticipating she will finally find happiness and love amongst her "own" people. However, the context now has changed. She discovers that the "home" she yearned for is no longer there. The hope she was clinging to, which sustained her during her exile, has gone. There is a new pain – the pain of being lost between two countries – and a new understanding of herself and her relationship with both countries. *Torn*, the title of the novel, refers to the pain of separation and nostalgic connections to "home".

Conclusion

In this introduction to the exegesis, I have highlighted my initial ideas and my motivation for writing this doctoral thesis. I have outlined the key concepts of the thesis: nostalgia, memory, and their impact on the renegotiation of migrant and refugee identity in a host country. In addition, I have set the background for further exploration of gender relations within the Soviet Union and within Australia. I have also indicated the main literary and theoretical sources of fictional and non-fictional works I read in preparation for and development of the exegesis and the novel. Finally, I have provided a synopsis of the novel, which summarises the storyline of the narrative.

The characteristics of Lithuanian national identity shaped by the Second World War are outlined in the following chapter. This includes the identity of some 10,000 postwar generation Lithuanian refugees who settled in Australia from the late 1940s to the 1950s (Jūragis 1961). More recently, approximately 500 Lithuanian migrants settled here of their own accord between 1970 and 1999 (*Australian Bureau of Statistics* 2008a, 2008b). I will discuss the identities of these different cohorts, and the reasons for the fractured relationships that exist between the different groups of migrants. In discussing Lithuanian identity in the Australian diaspora, I prepare the background for the contrasting sets of national and cultural values, traditions, attitudes and behaviour patterns of my novel's characters. These patterns and values are indicative of the specific historical and cultural ideologies that the characters brought with them from their homeland or absorbed in Australia.

The process of writing the novel, including my research and analysis of the relationship between postwar, Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanians in Australia, is addressed in chapter 2. This chapter also contains my own reflections on my own experience as a migrant.

In chapter 3, I discuss the writing of Sallis and Liubinas, particularly the creation of their female characters. I highlight the reasons why Sallis' and Liubinas' writing became inspirational throughout my drafting and redrafting of the novel, and the ways in which it helped me to think about and meet the challenges of writing the experiences of Lithuanian women migrants.

Chapter 4 examines memory of place in Arnold Zable's novel *Cafe Scheherazade* (2005) and Vitali Vitaliev's *Vitali's Australia* (1991). Zable's *Cafe Scheherazade* draws on pre-Second World War and Second World War events in Lithuania, retold by Jewish characters, primarily Holocaust survivors. *Vitali's Australia* contains a selection of articles on Australia and an autobiographical account of the prominent Ukrainian writer Vitali Vitaliev. I demonstrate how Zable's and Vitaliev's works helped me to gain a greater awareness of how memory of place contributes to reshaping and renegotiating the meaning of "home".

In the concluding chapter, I summarise the benefits of my doctoral research as a woman migrant writer. This includes a reflection on how well I have been able to bridge the gap between my life in the Soviet Union and my life in Australia through a discussion of issues of identity: who I was, who I am, and who I may become in my search to belong.

Chapter 1

Politicised identities in twentieth-century Lithuania

Ideological shifts

Understanding the historical and cultural context that led to the emigration of Lithuanians to Australia has been crucial to the writing of my PhD. This chapter outlines the research through the exploration of aspects of Lithuanian history that are relevant to my project, and the historical and political circumstances of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania before, during and after the Second World War that impacted on the lives of its citizens. It has been an integral part of this project to compare and contrast the reasons for and the extent to which Lithuanian identity in Australia differs between the members of the postwar refugees and Soviet and post-Soviet citizens, and to highlight the impact the political and historical ideologies have on Lithuanians in Australia, their sense of belonging and their attachment to their ancestors' past. The ways in which my novel relates to these themes is argued in this chapter.

Through its representation of the interrelations between the historical and cultural context of twentieth-century Lithuanian history, my aim was to ensure that the novel was both informative and realistic in relation to migrant experience. Living in Lithuania from 1957 to 1989 but not knowing my country's history, I was deprived of understanding the significance of historical and political events. One month before I left Lithuania for Australia, I remember making jam from the berries collected in a forest close to my home. A girlfriend came around to invite me to go to the beach, just 15 minutes walk from my flat, to participate in the Baltic Way celebration. It was the 23rd of August 1989. 'I am not interested in politics and am much happier to make jam than hold hands with strangers for no reason,' I said. We both laughed and she went alone. Even now, thinking about that particular day makes me sad; I did not realise the significance of the Baltic Way celebration, which symbolised the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet-Nazi plot to take over Europe. And I did not even get to eat the jam I made that day because a month later I left Lithuania and on the 22nd of September I landed in Melbourne. More than 25 years have

passed, and my regret at not being a part of the Baltic Way has increased in Australia over time; my desire to learn more about Lithuanian history has also grown.

I began to increase my knowledge of Lithuanian history through conversations with postwar generation Lithuanians, as well as through borrowing books from the Lithuanian libraries and archives around Australia. In the 1990s, after Lithuania became independent from the Soviet Union, I discovered more of my country's history, realising that there are different interpretations of the same events, which impact on postwar, Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanians' sense of belonging in Australia. In my novel *Torn*, my previous lack of historical knowledge is depicted through the novel's character Daina, who is so taken aback at learning the suppressed Lithuanian history in Australia that she is forced to re-evaluate her identity.

Stuart Hall (1987, et al. 1996) suggests that identity brings together or sets apart different groups as well as "aligning" individuals and collectives to a particular belonging. Their belonging reflects their set of historical, linguistic and cultural values within and outside their own community. Hall notes that our 'identity is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history' (1987, p. 46). Identity, to Hall et al. (1996),

bridges the gap between the "inside" and the "outside" – between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, at the same time internalising their meanings and values, making them "part of us," helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. (pp. 597-598)

Applying Hall's ideas on identity to the Lithuanian community in Australia, it is clear that the postwar refugees and more recent Lithuanian migrants "align" themselves with the historical, political and socio-economic circumstances they were exposed to before and after settling in Australia. At the same time, the individual and group "alignment" between the different cohorts of Lithuanians living here in Australia has to be renegotiated due to differences in their historical and cultural ideologies. Although Hall writes of matching identities for the purpose of uniformity, he also explains how our identities continually evolve, or are "in process" and are never complete.

Nevertheless, while identities continue to evolve, it has also been noted that refugee and migrant identity stalls “in its process”. This is because, along with inevitable change, people need to cling to certainty and continuity (Chase & Shaw 1989). This tension between the need for both change and continuity emerges as a critical issue for the characters in my novel.

Hall’s theorising of identity change shares much in common with Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridised spaces where identities become intermixed. Bhabha (1995) explains how the “inside-outside” binary opposition creates a “third space” where homeland identities mixed with diaspora identities are renegotiated. The “third space” opens up the possibility for remaking meaning, for constructing a hybridised cultural system – a “third space of enunciation”. The emergence of a new language created in the “third space” separates migrant identity between “selves” and “others” because

The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The natural(ised), unifying discourse of “nation”, “peoples”, or authentic “folk” tradition, those embedded myths of culture’s particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition. (pp. 247-248)

By maintaining their national and cultural celebrations, commemorations and events, Australian-Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians managed to “preserve” (Putniņš 1981) their identity. The argument that pure Lithuanian identity does not exist (Daugirdaitė Sruogienė 1990; Vardys 1978; Gerutis 1969; Riasanovsky 1992), supports Bhabha’s (1995) observation that identity is always shifting and is in a process of hybridisation. Hybridised identity places migrants in Bhabha’s “third” or “in-between” space (1995). Lithuanian-born postwar refugees and the later Lithuanian migrants are impacted by the “third” or “in-between” space after their resettlement in the host country. Lithuanian identity in Australia has been altered by migration, by being in Australia, and by the level of attachment they retain to the homeland. Placed in the “third” or “in-between” space they are forced to renegotiate their previous identity. In this process, the postwar, Soviet and post Soviet Lithuanians remain separated by their unique identity. This identity continues to evolve in Australia allowing them to reinvent their national and cultural traditions their own way.

In the process of destabilising myths of “authentic” languages and cultures to reflect self-awareness at any given point, each generation reconstructs tradition (Putinaitė 2004; Iveković 2002; Putniņš 1981; Sabaliauskas 2012; Švedas 2014; Ommundsen 2004). Bhabha’s idea of cultural transformation, occurring as a consequence of migration, displacement and relocation in diaspora, can be illustrated by the experience of Lithuanian migrants in Australia. However, displacement is experienced in different ways by different groups. The postwar Lithuanian refugees were displaced by the Soviet-German War (1941-45), whereas Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian migrants settled in Australia due to different circumstances (Pranauskas 2003). Not only did they come from political and cultural discourses that were very different to those they found in Australia, but, in addition, each cohort was separated from the other because they arrived here at different times in Lithuania’s history; they thus related to a particular identity that reassured them of their belonging to a distinctive past. However, as Bhabha implies in his reference to “unsettling”, the belief of belonging to a particular past (*any* past) is constructed, rather than existing independently of our own invention.

Through the postwar, Soviet and post-Soviet characters in my novel, I show the differences between the historical, political and socio-economic circumstances of their settlement in Australia. These circumstances provide the reader with the background behind the complications the novel’s characters face in belonging to a particular Lithuanian cohort in Australia.

“Politicised belonging”

The idea of “politicised belonging” is a useful concept for understanding the barriers that separate individuals from each other’s past. Any identity, bound to historical and political circumstances, becomes “politicised” and complicates the sense of individual as well as collective belonging. Nira Yuval-Davis (2009) suggests that ‘Identity politics is one *form* of politics of belonging’ to a particular group, that usually constructs its own rules in determining ‘boundaries of belonging, in ways that usually promote the agent’s own power within the group’ (p. 129). Constructed in a particular way, previous identity boundaries in diaspora are tested, and consequently result, as Yuval-Davis (2011) explains, in migrant and refugee separation into “strangers” and those who “do not belong” to the other’s cultural, religious and ethnic identities.

In the novel, Daina finds that because she is a product of the Soviet system that others in the Australian-Lithuanian cohort have escaped from, she is not welcome in their group. This illustration of the postwar cohort's attitudes and perceptions towards migrants like Daina is a consequence of "politicised belonging".

Yuval-Davis' concept of those who "do not belong" describes the prejudice against people who do not look and act like "us" in the diaspora, even if they were born there. I find this concept highly relevant to people sharing the same broad national and cultural background. Within the Lithuanian community in Australia, "politicised belonging" is constructed around the membership of Lithuanian-born groups such as postwar refugees and Soviet or post-Soviet citizens – each group having been exposed to different ideologies in their homeland. The postwar Lithuanian generation was threatened by deportations and war, the Soviet citizens lived as part of the totalitarian regime, and the post-Soviet citizens experienced the rebirth of the Lithuanian nation after its period of suppression from 1940 to 1990. The contrasting circumstances of Lithuanian settlement in Australia divided the migrant community into "us", i.e. the postwar Lithuanian cohort, and "strangers", i.e. the more recent Lithuanian migrants in Australia who "do not belong" to the postwar cohort's past. The "politics of belonging" within the Lithuanian community can be related to Hall's idea of "internalising" the "inside" identity.

Some Lithuanian migrants in Australia, especially those from the Soviet and post-Soviet cohorts, may not feel comfortable in speaking out, and may never express their feelings of being "strangers" or of having a sense of "not belonging". These more recent migrants may feel outsiders because their experience of their homeland was so different to that of the postwar cohort: they were not displaced from their homeland, did not live in the DP camps of Europe, did not come to Australia on the army ships, did not build the Lithuanian Houses here, and did not greatly participate in the activities of the postwar Lithuanian generation (Pranauskas 2003; Cibas 2014a, 2014b; Baltutis 1996; Varnas 2001; Doniela, cited in Kelmickaitė 2014). They may feel that if they want to belong, they must continue to maintain the same format of commemoration and celebration of national and cultural events (Bartkevičienė 1998a, 1998b; Popenhagen 2012), and certainly not form new groups or publish their own newspapers (Žemkalnis,

cited in Šeštokas 2000; Pranauskas 2003). There is an expectation that members of the same nationality are all part of the one “imagined community”, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s well-known phrase (Anderson 2006), however this is not always the case. For example, some Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian migrants in Australia came from families affected by the Soviet-German War. This included my maternal grandfather, who in 1944, along with another 75,000 Lithuanians, was forced to dig the German trenches (Vardys 1965; Krickus 1997; Kasekamp 2010). These experiences of hardship within the family are not, however, viewed in the same light because the Soviet and post-Soviet migrants were still not themselves among the postwar Lithuanians when the exodus to Australia occurred (Pranauskas 2003).

At the same time, some postwar Australian-Lithuanians admit to feeling guilty because they survived the war and escaped deportations (Baltutis 1996). They admit that they were fortunate not to have endured the fate of their relatives and friends. They did not suffer the hardship of being deported to Siberia – being locked into cramped train carriages without sanitation and having to endure extreme climactic conditions (Žemkalnis 2013). But the admissions tend not to be public: the public narrative tends to focus on the vastly different experiences of postwar and more recent Lithuanian migrants, often causing great friction as they try to reconcile a relationship determined by the assumption that those who became displaced due to war and those who arrived from the Soviet Union cannot fully understand each other. Hall’s observation of the difficulty of trying to breach the gap between “inside” and “outside”, or between refugees, migrants and the wider society, also reflects the tensions “inside” the Lithuanian community in Australia. The gap of understanding between postwar Lithuanian refugees and more recent Lithuanian migrants makes the latter feel like “strangers” who “do not belong” to a community, which is primarily defined by the postwar cohort’s experiences. I elaborate on these issues in chapters 3 and 4.

The differences that exist between the various groups within the Lithuanian migrant community are not given voice within that community in Australia, and only rarely do articles in the Australian-Lithuanian press depict the tensions felt by Soviet and post-Soviet citizens. I redress this shortcoming in my novel, by offering a fictional description of “politicised belonging” through my characters’ identification with their

distinct personal histories. I construct my narrative to show how Algis' character as well as other characters of the postwar generation maps their boundaries of belonging to the Lithuanian community in Australia. I also test the boundaries of my Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian characters Daina and Raminta, who are expected to act and think like the postwar group. While trying to "fit" within set boundaries of belonging, they find it difficult to "align" themselves with the constructed selection of who belongs to "us" and who is identified as "a stranger".

Repositioning of identity

The divide within the Lithuanian community in Australia reflects the shifting boundaries of belonging back in Lithuania. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed between the Soviet Union and Germany on the 23rd of August 1939 (Palmer 2006; Riasanovsky 1992; Smith 1994; Bethell 1974; Hiden 2003; Kasparavičius et al. 2012) contained a secret protocol partitioning Poland and transferring the Baltic States to the Soviet Union. The unlawful incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union resulted in Lithuania losing the independence it had enjoyed for 22 years between the First and Second World Wars (Kasekamp 2010; Kazokas 1992; Kedys 1994; Dunsdorfs 1975; Tarvydas 1997; Taškūnas 2005; Samoškaitė 2007; Terleckas 2014). This directly impacted on Lithuanian identity, which during the years of Soviet occupation became destabilised and increasingly "Sovietised" (Putinaitė 2007; Gailienė 2008; Kelertas 2006; Švedas 2014; Terleckas, cited in Kniežaitė 2014; Šapoka 1950; Žvinklienė 1996; Felder & Weindling 2013; Davoliūtė & Balkelis 2012). The *repositioning* of national identity resulted in the separation of Lithuanian nationals into those who survived within the homeland and those who were deported or fled from their homeland. Lithuanian boundaries of belonging became marked by "Sovietisation".

My novel aims to highlight how postwar Australian-Lithuanians, who fled the Soviet regime, distance themselves from "Sovietised" Lithuania and its people who settled later in Australia. It aims to show the continuing hold of ideological positions despite the radically new context in which refugees and migrants found themselves in Australia. It problematises what is meant by "being Australian" – the impossibility of completely severing links with the past, even when that past is no longer directly relevant to the material circumstances of current life. The novel interprets this through its characters,

who represent an extreme case what Yuval-Davis identifies as a “power within the group” mentality, holding Lithuanian refugees and migrants apart from each other. But the phenomenon is not confined to such extreme cases, and in many respects the novel serves as a mirror to mainstream Australia, which, at least as far as non-Aboriginal Australians are concerned, comprises a nation of migrants (Luke 1980; Arnold et al. 1993; *Australian Bureau of Statistics* 2008a, 2008b).

The history of the Soviet Union is an example of the extent to which the occupiers determined identity, whether individual or collective. The “national problems”, or claims for statehood, were simply “solved” by deportation (Matulionis 1992; Davoliūtė & Balkelis 2012). Those deported included those with the highest levels of education and their loss greatly weakened the economic, social and cultural capital of the Lithuanian nation (Gailienė 2008; Daugirdaitė Sruogienė 1990). Between 1940 and 1953, 198,367 Lithuanian citizens were imprisoned in the labour camps that were part of the GULAG system, housing “socially dangerous elements”, including farmers, pregnant women, and children (Solzhenitsyn 1974; Kurtinaitytė Aras & Zavadskis 2013; Lukšas 2013; Sadūnaitė 1987). Of that number, 20,000 died of starvation, cold and hard labour, or perished in any number of ways in the labour camps and prisons (Kurtinaitytė Aras & Zavadskis 2013).

The statistics cannot be translated into the human feelings of despair and disbelief, the experience of sorrow, suffering and pain, which left people angry, confused and heart-broken. My aim in the novel is to highlight the extent to which postwar Lithuanian experiences in their homeland remain integral to the characters’ identities in Australia. In *Torn*, the postwar characters continually reminisce about their family members being killed or sent to Siberia. They share their fear and sadness with each other. Out of their collective experiences, the characters maintain life-long friendships, resulting in the construction and operation of their own “power within the group” as they help each other deal with their troubled past, and defend themselves against prejudice and discrimination – whether real or imagined.

During the Soviet-German War and the years of Soviet occupation, competing political agendas exposed people to prejudice and discrimination. The historical evidence shows

the extent of mistreatment of the “undesirable” races. The war forced approximately 9 million Germans living in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to leave East-Central Europe. During the Soviet occupation, between 165,000 and 254,000 Lithuanian Jews were killed (Taškūnas 2012).¹ The identity of Soviet Lithuanian citizens was “politicised”, not only by the direct impact of Sovietisation, but also by the exodus in 1944 to war-devastated Germany of between 65,000 and 100,000 Lithuanians who did not trust the Soviet regime (Daugirdaitė Sruogienė 1990; Kasekamp 2010; Bleiere et al. 2006; Dapkutė 2012).² Some spent four years or longer in the displaced persons (or DP) camps in Germany before migrating to the United States, Canada, Venezuela, Argentina and Australia (Kazokas 1992). The Soviet propaganda apparatus labelled those who managed to escape from the Soviet Union “Nazis”, “Fascists”, “undemocratic”, “criminals”, “undesirable elements”, and “traitors of the state” (Ginsburgs 1957; Cohen & Kapsis 1977; Garrett 1978; Kazokas 1992; Birn 2006; Kasekamp 2010). At this historical and political point in time, a significant part of the Lithuanian nation was dislocated from their homeland (Gailienė 2008; Hiden et al. 2008). As noted by Jonathan H. L’Hommedieu (2011), the Baltic DPs were afraid of ‘what would happen to them when the war ended...Would they universally be categorised as Nazi sympathisers since they had fled from the Soviet Union and be punished?’ (p. 53). These accusations made them particularly vulnerable in trying to re-establish their relationship with the homeland.

Soviet propaganda, targeting the Lithuanian citizens who sought refuge in the DP camps of Europe, split the Lithuanian nation (Daugirdaitė Sruogienė 1990; Dapkutė 2012). Categorisation into “us” – those who remained in Lithuania – and “them” – those who escaped abroad, created a distinction between “inside” and “outside” identification with the homeland.

The postwar Lithuanian experiences are documented in *The Australian-Lithuanian chronicles* (Jūragis 1961; Baltutis 1983), newspapers, and in books by Viktoras Baltutis (1996), Elena Jonaitis (1997), Ramūnas Tarvydas (1997), Josef Šeštokas (2010), Ava

¹ Gailienė (2008) argues that the number of Lithuanian Jews killed in the concentration camps or ghettos during the Holocaust was between 160,000 and 200,000.

² The Lithuanian historian Vanda Daugirdaitė-Sruogienė (1990) notes that the number of people who left Lithuania in 1944 reached 100,000. However, later research calculates the total as between 60,000 and 65,000 (Dapkutė 2012; Bleiere et al. 2006).

Saudargienė (2005), Luda Popenhagen (2012), and Genovaitė Kazokas (2003). These sources serve as vital evidence of Lithuanian migrants being able to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of war and deportations. Together with the work of Anne Applebaum (2003, 2013), Danutė Gailienė (2008), Nerija Putinaitė (2007), Adolfas Šapoka (1950), and Algimantas P. Taškūnas (1992, 1996, 2005, 2007, 2012), these sources which document the Lithuanian exodus informed the writing of my novel.

However, the non-fictional literature does not capture the extent to which the Soviet propaganda continued to impact on members of the postwar Lithuanian community in Australia. In my novel, I deal with this particular issue by showing that postwar characters like Algis are aware of being viewed as the “traitors of the state” by the Soviet propaganda. Their identity in Australia is located in Bhabha’s “third space”, where they are forced to renegotiate their sense of belonging, and have to redefine their connection with a homeland and its people who have been continually influenced by the Soviet propaganda.

Negotiating assimilation

Lithuanians, like other citizens of the Soviet Union who managed to escape from the Soviet grip in 1944, were not willing to return (Bethell 1974; Gellately 2007; Taylor 2011). At the end of the Second World War, Australia suffered a labour shortage and decided to accept large numbers of displaced persons from war-ravaged Europe (Jupp 1995; Luck 1980). The number of Lithuanians who came to Australia between 1947 and 1953 was 9,906, some six per cent of the total of 170,000 DPs who arrived during this period (Kunz 1988). They were shipped to Australia by troop carriers and housed in former army camps. Bound by a two-year work contract, even highly educated and talented refugees were only allocated work as “labourers” and “domestics” (Kunz 1988; Jupp 1995; Tarvydas 1997; Taškūnas 2007; Popenhagen 2012; Šeštokas 2010; Kazokas 1992). In this way, the Australian government, holding power over the vulnerable refugees and using them for unskilled jobs, rebuilt the Australian economy (Jupp 1995; Kunz 1988; Tarvydas 1997). But the categorisation into “labourers” and “domestics” exacerbated even further the diminished self-esteem of Lithuanians already displaced during the war. For many, the inability to work in their professions after the end of their two-year contract destroyed their previous status (Pranauskas 2003; Baltutienė et al.

1990; Zubrickas 1999; Šeštokas 2010; Jūragis 1961; Jonaitis 1997; Cibas 2014b; Saudargienė 2005).

In my fictional account of these events, I wanted to show the extent of the psychological and emotional trauma the above usage of “labourers” and “domestics” policy had on the postwar characters. Many, trapped in “labouring” and “domestic” jobs for the rest of their working lives, continually mourned the loss of their professional standing and identity. By writing in the way I have about the treatment of Lithuanian refugees in Australia in the postwar period, my aim was to raise the reader’s awareness of the impact of the Australian government’s decisions at the time on refugees and migrants, both on their individual self-identity and on their group vulnerability. I aimed to show how historical and political developments can result in a whole generation feeling disadvantaged, “unsettled”, and dislocated. In their realisation that there is no certainty and continuity to cling to (cf. Chase & Shaw 1989), the postwar era characters appear in the novel (as they do in reality) as sad and heart-broken.

The Lithuanian nationals who managed to escape from the Soviet totalitarian regime to Australia were encouraged to assimilate. Fitting the “good type” category – blue-eyed, blond-haired, fair-skinned “Balts” – it was assumed that Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians would easily become part of Australian society, and they were expected to ‘fit into the Australian pattern [that] would influence the Australian attitude to migration as a whole...’ (Holt 1953, p. 3). However, the postwar Lithuanians in Australia were also regarded as “others” in their host country (Šeštokas 2010; Kazokas 1992; Popenhagen 2012). Baltic refugees in Tasmania were looked upon as if they ‘had come from the moon’ and were constantly stared at (Tarvydas 1997, p. 21). They were required to talk among themselves in English (Pranauskas 2003; Tarvydas 1997). Trying to close the gap between being viewed as migrants, refugees and “others” (Tarvydas 1997), and wishing to secure a safer future, the great majority of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian refugees took Australian citizenship. The Australian Census 1971 indicates that between 1945 and 1966, out of a total of 36,613 Baltic migrants, 33,545 became naturalised (cited in Jordens 1995). By becoming Australian citizens, they succumbed to the policy of Assimilation (post-Second World War to 1973). At the same time, their “otherness”

both distinguished them from the wider Australian society and helped them to maintain their distinct identity.

Despite the Assimilation policy and expectations of the time, the postwar generation of Lithuanian migrants were determined to maintain their own culture. In Australia, they built Lithuanian Houses or Clubs, which were, and still are, used to accommodate Lithuanian weekend schools, community meetings, theatre performances, and concerts, and are open for choir, theatre and folk dancing rehearsals free of charge (Jūragis 1961; Baltutis 1983; Baltutienė et al. 1990; Popenhagen 2012). The policy of Assimilation, responsible for the migrant blending into “Australian identity” (Clyne 1967; Putniņš 1981; Rizvi 1989), did not deter the postwar Lithuanians from holding onto their homeland identity. Their sense of national identity and their determination to be “visible” as part of the Lithuanian nation remained strong (Baltutis 1981). At the same time, their “visibility” contributed to their sense of “otherness” in Australia.

My novel highlights this quest for “visibility” within the Lithuanian community in Australia, and the commitment of the postwar Lithuanian generation to preserve their version of Lithuanian identity. The examples of “clinging” to the maintenance of their national and cultural identity away from home are expressed through the community spirit and collective commitment to ongoing commemorative events. Participation in the Australian-Lithuanian Days or celebration of Lithuanian Independence Day places the community “outside” other refugee and migrant communities as well as being different from the wider Australian traditions. Writing about the well-established Lithuanian community’s maintenance of their cultural activities in Australia is intended to give the reader a greater understanding of what drives and sustains the dedication of the postwar characters in the novel to cling to a particular identity. At the same time, the novel aims to show how different their new life in Australia had become compared with what the Soviet Union citizens continued to endure.

Outcome of suppression

In the period of the 1940s to the 1960s, the policy of Soviet collectivisation forced people into the establishment of *kolkhozes* (collective farms) and *sovkhozes* (state farms), disadvantaging the “small-scale cooperative” farming practices formed during

the years of Lithuanian independence (1918-40) (Gerutis 1969; Hope 1994; Gailienė 2008). The building of a classless communist society was greatly encouraged through the collective work and through the Soviet attempt to liquidate private enterprises. Those who owned land or private property were viewed as “the bourgeois class” and the enemies of collectivisation (Anušauskas 1996; Noguee 1972; Küng 1999; Vardys 1978). Lithuanians resisted by selling their property and livestock rather than have it collectivised. However, by 1952, 96 per cent of Lithuanian farmers were forced into *kolkhozes* (Gerutis 1969), with postwar generation Lithuanians experiencing the full impact of the discontinuation of their farming practices, especially their individual and collective identity as a resilient and independent people.

The impact of these developments in relation to collectivisation and privatisation has not been sufficiently dealt with in the Australian context. By using the historical evidence on deportation and dispersal of the Lithuanian nation and fictionalising it, I am giving experiential depth to the various historical accounts. My novel addresses the issue of the postwar Lithuanian cohort in Australia losing their homes and properties to collectivisation, and their inability to forget and forgive those who repossessed their land, properties and assets, not only Russians but even their own servants. The critical point is that the non-fictional accounts that have been written do not express the fear, frustration, desperation, guilt or inability to change the sequence of events, and thus do not adequately address the experiences of real people. In dealing with the emotional impact of these events, expressed through my characters’ narratives, my aim is to provide with an appreciation of what it might have been like to personally experience the collectivisation and privatisation of homes and properties that occurred as part of the process of “Sovietisation”.

Integration into the Soviet Union and the sovietisation of identity was achieved through force, collaboration and submissiveness to the totalitarian regime (Kelertas 2006; Dawisha & Parrott 1995; Putinaite 2007; Terleckas 2014; Felder & Weindling 2013). As Nerija Putinaite (2007) confirms, Soviet Lithuanian citizens were expected to live a quiet life and to be content with what the regime had to offer. Dissenters and rebels who resisted the Soviet regime (Remeikis 1980; Kudirka & Eichel 1978; Sadūnaitė 1987; Tinu 2010) found themselves in society’s “third space”, where they were viewed as

“others”, and were exposed to punishment. Gailienė (2008) confirms that, whether within or outside the country, Lithuanian citizens could not escape the consequences of the Soviet regime due to the Committee of the State Security or KGB activities. The KGB, established in March 1954 in Moscow (Freemantle 1982), comprised between 390,000 and 700,000 Soviet citizens (Knight 1988). Operating as agents within and outside the Soviet Union, they gathered intelligence and conducted counterintelligence operations not only within the Soviet Union but also in other nations (‘Organisation of the committee for state security’ 1997). As historian Ronald Hingley (1970) notes, Russian espionage activities made people suspicious of each other and wary of collaboration with the Soviets. As Soviet citizens were encouraged to join the KGB ranks in return for greater pay and a more exclusive lifestyle (Vitaliev 1991), people were naturally suspicious of who these agents might be (Kedys 1994).

Research conducted by the Social Anthropology Centre at the University of Vilnius (Šutinienė 2007) assessed views on Lithuanian collaboration with other nations. The research confirms that of those Lithuanian citizens who responded to the survey, 25 per cent believe Lithuanians should be ashamed of their collaboration with the Soviets. Also, 23 per cent of respondents agree that the Lithuanian nation should be ashamed of the collaboration of some citizens with the Nazis. The figures show that the majority of Lithuanians believed that collaboration with the Nazis was less shameful than collaboration with the Russians. By investigating Lithuanian citizens’ views on the consequences of their historical and political past, the research highlights how the Lithuanian nation remains divided in its attempt to redefine their belonging in relation to their Soviet identity. At the same time, evaluation of the past events in the present may not be accurate due to the lack of historical clarity on just who the collaborators were and whether they collaborated voluntarily or by force (Hingley 1970; Kelertas 2006; Bethell 1974; Baranova 2000; Kasekamp 2010; Gellately 2007; Khapaeva & Kuposov 2007; Toymentsev 2011).

The non-fictional sources that document the divisions among Lithuanians and the destabilisation of a shared Lithuanian identity shed light on why my fictional Lithuanian characters from the Soviet era, Daina and Paulius, are met with suspicion in Australia. In my novel, I portray the extent to which, in the eyes of their postwar compatriots, they

are viewed as communists and possibly KGB agents. The postwar Lithuanian migrants recall their experiences of neighbours or friends who turned into KGB collaborators, and view the Soviet Lithuanian characters with suspicion. In the novel, I make my Soviet and post-Soviet characters reveal views about why some want to hold onto and others let go of their Soviet inheritance, and why some know more about their country's past than others. I use Daina's character to bring out the differences in the way historical and cultural perceptions separate Lithuanians in the homeland and in the diaspora. I will explore the meaning of the above views and perceptions in more detail in chapter 4.

When I came to Australia, I spent a lot of time reading about the suppression of human rights by the Soviet system. I discovered accounts of various individual attempts to break away from the Soviet system, showing the world the silent individual and group resistance to the totalitarian Soviet regime. I learnt of the Lithuanian human rights and freedom fighter Romas Kalanta, who on 14 May 1972, in the park of the Musical Theatre in the *Laisvės alėja* (Alley of freedom) in the city of Kaunas, poured petrol over his body and turned himself into a living torch. I learnt of his last words: 'I am dying for the freedom of Lithuania' (Vardys 1978, p. 174). I learnt how, following this incident, government authorities ordered his immediate burial, resulting in mass demonstrations during which some 500 people were arrested. I learnt how Party Secretary Antanas Sniečkus remarked at the time that such behaviour was related to "bourgeois ideology", which was blamed for its 'attempts to poison the consciousness of the working people with the poison of nationalism' (*Tiesa* 27 May 1972, p. 2, cited in Vardys 1978, p. 177). My ignorance of these events in Lithuania show the extent to which the Soviet system tried to blindfold its citizens by withholding information about non-conformers like Kalanta. Only in Australia did I come to know how individuals rebelled against the Soviet regime, highlighting the strong national desire for Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union.

Such events not only highlight how the history of the Soviet period was greatly suppressed, but also how, after they had been discovered and reinterpreted, individuals like me and, by extension, my novel's protagonist, Daina, questioned our Soviet identity. Daina becomes the mouthpiece for my own experience – a personal experience that has not been adequately captured in the existing analytical and historical literature.

By providing an opportunity for the reader to discover with Daina the misfortunes of those Lithuanian nationals who suffered greatly under Soviet rule in Lithuania, my aim was to show, not only how people like Daina grew up ignorant of their country's history, but also how, empowered by new knowledge acquired in Australia, they began to see why they related to their homeland in a different way to the postwar characters.

Meaning of “returning home”

As Edward Said (1986) argues, when migrants and refugees share their experiences with each other, it allows them to “return to themselves”. An example of this phenomenon is the exile of Palestinians from their homeland in the 1940s (Nachman 1995), which led to the enforced dislocation and displacement of the Palestinian nation. Said (1986) observes that, for the migrant, the past is intertwined with history and the desire to “return” to the ‘place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences...’ (p. 33), where they can feel at “home”.

The circumstances under which Palestinians lost their homes are very different from those under which the postwar Lithuanians lost theirs. However, I found that even though the circumstances are different, migrants and refugees share the realisation that, although they have moved away from their homeland, the history of their migration, exodus or exile remains. Like Palestinians, the postwar Lithuanian refugees regard themselves as exiles (Kazokas 1992; Baltutis 1996; Pranauskas 1988, 2003; Žemkalnis 2013; Baltutis 2014) and political refugees (Zake 2010; L’Hommedieu 2011). Their attempt to distinguish themselves from other migrants in Australia, by calling themselves refugees or exiles, separates what “returning home” means for them compared with later Lithuanian cohorts such as Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian migrants. Each of these cohorts constructs their relationship with their homeland or ancestral land according to relived or passed on generational experiences.

The question of what kind of relationship each of the above cohorts expects to maintain with their homeland has not been adequately addressed in either fiction or non-fiction. Most of the available literature talks of the postwar Lithuanian generation's exodus from the homeland and their desire to one day “return home”. In my novel, one of my aims is to “dig deeper” in terms of the kind of relationship my characters have with their

homeland, and why it varies between different cohorts. The postwar characters yearn for their lost properties, for nature and for familiar fragrances; the Soviet characters miss their social interactions and their enjoyable jobs; the post-Soviet characters do not wish to dwell on their Soviet past at all. The Australian-born Lithuanians relate differently again to their ancestors' past. In the novel, various feelings and emotions towards Lithuania, revealed during socialising either at the Lithuanian Club in Melbourne or in Lithuania, make the reader aware that, due to their contrasting circumstances of migration, the characters can never all identify with the same sense of belonging to Lithuania. They cannot be regarded as part of one coherent group because by "returning to themselves" and sharing their experiences, they relate to different historical and political contexts.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the Second World War and the effects of the Soviet totalitarian regime led to emigration and contributed to the creation of different identities among Lithuanians in Australia. The theoretical observations on identity change by Hall, Bhabha, Said and Yuval-Davis have demonstrated how and why identities are constructed in accord with historical and political ideologies, and how Lithuanian identity in Australia was constructed and "politicised" in terms of belonging in a "third space". I have also shown how Hall et al.'s idea of "shifting" identity has its limitations in relation to Lithuanians in Australia, as many (especially among postwar refugees) continued to hold onto a view of Lithuanian history that divides "us" and "them", widening rather than bridging the gap in relation to each other's past.

Taking its cue from the historically verifiable and seemingly irreconcilable differences between "us" and "them", caught in a fractured "inside"- "outside" relationship, the novel incorporates characters' personal and group stories to help the reader understand the difficulty of finding common ground in Australia. Due to an unwillingness to share their "power within the group" with more recent Lithuanian migrants, the reader is presented with postwar Lithuanian characters adamantly preserving their version of Lithuanian identity in Australia, free from the Soviet influences.

The following chapter focuses on the writing of the novel. It opens with my own story – the story of a migrant woman in Australia that inspired and informed the novel. I will also explain the development of other characters who represent postwar Lithuanians and their descendants, as well as Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanians in Australia.

Chapter 2

Writing *Torn* – the migrant writer

Development of ideas

In this chapter I synthesise my creative writing process, with particular emphasis on the way the initial ideas for *Torn* evolved. I focus on both how the historical evidence and the unofficial accounts helped me to develop my characters, and how my characters try to distinguish between the “truth” and what is still hidden in the “silence” of the Soviet regime. I explore the reasons for Daina’s nostalgia and homesickness. I also touch on some of the challenges of writing *Torn* as a migrant woman writer.

In my introduction, I discussed some of my motivations for writing my novel – a story that I believe has not been previously told. The primary motivation behind my writing and research was my desire to understand the Lithuanian migrant experience and translate it into a fictional form that would allow readers to also understand this experience. This included an exploration of the differences between different groups within the Lithuanian-Australian community, as captured in chapter 1. My studies and research in Australia enabled me to understand where these differences originated, and the consequences of these differences. Through discussions with members of the Lithuanian community in Australia, other Lithuanian migrants I have met, and through engaging with the world Lithuanian press, SBS radio broadcasting, libraries and oral stories narrated on Sunday afternoons at Geelong and Melbourne Lithuanian Houses, I have listened to a broad range of life narratives of Australian-Lithuanians – narratives in which these members of the Lithuanian community reflected on their lives in Lithuania and Australia.

The desire – perhaps the need – to write a novel draws on my experience in both Lithuania and Australia. Writing has always been part of my life: I started to keep a diary and compose poems and short stories at the age of thirteen. Since then, I have written for various journals and newspapers, firstly in Lithuania and then in Australia. My poetry and short stories have been published in various publications in both Lithuanian and English. Several of my books have been published: *Eukaliptų tyloj*

(2007) and *Abu krantai* (2010)³ in Lithuanian and, since 1999, I have contributed to Deakin University Literary Society's annual publication in English. I have also written non-fiction in English, including my Bachelor of Arts Honours Thesis, 'Fifty years of Lithuanian culture in Australia 1940s-1990s (1998)', and my Masters Thesis, 'National and cultural identity in diaspora: a study of Australian-Lithuanians' (2003).

As part of my MA research, I interviewed 82 Lithuanian and Australian-born Lithuanian participants. This research gave me an insight into the lives of Lithuanian migrants in Australia and revealed that their stories and experiences, while important, had not yet been publicly told. This, along with my own experiences as a migrant, informed and inspired the writing of my novel. Listening and recording interviews with my fellow Lithuanians during my MA research allowed me to learn about the collective and individual experiences of migrants before and after their arrival in Australia. Also, it helped me to understand the differences between the postwar refugees, their descendants, and more recently-arrived Lithuanian migrants to Australia, and how these differences impacted on their relationship with each other and their view of Lithuanian history. During this research, I was overwhelmed by what I discovered. I found myself depressed. Sometimes, when I closed my eyes, I could see the faces of people I had interviewed, particularly those of the postwar Lithuanian cohort, recalling their traumatic experiences of their journey to Australia. The way I had documented and analysed the stories in my MA research did not provide an opportunity for my own reflection, and I longed to reflect on these stories and on my own experiences as a migrant. While I have not used any particular stories I was told during my MA research in my PhD, I want to acknowledge that those stories and the people who told them have informed and enriched my writing.

In 2005, I started to write a novel in Lithuanian using my personal experiences and my existing knowledge of the Lithuanian community in Australia to create a narrative. But after some sixty pages the narrative was exhausted. Three years later, when I embarked on writing my PhD, I began a period of extensive reading and research into the consequences of migration, and this helped me to develop the fictional narrative. While I had written short stories, poetry and non-fiction in the past, the novel was my first

³ Both books have been published under the name of Pranauskienė.

attempt at a full length fictional work in English. The reason I decided to write it in English was that I wanted to share my novel with an Australian audience including, but not only, migrants and refugees. I knew that I was much better at oral than written storytelling. When I share my stories with my family, colleagues and friends, I use my voice and body language to express myself; thus my inspiration also came from those who encouraged me to write down the stories I told them about my homeland, Lithuania. Some of them admitted not knowing where Lithuania was until they met me and learned about its people, culture, language, and natural environment. Intrigued by my stories, they visited Lithuania themselves.

At the beginning of my doctoral research, I decided to translate what I had already written from Lithuanian into English, but changing the language changed the precise meaning of the way I created context and designed the storyline. Translation greatly interfered with the shaping of the narrative, and so I moved away from the draft written in Lithuanian altogether. However, moving away from my native language made it difficult to write a coherent narrative that would be comprehensible to the reader and would allow them to identify with the feelings and experiences of the characters. To write in a non-native, and in my case, a third language, to describe the surroundings and to reflect on the unique Lithuanian traditions in English was challenging, because of the way the syntax is structured. On the other hand, I did not want to change the way I expressed myself in English. As a migrant writer, I made the characters of my novel sound and think like Lithuanian migrants and, therefore, I have deliberately used Lithuanian language in the English text. For instance, I included my poetry in Lithuanian, called the traditional dishes their Lithuanian names, and used particular cultural expressions that may not make much sense to an English speaker but will be recognised and appreciated by a Lithuanian reader. At the same time, I wanted to give readers who were not familiar with Lithuanian a sense of non-English linguistics and non-English cultural style, as well as the experience of seeing an unfamiliar text. Not understanding the Lithuanian text does not impact on readers' understanding of the novel.

I have faced English language technicalities and differences in the way I used particular expressions and phrases. Translator Elizabeth Novickas (2012) agrees that one of the

problems for non-Lithuanian readers is misunderstanding idiomatic phrases such as ‘Jaučiuosi kaip balta varna’ (p. 58). Although the direct translation of this phrase is ‘I feel like a white crow’ (p. 58), it does not carry the real meaning that a person is feeling out of place. To Novickas, more importantly, the equivalent of this phrase in English is ‘sticking out like a sore thumb’ (p. 58). Given such diverse interpretation of the same phrase, not surprisingly, my PhD supervisors at first struggled to understand the linguistic expressions and cultural meanings contained in my novel. I had to omit or reword my expressions and phrases to ensure that they would make sense to all readers. One phrase, ‘*jeigu rankos šaltos, tai širdis karšta*’ (p. 118), directly translates as ‘cold hands, hot heart’, but the English equivalent is ‘cold hands, warm heart’. Therefore, in my novel, in a love scene between Daina and Arūnas, Daina admits to the inadequacy of the literal translation of the Lithuanian saying: ‘if one’s hands are cold, the heart is warm...doesn’t sound the same in English’ (p. 118). Each time I considered using phrases and expressions with more than one meaning, I needed to ensure that the meaning was not ambiguous through the use of other techniques, such as the creation of a romantic atmosphere filled with flowers and music to convey the intended sense of emotional and physical connection. I not only needed to explain the phrases that conveyed specific cultural messages included in my narrative, but also to clarify the reasons my characters communicate with each other in a particular way. In order to unpack the Lithuanian meanings of jokes or stories in the Australian context, thinking in Lithuanian and expressing myself in English had to be “shifted” to thinking and writing in English.

The process of improving writing in a foreign language lies in finding a medium in the crossover of linguistic and cultural experiences into a text (Khoii 2011; Skoglung 2010). This can be achieved through extensive planning, preparation and transformation of the initial ideas from the native into the foreign language at its required level of written proficiency (Richards & Renandya 2002). I have achieved my goals by regularly seeking and responding to my supervisors’ and other readers’ comments, as well as by consulting the relevant literature to help me improve my English writing skills. I am pleased that I had an opportunity to rework, decode and reconstruct the meanings of a migrant writer that hopefully will make sense not only to a migrant, but also to a non-migrant reader. The ongoing redrafting of the ideas, behavioural patterns of different

characters, and the way the history was included into the creative context led me to rewrite the novel sixteen times!

Memory interpretation through “truth” and “silence”

Each revision of my novel brought new ideas and I had to reassess which ones to include, particularly when dealing with the Soviet memories from my childhood and youth. I grew up with socialist ideals that were full of praise for the Soviet Union. I grew up hearing and learning the Russian language and culture side by side with my native Lithuanian tongue. Since school, I had read Russian classics, listened to Russian music, and communicated with people around the USSR in Russian. When I was in high school, one of our subjects was called *Preparation for War*. This subject was considered essential and we were treated like soldiers, and trained to strive to build a classless society and fight against “bourgeois nationalism”. We were taught by a Russian general, who required us to wear gas masks, to dismantle and put together Kalashnikovs, and shoot at targets. We were preparing to be nurses and soldiers in case of a war. Therefore, Soviet ideology had been solidly entrenched in our thinking (Azrael 1972; Miller 1972; Matthews 2012; Davoliūtė & Balkelis 2012).

I recall that when I lived in Soviet Lithuania, I watched movies about the Soviet-German War that portrayed the bravery of the Russian soldiers and belittled the Germans. Based on these memories, my novel’s character Daina also ‘remembered seeing German soldiers in the movies looking like beggars with ripped clothing and worn out shoes. They looked stupid, not like the Russian soldiers who were depicted as bright and clever, whistling a song of victory’ (p. 152).

There is tension between the official record of events and unofficial and undocumented memories. Official records often conflict with the way people remember political and historical events. Soviet era analysts such as Slava Gerovitch (2011), Svetlana Boym (2001a, 2001b), Nerija Putnaitė (2007), Marilyn Murray (2013), and Iaroslav Golovanov (1970) agree that during the Soviet times, due to the harshness of the totalitarian regime, the “truth” about the historical events was often withheld. Consequently, the “truth” was hidden or circulated as part of the collective myths. Boym (2001a) argues that individual and collective memory is used as a “counter”

memory or ‘an oral memory transmitted between close friends and family members and spread to the wider society through unofficial networks’ (p. 61) for historical record. Gerovitch (2011) suggests that while Soviet oral stories provided ‘counter-memories’, they were ‘totally separate from written accounts’ (p. 463), and revealed different stories. One of the examples of this discrepancy between historical and political “truth” can be found in the Soviet space program, where the ‘Soviet master narrative of space history was reduced to a set of clichés: flawless cosmonauts flew perfect missions, supported by unfailing technology’ (p. 463). These writers explore the extent to which the “flawless” Soviet Union oppressed people’s views and opinions. In chapter 4, I discuss the consequences of important events being hidden under the image of a “flawless” Soviet Union in more detail.

The comradeship and collective belonging to the Soviet past is immortalised in films and books documenting the hardship of Stalin’s leadership. Stalin’s repressions and purges, as testified by his victims, are documented in the 1994 Academy Award-winning film of Nikita Michalkov, *Burnt by the sun* (1994). The memoirs of Alexander Solzhenitsyn *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974) have also become a living memory of the past. The Russian archives reveal that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) tightly controlled the lives of the Soviet citizens, and the flow of information (Pithoya 1993). Books of Nijolė Sadūnaitė, *A radiance in the Gulag* (1987) and Vladas Terleckas, *The tragic pages of Lithuanian history 1940-1953* (2014) cover the extent of the destruction of the Lithuanian nation during the years of the totalitarian regime.

My novel’s postwar characters believe that the Soviet Lithuanian characters have been brainwashed by the Soviet regime but they are still shocked when Daina challenges their negative views about the homeland they left due to war and Soviet occupation. One of them, Mėta, who was separated from her family, cannot believe it when she hears Daina praise her Soviet life:

Personally, my life was alright there. My education was free. I could easily eat my three-course dinner for a ruble while earning 130 rubles a month...I was able to have two part-time jobs on top of my main position...The reward was great – every summer my friends and I could afford to travel around the Soviet Union. (p. 67)

In *Torn* I wanted to highlight how Soviet citizens were often oblivious to the ways in which the totalitarian regime controlled their lives (Leinarte 2010). Not surprisingly, Daina and I are convinced that free education, and having enough to eat after working two or three jobs, will help to build a classless society. Thus, for me, and my protagonist, the best memories remain attached to our life in Soviet Lithuania.

Reminiscing on nostalgia/homesickness

Migrants' memories of their homeland are often distorted (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003; Gerovitch 2011; Boym 2001a) or "utopian" (Stanford Friedman 2004). The realisation that the "utopian" homeland, remembered in diaspora, no longer exists is painful. After each visit to Lithuania, I feel less desire to return. In Lithuania, I am treated as a guest and receive attention, which at times is overwhelming. But I also understand that after living away from my homeland for a long time, I do not belong there anymore. Everything has changed, and I also have changed; some of my friends have moved from their artistic pursuits to commercial interests, and we are unable to find common topics for conversation. Thus, I have unwillingly become an outsider to my birthplace and find it difficult to reconcile myself with this reality. Nevertheless, I still retain a strong attachment to my birthplace. The "new" Lithuania I discover each time I visit varies greatly from the one I left. I feel nostalgic and homesick for the "old" Lithuania where I could relate to places, jokes and anecdotes, and trust the strength of my few friendships and connections. However, there are things that never change: the aroma of cheap coffee, the varying colours of the different seasons, the familiarity of certain special places and the continuation of special friendships that are part of my connection to my homeland and my sense of belonging there. In this way, to migrants like me, the memories of the homeland are often distorted and "utopian".

In the novel, I drew on my personal memories of my life in Lithuania and Australia to develop the character of Daina and her frustrations and feelings of nostalgia for her homeland. For instance, she lives with nostalgia for Christmas celebrations, where only close friends gathered together, sharing food, jokes, anecdotes and games. Isolated and trapped in the company of the elderly people, Daina's yearning for social interaction with people of her own age, and her desire to become noticeable in Australia, inflames her sense of loss and intensifies her yearning to return to Lithuania. However, upon her

return, like me, she does not find a true sense of belonging and feels detached from the linguistic and cultural practices shaping the “new” Lithuania.

My experience of living in Australia and thinking of Lithuania deepened my emotional trauma and sense of loss. I have been dealing with these issues by keeping a diary and expressing my thoughts and uncertainties on paper. After arrival in Australia, I wrote about my new life in my diary every day, and then cried while rereading my experiences, detecting signs of my decrease in self-esteem and my inability to deal with my diminished professional and social status. This realisation resulted in an unremitting feeling of depression that I kept hidden. The decision to share with others what I have been through has helped me to rediscover myself as a writer and as a Lithuanian in Australia. My story is a continuation of the other Australian women migrant stories recorded in *Elena's journey* (Jonaitis 1997) or *Moving stories: an intimate history of four women across two countries* (Thomson with Cave 2011), who, like me, weave homesickness and nostalgia into the Australian narrative.

While nostalgia involves thoughts of my best childhood and youth experiences, homesickness – also called “heimveh” or a “nostalgic reaction” by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates (ca. 460-377 BC) – is the consequence of nostalgia that may intensify due to living away from home (Zwingmann 1959; Fisher 1989; van Tilburg et al. 1999). Writing this novel has given me a new outlet and has helped me to come to terms with my homesickness and nostalgia. Often I have asked myself: what is the basis of my nostalgia and homesickness? I am nostalgic for Lithuania, sometimes for fragrances, sounds, or the way things used to be. I am homesick for my family and friends as well as nostalgic for my work as a choir conductress, the status that came with that, and the opportunity to do the things I used to do well back home. Trapped between feeling nostalgic and homesick, I find myself daydreaming and I see myself walking the streets of Palanga. I imagine standing on the beach looking at the Baltic Sea and listening to the sounds of the passing waves. Photographs, found and removed from my photo albums during my visits to Lithuania, make me emotional each time I view them. Looking at my school photos, I see myself dressed in a dark brown uniform and a black apron, standing next to my best friend, with whom I have lost touch. Images of my grandmother feeding her chickens, my grandfather sweeping the yard, or both

standing under the cherry tree, holding a ladder, waiting for me to bring down the cherries, make me feel emotional.

In my novel, I aimed to recapture these feelings of nostalgia and homesickness so that the reader might gain some insight into the migrant experience. Daina relives her nostalgia through touch and smell. She comes to Mornington to help with preparations for Saulė's wedding. Seeing a cake called *šakotis* in the kitchen, and snapping 'the tiniest horn from the very bottom of the cake' (p. 108), she begins to cry. I demonstrate the extent to which yearning for the past intensifies with remembered fragrances and people who once played a significant part the life of the migrant and refugee. For me and my novel's protagonist Daina, it is impossible to separate nostalgia from homesickness as they resurface side by side when thinking about the homeland. She is nostalgic for her happy youth in Lithuania. But she is also homesick due to living away from her family and friends. Life experiences leave Daina attached to longing for what has been lost, exacerbated by nostalgia and homesickness that makes her, as a character and me, as a real person, emotionally vulnerable. Thus, my novel highlights the difficulties in some refugee and migrant attempts to 'mediate – and traverse' what Roberta Rubenstein (2001) refers to as 'the gap between longing and belonging' (p. 6) to particular places and events. The gap between nostalgia and homesickness is difficult to breach.

Character building

By changing names, places and the chain of events, I re-imagined the characters' experiences for a novel. Daina, full of doubts and emotional insecurities, reflects my own status as a migrant whose dreams and desires have not been fulfilled. Because I had not planned to stay in Australia after my short holiday, I did not bring things that were important to me such as photos and items reminding me of my life in Lithuania. I also had not told anyone of my trip to Australia out of fear that my visa might be cancelled without reason, and was only able to return to Lithuania for a visit five years after my marriage. For these reasons, I was left (using Bhabha's expression) greatly "unsettled". My intention was to represent Daina's character as indecisive and unsure of making decisions because she, like me, lost her grounding after being caught in the company of the elderly Lithuanians in Australia who have a different outlook on life. I

constructed Daina as struggling emotionally as she comes to terms with the difference between her fantasies of a fairytale life in Australia and the reality. Daina has no luck with men in her life, which relates to my own fractured relationships with the opposite sex. I hope that the reader will understand that her naivety is a result of the circumstances in which she grew up.

In the process of developing Daina's character, I also included two important female characters: her grandmother and mother. Being greatly suppressed by the Soviet rule, they represent "minority" voices. Leinarte (2010) conducted 50 interviews with the Lithuanian women, who said they were misrepresented at work and mistreated at home. They had to comply with their mother's, worker's and political activist's image in the society, and, those 'who avoided the direct influence of Soviet propaganda were the system's social outcasts...' (p. 2). Through the fictional characters, Roma and Marija, I wanted to speak of the mistreatment of women in my own family. Roma's husband does not return to her after the war until she, like my grandmother, finds him and takes him home herself. Marija, subject to an abusive relationship with her husband all her married life, like my mother was, finally finds the strength to leave him. After reimagining my mother's and grandmother's experiences, I wrote these two women into my novel, and provided them with unique voices. I was able to incorporate their stories into my narrative, showing how their traumatic experiences made them stronger.

Algis' and Gintas' characters are based on an elderly postwar generation Lithuanian, Max (not his real name). My husband and I lived with Max for more than seven years and he became an inspiration for both characters. Max was my best friend and a father figure, and many times helped me to overcome the difficulties of settling in Australia. It was through Max that I first learnt that postwar Lithuanians in Australia had to run away from their homeland to save their lives. Other characters, such as Vilius, Rimvydas, Mėta and Paulius, were inspired by people I met at the Lithuanian gatherings all around Australia. I also invented and constructed some characters such as a newly-arrived Lithuanian, Raminta, and Arūnas, a descendant of postwar Lithuanians whose behaviour does not mirror the lifestyle or norms and expectations of the "imagined" Lithuanian community in Australia. At the same time, I gave all my characters names popular among Lithuanians and some of them such as Saulė – sun (or always cheerful)

and Daina – song (because she loves to sing) – to mirror a particular personality and behaviour.

Writing through experience

Edward Said (1975) suggests that ‘Writing is not a fact of nature [but rather] has its own kind of action, its own dreams, its own restrictions – all doubtless acquired, all doubtless connected to a psychological, social, and historical context’ (p. 24). Writing is the action I have chosen to explore the meaning of migrant life in Australia. Therefore, my thoughts, observations, and interpretations of ideas reflect upon the way I was brought up in Lithuania, despite having spent the last 25 years in Australia.

My own dreams and doubts, as expressed through my main protagonist, Daina, serve to emphasise the strong connections forged between Lithuanian migrant characters and their homeland as well as illustrating the emotional and physical connections formed under different historical and social contexts. My aim was to show how this context was reflected in the stories told by my characters who have interpreted their narratives as per their living ideologies.

However, as a migrant writer, I faced a more challenging task which was to rise above the perceptions of woman writers in Australia as only being able to produce ‘first-person confessional or semi-autobiographical writings’ (Gunew 1988, p. 87). I consulted historian Joan W. Scott’s (1991) thoughts on “what counts as experience”. She writes: ‘What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political’ (p. 797). The political aspect of any event can be closely related to the experiences that the real people, like the postwar Lithuanian refugees, Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian migrants, lived through before and after their arrival in Australia. In chapter 1, I elaborated on the historical and cultural circumstances highlighting their previous discourses that had been interrupted and contested in Australia.

My life and experiences in the Soviet Union and Australia allowed me to expand my understanding of different values and beliefs, and also to integrate them into the novel. The process of creative writing helped me to see beneath the meaning of particular

events in a way that no language is able to express. In the novel, by drawing on the historical and cultural context of twentieth-century Lithuanian history, I am also pulling apart and reconstructing the historical and cultural context, ranging from war to the ideological suppression experienced by Lithuanians in their homeland or the diaspora.

Like Scott, I believe that group and individual belonging is “political” (cf. Yuval-Davis). As feminist scholar Teresa de Lauretis (1984) explains, experience is a ‘process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed’ (p. 159). According to de Lauretis, subjectivity is constructed through our interactions with the world, ranging from economic circumstances to historical events. It ‘is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one’s personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world’ (p. 159). Subjectivity is therefore a continual process that embraces social reality that is not static, but part of ongoing renewal. In my novel I aimed to highlight the extent to which group and individual experience differ based ‘on the politics of its construction’ (Scott 1991, p. 797). I discuss in greater detail the importance of individual experiences in chapter 4, and how vital these experiences are in building a coherent narrative. The representation of being part of a group, that is, an ex-Soviet citizen, fails to show the uniqueness of my own individual experience in Lithuania or Australia. In Lithuania I was and a professional choir conductress who successfully practised in this male-dominated profession (Andriejauskaitė 1994, 1998; Zubrickas 1999), but I have not found professional conducting opportunities in Australia. My experience as a woman migrant writer in Australia initially situated me within what Sneja Gunew (1994) called “minority writing”. But I have moved beyond the patriarchal expectations of a housewife and the limited possibilities attached to the “inferior sex” in the Soviet Union of the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s (Leinarte 2010; Jonušas 1987; Metcalfe & Afanassieva 2005), and this was a great challenge to me. By having a female protagonist and writing a novel that narrates the Lithuanian migrant experience, I have been able not only to reconcile with my past in Lithuania and my present in Australia but to give others an understanding of the experiences of migrant women.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the process of writing *Torn* and some of the challenges I faced not only as a non-English native speaker but also as someone who was born and grew up in a very different culture. While novels often appear easy to read, they involve many hours of preparation, planning, phrasing, rephrasing, drafting, redrafting, writing, rewriting, reading, rereading and correcting, and this was certainly the case for me.

By reminiscing on my upbringing as a Soviet citizen, where the gap between the “truth” and “silence” and between the official and unofficial memory remains fluid, my intention was to connect my characters to particular historical and political events in order to show individual and collective views on “truth” and “silence”. By constructing characters who retain different levels of attachment to their homeland, I wanted to highlight their level of “belonging” to a particular time in Lithuanian history. Through building the novel’s characters such as Daina, and incorporating other female characters into the novel, I aimed to explore the issue of women’s “silence” and to demonstrate how their stories need to be heard as a challenge to patriarchal relationships. By disclosing the backgrounds of my characters, my intention was to show how their stories depict sets of values and beliefs of a given historical, political and socio-economic environment in Lithuania and Australia.

In chapter 3, I discuss the ways in which the works of Australian migrant writers Eva Sallis and Ale Liubinas influenced my writing of the novel. This chapter will include an examination of female migrant characters, such as Sallis’ Hiam and Liubinas’ Ale, who are forced to deal with their “otherness” in Australia. I will also reveal the ways in which “otherness” is captured in the women’s attempts to reconcile themselves with their new “home”. I argue that an exploration of the characterisation of Sallis and Liubinas is not only relevant to my novel but is also important in broadening an understanding of what being a woman and a migrant entails.

Chapter 3

Migrant women's voices in Australia

Racial and cultural dislocation in Sallis' Hiam

In this chapter, I discuss the way Eva Sallis and Ale Liubinas deal with the consequences of women's migration. My aim is to explore the way female characters, such as Hiam in Sallis' novel *Hiam* (1998) and Ale in Liubinas' autobiographical trilogy *Homeland lost* (2003), struggle to adjust to their foreign surroundings and to deal with the impact of migration (Hiam) and being a refugee (Liubinas). I highlight how particular writing techniques and literary devices such as irony, satire and humor, expressed through feelings and emotions are used by Sallis and Liubinas to intertwine the historical events with individual experiences. I show how the individual characters' experiences make the reading of these texts both informative and engaging. Although the genres of the books are different, Sallis' is a novel and Liubinas' an autobiography, they both use narrative techniques and devices that informed my writing. In analysing how migration changes Hiam's and Ale's perceptions of life and how they re-evaluate their past after they settle in Australia, I show the extent to which the process of migration forces female characters to renegotiate their race, culture, professional and social status, as well as gender relationships outside their familiar boundaries.

Creative writers usually write about what they know (Amin 2008). The *Age* columnist Anna King Murdoch (2003) notes that, as a fiction writer, Sallis is preoccupied with the 'migrant experience and, particularly, the mysteries and beauty of Arabic culture' (p. 3). Her passion for Arabic culture springs from her 'father's reminiscences of his youth in Palestine', which 'made the Middle East a real place to Sallis rather than the mysterious Orient' (p. 3). Murdoch's choice of words addressing the "mysterious Orient" exemplifies the westerners' view of the Middle East and highlights Sallis' revoking of the cliché. Sallis aims to portray the Middle East as 'a real place...not an exotic place with real people, real origins' (cited in Barrowclough 2005, p. 24). Not only does she speak Arabic, she also regularly visits the Middle East for her research and is well-informed on the issues of prejudice towards refugees and migrants (Murdoch 2003; Clarke 2005; Barrowclough 2005).

In her novel, Sallis explores migrant women's experiences through her main protagonist, Hiam. Hiam, a Jordanian woman, immigrates to Adelaide with her Palestinian husband, Masoud, and their daughter Zena. After 18 years, Masoud commits suicide. Hiam, lonely, displaced and dislocated from her Australian household, makes a lengthy journey through the centre of Australia in response to her grief.

A central aspect of the novel is Sallis' exploration of racial differences and their impact upon the main protagonist, resulting in her in/ability to settle in her host country. Even though the story is limited to the protagonist's third person point of view, I, as a reader, am exposed to the multiplicity of meanings hidden behind racial and cultural attitudes, relating to stereotyped relationships between migrants and the wider society through Sallis' "subtext". I am most interested in the techniques she uses to highlight and critique racial differences in Australian society. By drawing attention to the existence of problematic attitudes between "us"/Arabs and "them"/Australians, Sallis reverses the stereotypical roles so that the majority of the population becomes "them" and the minority "us". To exemplify these differences, she uses binary constructions that highlight the extent of the tensions.

Through Hiam, Sallis shows hostility Australians and Arabs feel towards each other. In the company of her female relatives, Hiam supports their view that Arabs should not be marrying Australians, thus showing her intolerance of other cultures. She pities Australians because they 'lack pride and self-respect, don't dress themselves or their children well and eat bland food', which to Hiam, 'means little or nothing' (p. 19). Such an outlook, projected in Sallis' storyline, highlights the two-way nature of the boundaries between "us" and "them". Hiam and her relatives, coming from the same cultural background, "recognise" themselves and acknowledge their similar views and beliefs that show their sense of "otherness" as well as their *othering* in the host country.

The examples confirm Hall's (1987) theoretical observations on the coexistence of "inside"- "outside" binary opposition between "the personal and the public worlds", which can be extended to the attempt to maintain an identification with the homeland and in the diaspora. Even though "recognition" and identification with people "like us" help migrants to bond (Brah 1998), they also highlight their "otherness" in the diaspora

(Gilroy 1994). The significance of switching the roles between “us”/locals to “us”/migrants in Sallis’ novel allows the reader to understand the extent to which the linguistic and cultural differences interfere in relationship-building between groups and contribute to gaps in knowledge and understanding.

To highlight migrant women’s cultural and linguistic differences, Sallis depicts experiences of ridicule and misunderstandings. Hiam, who wears a *hijab*, is viewed as an “outsider” by the wider society. Sallis draws on misunderstandings related to linguistic and cultural barriers. For example, when asked ‘what it was like growing up as a woman’, Hiam replies: ‘Well, I started as a girl’ (p. 20). They pretend to be happy for her with their condescending, ‘It must be wonderful for you to live in Australia!’ (p. 21), but this biased opinion only intensifies racial and cultural “otherness”. Sallis’ depiction of Hiam’s Islamic cultural background shows how prejudice does not help to breach the gap between “us” and “them”, or migrants and the wider society. On the contrary, it exposes *othering* that masks fear and prejudice towards the unknown cultures (cf. introduction). By exploring the binary effect of *othering* in the diaspora, Sallis highlights the extent of migrant racial and cultural dislocation.

Racial and cultural dislocation in Sallis’ novel reflects westerners’ preconceived attitudes towards women’s treatment within Islamic culture. The online *Muslim Women’s League* journal elaborates on common perceptions towards Arab women’s sexuality as ‘controlled, hidden, or mastered, most often by men’ (cited in ‘Sex and sexuality in Islam’ 1995, p. 1). In fact, the article explains, the question of sexuality is ‘rooted in the cultural values’ that were formed with the introduction of Islam, and explains that Arab women can maintain ‘a high sense of self-esteem and self-worth’ and are entitled to ‘a satisfying relationship’, ‘determined by prevailing attitudes of the family and surrounding culture’ (p. 1). In comparison to common misperceptions, Sallis’ Hiam appears disappointed when there is a change in her sexual relationship with her husband, who, like her is unable to find happiness in Australia. This is the reason Hiam is caught up in ‘grief upon grief’ (p. 68), and she blames their emigration for her unhappiness. Emphasising the fractured sexual relationship, and the unfulfilled expectations of maintaining high “self-esteem and self-worth”, Sallis highlights Hiam’s vulnerability.

The absence of meaningful human interaction as a consequence of migration features in Catherine Ward and Irene Styles' 'Evidence for the ecological self: English-speaking migrants' residual links to their homeland' (2007). They summarise the effects of migration from 154 questionnaires and 40 interviews with British women, who were residing in Australia at the time of the research. These findings show the importance of "non-human interactions" such as emotional bonds to smell, touch, colour or sound, as well as "human interactions" expressed in physical bonds with other people from their homeland. This provides strong evidence of the negative impact of migration. On the one hand, Ward and Styles point out the benefits of people maintaining a bond with those they can identify with and trust. On the other hand, lack of positive interaction with the outside world is responsible for having the most negative impact on migrants. It must be noted that the sample above was restricted to British women migrants who were also native English speakers. In comparison, a non-English speaker, like Sallis' protagonist, would find herself even more overwhelmed by her inability to deal with human interactions and her new surroundings. Trying to explain herself in a foreign environment, she finds 'the words dead on her lips' (p. 21). Fulfilling emotional interactions with people and new surroundings can help migrants to ease their sense of loss.

To highlight the extent of Hiam's hostility to her new surroundings, Sallis places her character in the outback. There she is also isolated from her Adelaide home. To show how her protagonist deals with her sense of dislocation, Sallis employs a flashback technique, moving from Hiam's homeland to Australia. Often overcome with memories of home such as 'crusty bread in the morning', and of 'almond blossom, sulking outside, back against the hot sandstone' (p. 11), Hiam is unable to reconcile herself to her life as a migrant; she is caught in her nostalgic reminiscing of her past. It is clear to the reader that Hiam remains torn between different times and places. From the first to the last page, Sallis' novel deals with a migrant woman's journey: it is a journey that draws out her nostalgic yearning for her homeland; it is also a journey inwards as she renegotiates aspects of herself in Australia. Sallis wants her protagonist to see, to touch, to hear and to feel the Australian landscape and it is this experience that helps her to heal.

According to literary critic Sue Kossew (2004), Hiam's close contact with Australian nature enables her to finally 'feel "at home" in Australia' (p. 44). At the same time, her dislocation from her homeland means she feels foreign in Australia. The portrayal of Sallis' protagonist highlights the complexities of migrant experiences, especially migrant women's experiences.

Linguistic and cultural differences in Liubinas' Homeland lost

Liubinas' autobiography starts in Eastern Europe and ends in Australia. The author tells the story of her physical dislocation from Lithuania during the Second World War, life in the Displaced Persons camps in Germany, and emigration to Australia in 1949. Her story, like the stories I recorded as part of my MA, as well as *The Australian-Lithuanian chronicles* (Jūragis 1961; Baltutis 1983), the Australian-Lithuanian newspapers, *Mūsų Pastogė* and *Tėviškės Aidai*, and the stories documented in books of the Australian-Lithuanian writers Kazokas (2003), Baltutis (1996), Baltutienė et al. (1990), Tarvydas (1997), Jonaitis (1997), Šeštokas (2010), Taškūnas (2005), Popenhagen (2012), and Saudargienė (2005), enhanced my understanding of postwar Lithuanian migrant experiences.

Ale Liubinas was born in 1931 in the Lithuanian village of Smilgiai. Because her family were rich farmers and threatened with death or deportation to Siberia, they were forced to flee their homeland in 1944 (Kazokas 2003). Rimvydas Šilbajoris (2007), in his review of Liubinas' book, writes: 'The voices of the victims of the World War II may now sound distant and fading among the turmoils and tragedies of our own time. To the victims themselves, however, their personal stories remain vivid, immediate, and, to me, so important that they must urgently be told to the entire world' (p. 1). Through Liubinas' autobiography, a personal contemplation on her life, the reader experiences 'the presence of universal suffering' (p. 1) that adds another layer to the individual physical and psychological pain of losing her homeland due to war and displacement.

In her transition from being a stateless refugee to becoming an Australian citizen, there are many examples of Ale's struggle to interpret the linguistic and cultural differences she encounters in her host country. These occur due to her poor command of English and the specificity of the local colloquialisms in Australia. Ale employs humour to give

the reader some sense of her struggle to “fit” into her new surroundings. This can be seen in how she uses a particular place, a factory where she is employed to sew jumpers, to create an atmosphere ranging from friendliness to hostility. She reveals the multi-layered Australian attitudes towards migrants, the atmosphere intensified by hidden meanings Ale does not understand, and her doubts about what is being said and what it really means.

An example is Ale’s linguistic misunderstandings with her work colleague Kate. After tasting a pudding Kate brings to work and not knowing what it is made of, Kate tells her that she is eating a doodle, which is available at the butcher’s shop. ‘Just ask for a doodle, Ducky. The butcher won’t have a problem understanding you’ (p. 509). Then when Ale repeatedly tells the butcher ‘I...I want doodle...’ (p. 509), not only does she make him laugh, she greatly embarrasses herself. This illustrates how a migrant woman can become an object of laughter, and can be reduced to feeling childish, as a result of not having enough linguistic and cultural knowledge to avoid belittlement in her new country.

Liubinas’ autobiographical account corresponds with those of others who have documented their migrant experiences in Australia. The postwar Lithuanian refugee Ramunas Tarvydas (1997) writes about how an Australian Margaret Bartkevicius, who is married to a Lithuanian man, experienced linguistic and cultural barriers and the preconceived perceptions of 1940s and 1950s Australia, and how this impacted on her happiness. She purports: ‘if you were going out with one of those newly-arrived Australians you were, of necessity, a very low-quality person, of very poor morals; you’d be identified as one of “those” kinds of girls because you went out with “these” kinds of people’ (p. 21). Such attitudes often lay hidden beneath the linguistic and cultural barriers refugees and migrants were exposed to in their host country.

In Liubinas’ account, Ale, first treated as an “outsider” at the factory, soon finds a way to “fit” in. While working overtime, she makes more jumpers and gets paid triple the amount of money. She is rebuked by her colleagues in a rude and threatening manner: ‘Migrants...Bloody migrants...No speak English...But they understand the money...Oh, yeah, they do...’ (p. 508). Only after being spoken to with such sarcasm

does she realise the extent of their different attitudes towards work ethics and the fact that she is being singled out because of these differences. Even though making her parents disappointed for not bringing home much needed money, Ale chooses to work at the same pace and to receive the same wage as her female colleagues. Fortunately, due to her accommodating attitude and willingness to adhere to the expectations of her new environment, she quickly learns the subtleties of the English language and successfully integrates into Australian society.

Such examples highlight the *othering* of migrants and refugees in Australia, disputing the Australian government's assertion, articulated in chapter 1, that people from the Baltic States, due to their Anglo-Saxon appearance, would not have problems "fitting" into the Australian environment. As I relate in my novel *Torn*, the "otherness" refugees and migrants need to overcome in their host country is not only due to supposed racial differences, but also to linguistic and cultural differences, which take time to renegotiate.

Gendered relationships in Torn

My novel deals with a Lithuanian migrant woman's experience, coming to Australia in 1986 and staying here for six years before returning to Lithuania. As part of the novel, I created a narrative which would speculate on Daina's relationship with different male characters: her boyfriend, Toivo, her father, two of her lovers Arūnas and Paulius, and two elderly men, Algis and Gintas. Throughout the novel, I highlight the extent to which Daina's fractured relationships greatly contribute to her lowered self-esteem. Daina's father punishes her from a young age; Toivo is having another relationship that he strongly denies; Paulius hides details of his previous marriage and his affair with another woman from her; an Australian-born Lithuanian, Arūnas, seduces her to satisfy his desire for having a lover from his ancestors' homeland; and Algis treats her as a servant on his property. Unable to muster the strength to rebel against their patriarchal attitudes and dishonesty, she does not fight for her rights and her happiness. I could have represented her differently, but my aim was to use her experiences to show her vulnerability as a migrant woman.

In contrast, Gintas has good intentions towards Daina. Not only does he give her his deceased wife's possessions, he also encourages her to further her studies. He pays for the courses she attends, expressing his gratitude that she is looking after him, and making it clear that he sees her as more than a carer. My aim here was to show the reader how migrant women are often seen as being naïve or uneducated because they don't know the language. Here, vulnerability is juxtaposed against Daina's potential: in their relationship, based on trust and respect, Gintas and Daina appear equal, as Gintas values her opinions, her willingness to read and learn her country's history, and he is proud of her educational achievements. This connects with the way she had been treated as a theatre producer in Lithuania when her troupe performed around the Soviet Union. 'While touring, she'd met actors, make-up artists and producers who gave her professional advice and shared their work' (p. 39) – recognition of her talent made her proud.

By exploring the various reasons for her complicated female-male relationships, I wanted the reader to understand the multileveled impact of migration on Daina, who had sacrificed so much in exchange for trying to build a better future in Australia. My aim was to have the reader sympathise with Daina, who, due to her vulnerability as a migrant and as a woman, feels out of place. An educated and well-travelled woman, she is made to play the role of a submissive female who does not assert herself in these patriarchal relationships. My aim was to show that migrant women are more vulnerable than men, and therefore susceptible to greater mistreatment in the host country.

The patriarchal attitudes, which feature throughout in the novel, highlight "women's categorisation" in Australia, where they were expected to be mothers and housewives (cf. introduction). I worked to make Daina's submissiveness to men come through in my novel, especially in relation to her great-uncle Algis, who is pictured as 'an old-fashioned man', who 'doesn't approve of sex before marriage' (p. 142). Thus I use derogative language to capture Algis' attitude towards her promiscuity which culminates in him calling her a whore. Overwhelmed by fear of what is awaiting her in the future, Daina is overwhelmed with regret that she 'didn't want to be pregnant, but she was, and she knew she couldn't leave the baby in the hospital or give it up for

adoption. She had to do something' (p. 131), especially if she wanted to return to Soviet Lithuania.

By revealing Daina's personal misfortunes, I also wanted to show the negative perceptions and attitudes towards single mothers in the Soviet Union (Kaminsky 2011; Field 1998). Thus, I revealed what would have happened if Daina was made to return to her homeland with a baby, to parents who 'wouldn't have been pleased' to see her 'with a bundle of joy and no husband' (p. 142). This reflects the idea that single mothers threaten the "flawless" image of Soviet society. Within that society, as I explained in the introduction, Soviet propaganda concentrated on the model of a "heroic" mother who was married and had many children (Leinarte 2010). At the same time, the extra burden attached to women, who juggled work and family life with participation in their country's political activities, meant that they needed to keep their children in government crèches and kindergartens (Matthews 2012; Molyneux 1995; Putinaite 2007). Single mother status was not mentioned in Soviet propaganda, as they were simply viewed as prostitutes. Prostitution was forbidden in the Soviet Union (Vitaliev 1990) and thus hidden, together with instances of rape, homosexuality and the use of contraceptives. In this way, the image of the "flawless" society was projected and protected within and outside the Soviet Union (Warshofsky Lapidus 1993).

I used my protagonist's mistreatment and vulnerability in her fractured relationships with men to make the reader aware of her alienation from both Australia and the Soviet Union. Her desire to cover her pregnancy reflects the operation of patriarchal values and perceptions towards women in both Australia and the Soviet Union. At the same time, by making Daina end her hurtful and unhappy relationships with men, I was attempting to highlight the extent to which women can renegotiate societal expectations.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the main issues associated with different racial, cultural, and gender perceptions and expectations of refugees, migrants and members of Australian society in the context of fiction and non-fiction. Sallis' novel and Liubinas' autobiography provide us with a greater understanding of women's issues associated with migration and finding their place in the diaspora. Through their treatment of the

psychological and emotional difficulties of adaptation in their host environment, Sallis and Liubinas made me, as a writer, more aware of the ways these issues can be approached through creative work. Sallis' and Liubinas' books, showing migrant women's experiences in Australia, highlight the difficulties these women face in their attempt to settle into their new country while dealing with the differences between the homeland and the host country. Some of the characters, trapped in particular historical and political circumstances, appear to be struggling to fulfill their dreams. Others, caught in complicated male-female relationships, work on renegotiation of their life choices. As I read the above works, I understood, as a writer, the significance of the inclusion of historical and political evidence of twentieth-century patriarchal views, attitudes and perceptions in the Soviet Union and Australia, and how this strengthened the narrative. In terms of migrant women's mistreatment in Australia, Sallis' and Liubinas' writing showed me the extent to which positive human and non-human interactions helped their migrant women characters to establish a sense of belonging in a host country.

In their texts, the struggle of Sallis' Hiam and Liubinas' Ale to create a new life for themselves makes the women migrant characters susceptible to the change in racial, linguistic, cultural and patriarchal attitudes. In Sallis' narrative, she ensures that her protagonist, Hiam, overcomes her feelings of racial and cultural inadequacy by driving through the Australian outback. This enables Hiam to sort out her sense of belonging to Australia. Liubinas' technique is to show how, by discovering the extent of linguistic and cultural differences in Australia, she is able to alter her behaviour patterns in order to "fit" into her new surroundings. In my novel, Daina, who struggles with female-male relationships in Australia, becomes selective in her attitudes and choices upon her return to Lithuania, where she is able to free herself from patriarchal beliefs and perceptions and move on with her life.

In the following chapter, I examine the writing of two other authors, Melbourne-based Arnold Zable and Ukrainian-born Australian migrant Vitali Vitaliev. I focus on Zable's novel, *Cafe Scheherazade* (2005) and Vitaliev's collection of articles, *Vitali's Australia* (1991). I have chosen these two texts, one a novel and the other non-fiction, because they deal with the ways in which historical and political circumstances impact on the

meaning of place and memory in the lives of refugees and migrants. My decision to discuss these two works is also due to the fact that they are both set in the former Soviet Union, which included Soviet Lithuania.

Chapter 4

Writing about history and place

The representation of historical events in Zable's Cafe Scheherazade

In this chapter, I explore the texts of two other writers, Arnold Zable and Vitali Vitaliev, who have influenced the writing of my novel. Although their texts are very different – *Cafe Scheherazade* is a novel and *Vitali's Australia* is a collection of articles previously published in *The Age* – both writers have mastered the art of incorporating important historical and political events into their texts. I address the ways they intertwine the historical and political events with literary techniques and devices such as flashbacks, evocation of mood, stories within the stories, and dramatic events for themselves to convey to the reader how the historical and political events impact on the lives of people. I investigate the way Zable's writing challenges "official" history and how his engaging stories give the reader an insight into the consequences of history on individual characters. I also demonstrate how Vitaliev evokes the memory of particular places, including the Soviet Union, to illustrate the ability of totalitarian regimes to suppress their people. In my novel, historical events and political ideologies similarly impact on my characters and their relationships, and I outline some of the challenges that writing this aspect of the novel presented.

I am interested in how Zable makes the connection between historical events and the characters he has created. His style of writing, which blends historical events into the narrative, is easy to read and at the same time informative of history as it was experienced and lived by "real" people. His writing helped me to think about the experience of Lithuanian migrants and the way I told their stories. He captures the essence of the words *exile* and *refugee*, and shows how the lives of refugees and exiles were interrupted and disturbed and never fully mended. Zable writes in a very engaging way, drawing the reader into his narrative, whether he is describing atmosphere, people or events, taking the reader on an imaginary journey with his characters to the Soviet Union and to war-torn Europe.

Peter Barrett (2011), in his review of *Cafe Scheherazade*, describes the novel as a ‘celebration of the immigrants’ resilience and creativity’ (n.p.). To Barrett, in ‘Zable’s eloquent style, storytelling is heightened by pathos, tragedy and lyricism’, making his writing part of a ‘haunting meditation on displacement, and the way the effects of war linger in the minds of its survivors’ (n.p.).

Zable’s realistic representation of refugee experiences ties in with the particular historical events. I learned this by attending a couple of workshops with the author where he spoke of the pain, suffering and emotional trauma of his parents who experienced the horrors of the Holocaust. The fact that Zable based his novel’s characters, such as Avram and Masha, on people he knew greatly assisted in their realistic portrayal. ‘I remember as a child meeting Avram and Masha and going to the cafe after seeing shows at the Palais Theatre,’ he reminisces (Gocs 2011, p. 1).

Cafe Scheherazade is about Jewish refugees in Australia whose lives remain overshadowed by their Holocaust experiences. Their stories, shared in the Café Scheherazade in Melbourne, reveal some of the traumas caused by the Second World War. Zable uses the voice of the first person narrator Martin, who interviews the regulars of the café for his book. Here he hears many stories from various characters, of which I have selected two, Zalman and Yossel, to discuss in more detail. Zalman and Yossel meet at the end of 1939 in *Café Wolfke* [Volfke], in Vilna [Vilnius], Lithuania, where they find themselves among many refugees from all over Poland. They had escaped from their homeland to Lithuania because Poland had fallen into the hands of the Nazis. When the Nazis approach, they become desperate to leave Lithuania. In the novel, Martin narrates the unofficial history of the Jewish fate through the voices of different characters. The above events, narrated by Martin are contrasted with Zalman’s and Yossel’s stories, whose versions are different from each other, even though they are reflecting on the same events.

One of the events narrated in the novel, of how Jewish refugees managed to exit Lithuania, is recorded in official history. The heroic effort of the Japanese consul Chiune Sugihara in Kaunas, Lithuania, resulted in saving the lives of approximately 6,000 to 10,000 Jewish people (Levine 1996; Yutaka 2001). In 1940, when Lithuania

became incorporated into the Soviet Union (Kasekamp 2010; Daugirdaitė Sruogienė 1990; Taškūnas 1992), Jewish refugees in Poland and Lithuania were required to obtain exit visas from these countries. The Dutch consul Jan Zwartendijk provided some of them with an official stamp, confirming that no visa was required to enter Curaçao. However, refugees had to pass through Japan in order to reach this Dutch Caribbean island. Ten-day transit visas through Japan were issued to thousands of Jewish refugees by the Japanese consul Sugihara (Tenenbaum n.d.; Iwry 2004; Mochizuki 2004).

Zable's mastery lies in the way he incorporates this snippet of history into a fictional narrative by relating the journey of the Jewish characters as they escape to freedom via the trans-Siberian Railway. This is how his character Zalman shares the sequence of events with Martin. Discovering that no visa was required to enter Curaçao, Zalman obtains the stamp from the Dutch consul, and then joins the queue at the Japanese consulate in Kovno [Kaunas]. Zalman recalls how 'for those who stood that morning by the consulate gates, it was also the silence of the desperate' (p. 95). His words highlight the tension and the uncomfortable sense of stillness. Entering the consulate, Zalman experiences how Sugihara, 'too busy applying the stamps' (p. 96), does not look at him while stamping his documents. The reason for Sugihara's haste is that he does not have the Japanese government's approval to allow Jewish refugees to enter Japan. Therefore, acting on his own accord, Sugihara works 18-20 hours a day, trying to accommodate as many refugees as possible (Iwry 2004; Mochizuki 2004). Even though aware of this, Zalman feels that he is being treated as another "desperate" number by the consul.

By using the tense atmosphere of war-torn Russia, where life and its values become reduced to the random chance of a survivor, Zable makes the reader connect with these life-threatening events. As a reader, I can smell the gunpowder in the air, hear the sound of the stamp echoing through the Japanese consulate. I can see the queue of people with anxious faces, standing for hours, and imagine them holding their breath and maybe praying in silence. I can sense how tense things were. Uncertainty, mixed with fear of being stopped at any time through his ordeal, whether on the train to Vladivostok or while boarding the boat to Japan, pervades Zalman's thoughts. Observing prisoners with 'their heads bent...their eyes fixed in a helpless gaze' (p. 98), Zable highlights Zalman's sensitivity towards other people. Martin tells us that Zalman, ready to board the boat,

appears to the prisoners as if he ‘was from another world’ (p. 98). Even though at first he wants ‘to reach out and touch them’ (p. 98), overcome by the feeling of uselessness, he turns towards the waiting boat. Here Zable makes the reader aware of the extent to which Zalman’s inability to help those in need, springing from his “inaction”, exacerbates his sense of guilt.

In comparison, Yossel, who travels from Vilna to Curaçao, has a different tale to tell about waiting at the Japanese consulate. ‘I hopped about as if standing on pins. I sweated and jostled along with the impatient crowd. And Sugihara welcomed us all... He stamped whatever we put under his nose’ (p. 135). I can see him kissing his papers, after they are stamped and can imagine him ‘dancing in the streets’ (p. 136) with joy. Using ‘the boyish charm of a gambler’ (p. 134), who has been able to make his money trading on the black market, Yossel travels on the trans-Siberian train. Even though observing ‘prisoners lying on platforms, chained, and in rags’ and women ‘begging for food’ (p. 138), he appears relaxed because he has diamonds and money hidden in his suitcases. While the entire Russian empire searches for food, he enjoys being elegantly dressed, travelling ‘first-class’ (p. 137). Worst of all, his behaviour shows no sign of guilt. To me, as a reader, he represents the “other” or the lucky refugee, who, exposed to difficult circumstances, manages to get around them with ease.

It is clear that Yossel’s character is constructed to show the multiplicity of meanings evoked by various interpretations of the same event. In the café, where the narrator, Martin, hears recollections of the same story, Zable makes him evaluate the characters’ behaviour patterns: distress, openness, shyness, politeness, rudeness, fear, kindness, and weakness that shape their individual memories. These devices allow Zable to complete the picture of how people might have felt, as each day they faced dangers in their quest to survive the war.

These examples show how well Zable integrates non-fictional events into his fiction. His novel highlights the fragility of human life, threatened by the prewar, war and postwar political situation in Europe, discussed in chapter 1. By depicting behavioural patterns in response to trying circumstances, Zable shows us that historical events have enormous impact on real people. Thus, revision of the events as Gerovitch (2011), Hodgkin and Radstone (2003), Portelli (1998, 2003), Assmann (1992), and Rigney

(2004) agree (cf. introduction), further shifts the original meaning away from the “truth”. At the same time, Zable gives the characters room to tell their story in their own voice.

Dealing with place and ideology in Vitaliev’s Vitali’s Australia

Vitaliev’s writing, which glimpses into his life in the Soviet Union, influenced me during the writing of my novel. Viewing his experiences from a migrant point of view gives me, as a reader, a sense of how homeland events, reinterpreted in the diaspora, can gain new significance; how, when living away from home, particular events and circumstances may appear outrageous or unbelievable. Vitaliev’s writing relates to the historical and political circumstances of the 1980s and is thus relevant to my novel’s Soviet era characters. My interest lies in the techniques such as flashbacks and evocation of traumatic mood he uses to inform the readers of the events occurring in the Soviet Union, and how they were interpreted from within the constraints of the Soviet regime.

Vitali’s Australia is a collection of articles that range from diary entries to autobiographical pieces. The 1989 Moscow Journalist of the Year, Vitaliev is a prominent Ukrainian known for publicly exposing the organised crime of the “Soviet mafia”, as well as the plight of political prisoners and the existence of prostitution (Rumens 2010). In 1990, he defected to Australia (Wolff 1995), leaving the Soviet Union, ‘where your every move, word and desire was regulated by the unbending party line’ (Vitaliev 2012, n.p.). Vitaliev ‘was famous, or notorious, for saying things that the government didn’t like, and which the KGB didn’t like’ (James, cited in Wolff 1995, n.p.). In his series of articles, Vitaliev provides factual information about events including when, where and how they occurred and what effect they had on the surroundings and the people. His book, full of examples from his career in journalism, helps the reader relate to the experiences of ordinary Soviet citizens. His autobiographical accounts change the way he represents events: in recalling events from his past, he not only relives them, but also shares the pain and suffering of real people with the reader.

Like me, born in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and settling in Australia in his 30s, Vitaliev talks about historical and political circumstances surrounding events in the Soviet Union, events I had heard of or personally experienced – but only at the recounting level. A great storyteller, he encourages me, as a reader, to look for what lies beneath the facts. An example of such reporting is the aftermath of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant's explosion in April 1986 that I also recall, and include in my novel's narrative. Below are the official versions of the Chernobyl events provided by leading scientists and researchers. A prominent Russian environmentalist Alexey V. Yablokov (2009a) points out the Soviet government's negligence towards the evidence:

Problems complicating a full assessment of the effects from Chernobyl included official secrecy and falsification of medical records by the USSR for the first 3.5 years after the catastrophe and the lack of reliable medical statistics in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. Official data concerning the thousands of cleanup workers (Chernobyl liquidators) who worked to control the emissions are especially difficult to reconstruct. (p. 32)

'The human consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear accident' report, released on 22 January 2002, reveals how 'Serious concerns primarily relate to the so-called "highly contaminated territories" where contamination is between 15 and 40 curies per square kilometre. At present between 150 and 200 thousand people permanently reside in these areas' (p. 8). The extent to which the Soviet government withheld information about these events highlights how little was done to rescue the human beings from the radiation-affected areas. Knowledge of the events was greatly suppressed to defend the image of a "flawless" communist society (Nogee 1972). Unfortunately, disabled people were not considered as a part of the ideal society, and thus those who were disabled through Chernobyl were also hidden from the mainstream (Yablokov 2009a, 2009b; Rasell & Iarskaia-Smirnova 2014; Mete 2008).

I am interested in how Vitaliev captures this particular event, and the literary devices and writing techniques he employs to transform it into powerful storytelling. The story begins in a normal suburban setting:

I can still remember very well that day at the end of April 1986. With my family, we were spending the weekend in a rest home 160 kilometres from Moscow. One morning, after switching on a small old-fashioned radio in our room, I heard the news of "a minor accident at Chernobyl atomic power station". (1991, p. 259)

The news that people were 'well out of danger' deflated the real scope of the disaster, picked up by Swedish scientists who discovered 'a sudden sharp increase in the level of x-radiation in their country' (p. 259) and announced the news to the world. Vitaliev cleverly juxtaposes the carefree family holiday atmosphere and the apparent insignificance of the nuclear accident with the level of secrecy the Soviet authorities maintained throughout and after the accident.

In March 1991, after greeting 55 children from Chernobyl at Tullamarine airport, Vitaliev uses their conversation to bring me, as a reader, to tears. His powerful projection of children's fear, anger and frustration, evokes in the reader a sense of uneasiness and hopelessness. I see in front of me 'sad, tired and unchildish expressions in their eyes' (p. 263). I sense their anxiety when they tell how, some time after the accident, they were taken away from Chernobyl and resettled in other towns where they were verbally abused and called infectious. Vitaliev's text reveals the extent to which they were exposed to belittlement, and how they were shunned and avoided by people who were rude and insensitive towards the ill and needy. He describes how Kiev citizens demonstrated 'against resettling the victims of Chernobyl there' and how 'One girl's flat was set on fire in an attempt to drive her family away' (p. 264). Using the Melbourne airport to show the children's transition between their homeland and Australia, where their fate was yet to be decided, he highlights their fluid sense of belonging. I hear their trembling voices, admitting they are afraid to live in Ukraine and to talk about themselves. They reveal to Vitaliev how they were told by their superiors: 'We'll send you back if you start complaining' (p. 263). I imagine them whispering their hidden stories to Vitaliev, wondering, 'but who will tell the truth if not us?' (p. 264). His words make me sympathise with unfortunate children whose doctors in Ukraine didn't listen to their 'problems with the pancreas, headaches, memory failures', and regarded them 'just like everyone else' (p. 264).

Vitaliev's personal reaction and the level of sensitivity to his hometown events is expressed in the following lines: 'When we parted, the girls gave me a pin with the inscription: "Chernobyl Help – Donor". It is now on my lapel. As hot as a scorching iron, it burns me to my heart' (p. 265). Thus, by using the politically charged atmosphere to provide factual information about events taking place in Chernobyl, Kiev

or Tullamarine airport, he draws the reader into real people's pain and suffering. Learning the way those affected by the ecological disaster were silenced leaves a lump in the reader's throat.

The aftermath of Chernobyl disaster highlights the level of "outsiderness" that physically and emotionally affected children had been exposed to. By describing people's attitudes towards the victims, Vitaliev amplifies their individual vulnerability. The victims of the Chernobyl disaster become situated in Bhabha's "third space", but with no room for negotiation and criticism provided. The fact that the Soviet apparatus rejected the needs of its citizens and their greater protection from radiation shows the extent to which they were trapped in the "conditions of the existence" within the "flawless" society (Nogee 1972). The stories presented and interpreted in Vitaliev's text make the reader sense his anger with the way the Soviet government devalued individual needs during and after such an ecological disaster – a disaster that, after the Chernobyl accident was revealed to the world, undermined the mirage of the "flawless" Soviet society's existence. The relationship between ordinary people and totalitarianism, and how the latter can become exposed to more fluid interpretation of political and historical reality, are questions I take up in my novel *Torn*.

Dealing with fractured relationships in Torn

As part of my novel, I incorporated the particular events of twentieth-century Lithuanian history that had significant consequences on Lithuanian lives. I used various techniques and devices such as flashbacks, repetition of narratives, stories within the stories and irony, to depict irreconcilable differences between the postwar and Soviet Lithuanian characters in Australia, and the different Lithuania they came from. The story within the story technique has been used to highlight the way migrant characters are constantly returning to memories of their homeland. Every story triggers another story and their past life in Lithuania is never far away in their thoughts. The flashback technique and repetition of narratives has been used to show why the postwar cohort speaks highly of their time in pre-Second World War Lithuania, why my Soviet Lithuanian characters associate their belonging with the Soviet period, and why the

latter characters are viewed by the postwar group as if they arrived from a different “country”.

In my novel, characters are shown attaching great importance to when they came to Australia. This separates them into “us”, that is, the postwar Lithuanians who arrived first, and “them”, the Soviet Lithuanians, who came later. Hall’s (1987) observations of “us” and “them”, associated with people’s attempt to reconcile with each other’s historical and cultural values, have been noted in chapter 1. My intention was to explore the extent of the gap between “us” and “them” with particular reference to the Lithuanian situation, and throughout the novel I highlight how, while in Australia, those who were born and bred under different historical and political circumstances judge each other by their preconceived attitudes and views, reflected in their storytelling and hostile behaviour patterns. But to put it simply, they were largely unable to understand each other. In justifying the reasons for the fractured relationships between different characters, I wanted the reader to empathise with both sides. My postwar characters, well-informed of the activities of the Soviet secret services such as the KGB, assume that people coming from the Soviet Union might be spies. Such views have been articulated in the books of Zake (2010), Kasekamp (2010), Baltutienė et al. (1990), and Kedys (1994), confirming how Russian espionage activities, operating within and also outside the Soviet Union, resulted in the Soviet citizens’ inability to distinguish who were friends and who were enemies. Naturally, they were cautious in their official and non-official conversations (Knight 1988; Kedys 1994; Hingley 1970; Vitaliev 1990, 1991), an issue dealt with in my novel.

My aim was to integrate this kind of historical information into my narrative to show the level of mistrust the postwar Lithuanian characters projected towards the Soviet Lithuanian characters. For instance, one Sunday afternoon, after the concert in which Daina participates as part of the postwar choir, she overhears how she is regarded as a ‘KGB agent, sent here by the Russians’ (p. 86). Daina is shocked and brought to tears by such an accusation. The event is an example of what I discussed in chapter 1, of how Baltic refugees were fearful of punishment by the Soviet apparatus for not returning to their homeland after their exodus in 1944 (cf. L’Hommedieu 2011). Throughout my novel, I explore the postwar characters’ vulnerability and fear of being reported to the

Soviet authorities, even after 40 years of living in Australia. I show how they are so overwhelmed by their traumatic past that they behave in an unfair and hurtful way towards the Soviet Lithuanian characters. Thus, Daina, who is blamed for ‘capturing the information on a tape recorder hidden under her long woollen skirt’ and for keeping ‘detailed accounts of events in her notebook’ (p. 86), is made into a dangerous suspect. My aim is for the reader to understand that Daina is a victim of the postwar generation’s fear, suspicion, and mistrust towards all Soviet characters, and is not singled out as an individual. At the same time, being treated in such a way, I want to depict her disappointment and hurt, resulting in her emotional instability and her avoidance of dealings with the postwar characters.

At a political level, my aim was to convey to the reader how, when the postwar characters try to segregate the Soviet Lithuanian characters by regarding them as communists, this is Yuval-Davis’ “politicised belonging” in action. My intention was to show their shock, listening to the way Daina speaks of the ‘Equal and happy’ (p. 66) communist society, the very thought of which the postwar characters hate. They are frustrated at being called “traitors” (pp. 16, 133) for escaping from the homeland, after they were forced to leave their properties for others to benefit from. To provide justification for both sides of the argument, I use the postwar character Algis: ‘It’s all about politics, Daina. We are traitors and you are communists, so to speak. The Russians completely control our homeland, and brainwash Soviet citizens like you’ (p. 16). At the same time, Algis expresses his dislike for the Russians: ‘They killed millions – I hate them’, while Daina loves the Russian language: ‘she would go to her room to quietly listen to the SBS Russian news’ (p. 31). My intention was to make my reader understand that even though the postwar and Soviet Lithuanian characters are from the same place, their sets of life values are radically different. Fraught with misunderstandings and hostilities, their relationship remains complicated.

As a professional choir conductress from Soviet Lithuania, I also experienced prejudice from some members of the Australian-Lithuanian community. Luda Popenhagen (2012) writes: ‘At the outset some Geelong Lithuanians voiced skepticism about Burokaitė-

Pranauskienė's⁴ motives for migrating to Australia and her suitability to lead the migrant community choir' (p. 236). To Popenhagen, the reason was, 'Many new arrivals of the 1990s were initially regarded with suspicion, irrespective of profession or trade' (p. 236). In comparison, other authors have noted how Lithuanian migrants in Australia were not just "initially regarded", but continually viewed, with suspicion (Baltutienė et al. 1990; Varnas 2001; Baltušytė 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d; Bartkevičienė 1998a, 1998b; Dambrauskienė 2009; Pranauskas 2003; Cibas 2014b). My own experience confirms the tenacity of preconceived perceptions and attitudes about "them" and "us", as I became caught up in questions about who should be treated with suspicion.

Such revelations are seldom expressed in fictional literature. My novel aims to add to a deeper understanding of the tensions between postwar, Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanians, and show the difficulty of achieving reconciliation in the light of the opposing ideologies my characters were exposed to in their homeland. Hall et al.'s (1996) idea of bridging the difference between "us" and "them", or between people of the same nationality separated by different ideologies, may not be possible. Irreconcilability may be unavoidable.

Conclusion

By incorporating historical evidence into their texts, Zable and Vitaliev highlight the vulnerability of human beings in the light of changing historical and political circumstances. The imaginary eyewitness accounts, gathered from historical evidence and then incorporated into Zable's novel, make the reader understand how individual stories enrich historical evidence. His novel, based on the stories of real Holocaust survivors, is an example of how literary texts can shed a new light on individual perceptions of how things happened.

Similarly, Vitaliev's set of articles, full of flashbacks, highly-charged emotions, and descriptive atmosphere that inform the readers of his life in the Soviet Union, acts as an important evidence of how individual experiences amount to what philosopher Alain Badiou (2004) calls "a singular multiplicity" of meanings. Vitaliev's writing, providing

⁴ My maiden and married name in Lithuanian.

an “I”, or an individual point of view as part of “a singular multiplicity”, mirrors the harshness of the political atmosphere Soviet citizens were exposed to.

Given my Soviet Lithuanian citizen experiences in Lithuania and Australia, I well understand the reasons behind the behaviour of my characters. The challenge is to have the reader share my understanding. And this is where I draw inspiration from writers such as Zable and Vitaliev – in constructing my narrative in a way that will strike the reader as realistic and believable, that makes the text come alive. After all, ‘what composes an event is always extracted from a situation, [sic] is always related back to a singular multiplicity, to its state, to the language connected to it...’ (Badiou 2004, p. 98). The official events, circulating through unofficial storytelling in “the language connected to” a particular ideology, means that the “official” history is challenged by discrepancies with the unofficial accounts (cf. Portelli 1998, 2003; Švedas 2014). This helps to bridge the gaps between non-fiction and fiction writing.

I know these gaps only too well. I have experienced – and continue to experience – many, and in the final section of this exegesis I try to sum up *Torn*’s significance in my life, as well as the way my writing contributes to the wider community. The conclusion highlights what I learned from the process of writing and how it influenced my search for that elusive “home”.

Conclusion

Writing during the Soviet era

I have been overwhelmed by the freedom of expression in Australia. I often wish I had been born and bred here. However, my life began in Soviet Lithuania, where students at public schools did not enjoy the opportunity of freedom of speech. Where students at tertiary institutions were silent during lectures because of the strict discipline drilled into them since kindergarten. Where they – we – were taught to think and behave as one (Eaton 2004; Putnaitė 2007; Matthews 2012). Because of Soviet totalitarianism, writing about Soviet Lithuania is extremely difficult, particularly for women writers. Solveiga Daugirdaitė (2011) has written of how, in the 1970s, feminism was not able to reach behind the Iron Curtain, though there were some brave women who were writing in those circumstances. A Lithuanian poet, Janina Degutytė (1928-1990), was described as an important woman writer, who ‘never deferred to the Soviet authorities’ (Daugirdaitė 2011, p. 179). She was greatly scrutinised in comparison to Lithuanian male writers. Degutytė (1998) shares her frustrations of constantly needing to prove to the male writers that she is as good as them. She explains: ‘If a woman achieves the same as a man does, it means she had twice as much talent, will, and spiritual energy’ (p. 38). Her personal frustration is understandable – Lithuania’s most prestigious National Prize for Literature and Art Award, since it was established in 1989, has been awarded to just eight female and 36 male writers (Daugirdaitė 2011).

I doubt I would have been able to become a writer in Lithuania if I were still living there. Although I have written poetry and short stories since my teenage years, only in my 20s did my feature articles begin to appear in the Lithuanian press. Writing in that capacity I never touched on political or historical topics, reporting instead on cultural events and traditional activities. I didn’t think I could write about history, deportations, the postwar Lithuanian exodus from the country, or the suppression of religious or human rights. I had no idea about the distortion of Lithuanian history of the twentieth-century, and little knowledge about the “true” facts. And if I had written about political or historical issues at the time I lived in Lithuania, I would have been put in jail.

As a researcher in Lithuania, I would have faced the extent of Soviet control and its censorship of written materials. Alfonsas Piliponis (cited in Grigonytė 2013), the director of the Lithuanian National Archives (1986-97), confirms that academics consulting the archives during the years of the Soviet regime were allowed to take notes in their note books, numbered by the staff. Before they left the archive, the staff checked for missing pages and read the content of the notes, confiscating them if they in any way implied anti-Soviet sentiments. To Piliponis, these so-called “secret instructions” for checking clients’ readings were given to staff by the NKVD headquarters. Discovering the extent of Soviet control and censorship makes me sad and, at the same time, relieved that I live in Australia and do not have to deal with such occurrences. I am relieved that I am no longer part of Soviet ideology, where complicity was inescapable, though I am sure that aspects of that ideology will remain ingrained in my psyche.

In 1994, upon my first return to Lithuania, I discovered that when I did not come back from my initial six-week trip to Australia, the manager I had worked for as Art and Music Officer in the Park of Leisure and Recreation in the town of Klaipėda had been called to the KGB office. He was asked whether there was an underlying reason behind my stay in Australia. He explained that I was a musician and that I had nothing to do with politics, and that I went to Australia for a holiday, fell in love and stayed on. After a few months, obviously not satisfied with his reply, they again called him in for questioning, and he repeated the same answers. My manager told me he had seen the folder where information on both occasions was recorded. I felt uneasy knowing that I had a “personal file”, and it made me cautious that people like me, who managed to venture abroad, may have been monitored for their activities even while abroad. It also alerted me to reconsider what I said and wrote about my homeland, its people, and how I commented on changes there. After living and working in Australia for many years, I have now begun to relax and write with ease, and to get work published not only in Lithuanian but also in English. My writing has emboldened me. I have taken a stand through my words.

Beyond migrant silence

Since my arrival in Australia 25 years ago, I have never stopped yearning for Lithuania and contemplating my return there. Even after all these years of negotiating my place in

Australia, I still feel like an outsider. Partly in response to these feelings, in 2008 I decided to undertake further study and research into the Lithuanian community in Australia. The process of writing the PhD novel helped me to understand the issues created through migration, issues that had impacted directly on me. Finding relevant theoretical underpinnings deepened my understanding – the process of conceptualising nostalgia, memory and identity providing me with the framework for imagining the diverse migration experiences embedded in each character in *Torn*.

The process of writing my novel was a long journey of personal growth. I acquired a greater understanding of myself and my transition from being a citizen of Lithuania to becoming a migrant in Australia. This understanding supports the diaspora researcher Tea Golob's (2009) observation that migrants may live with a strong 'desire and need for belonging to a certain place' (p. 65). She suggests the relationship between 'a place of origin to which one feels emotionally attached' and 'a stable place of residence that feels secure, comfortable, and familiar' may help to breach the gap between home and homeland (p. 67).

Similarly, even though yearning for my homeland and contemplating returning there, I have now created a special place for myself that makes me belong in Australia. But I only found that place after writing in English and after "stepping outside" the Lithuanian community that is still trying to find a formula for the dialogue between the Lithuanian migrants from different eras. As the German-Australian writer Walter Adamson (1992) has suggested, communication between migrants within their ethnic communities must be extended into the wider, Australian community, lest their "silence" continues to divide ethnic communities from the broader society and leaves many of the migrant stories untold. Adamson also suggests that multicultural writers must reach beyond their past experiences outside of Australia, and 'Instead of lamenting what we have lost (e.g. a home country) we should welcome what we have found (a home in Australia)' (p. 66). I am conscious that writing about a particular community's issues may help to open up a dialogue based on an awareness of why migrants and displaced persons continue to hold onto symbolic meanings of home and homeland (Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Ommundsen 2004).

Working on my novel, I grew stronger. I now feel more confident that my voice will be heard among the other voices of Australian migrant writers. While writing my novel, I felt inspired by them and proud to be able to contribute in my own small way to this body of Australian literature. There are only a few Australian-Lithuanian women writers of the postwar generation such as Elena Jonaitis, Ale Liubinas and Ava Saudargienė, who have written about their migration experiences. No works of more recent Lithuanian migrants such as myself have been published in Australia.

To summarise, in this exegesis I aimed at further theorising and fictionalising the lives of Lithuanians the Lithuanian presence in Australia. By adding to the chronicles, books, and my own BA Honours and MA research into the Australian-Lithuanian community, I believe I have contributed to the body of knowledge on Lithuanian migration. As nobody before me has researched and analysed Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian migration to Australia in fiction and non-fiction, I also feel I have made a substantial contribution in doing so. By documenting historical and political events in twentieth-century Lithuania that led to migration here, I was able to draw on the differences in time and reason for arrival, the fractured relationships, and the way different groups have dealt with nostalgia and memory for their homeland. Sharing my knowledge with the reader may help to broaden Australian society's awareness of the extent to which the ideological differences within ethnic communities impacts on their ability to communicate and build relationships. I hope that my novel and exegesis has opened a possibility for other migrant writers to come forward with their stories.

I believe my novel has given voice to *another* migrant, who, after many years of living in silence, is finally able to express herself through writing in English. Through the particular circumstances, experiences and events to which my main protagonist Daina was exposed in Australia and Lithuania, I can hear my own voice, my own views, my ideas and my beliefs. As a fictional character that is being constructed to depict the life of a Soviet citizen in the Soviet Union, Daina is in part of my own reflection: she too feels "other" in Australia. Daina and I are both caught between two countries, two cultures, resulting in a hybridised, Soviet-Australian identity. That "otherness" exists in relation to the Lithuanian community, to broader Australian society, and to the homeland that has changed since our departure. But there is a difference. Daina is

finally able to reconcile with herself and sort out her belonging to Lithuania. My own journey of rediscovering myself continues.

I have reclaimed an identity I left behind in Lithuania by writing, instead of conducting, and writing in English, not Lithuanian. By stepping beyond the familiar and enclosed Lithuanian community boundaries that I was part of for many years, I have felt independent and free from the community's expectations. By sharing my personal experiences, regrets and aspirations outside the Lithuanian community, I have answered my own questions about who I was in Lithuania, and who I have become in Australia. The answers lead to more questions. My identity remains *torn* between Australian and Lithuanian, between musician and writer, between migrant and woman. As a migrant woman, I think less of myself in Australia and I continue to live with regret that my haste decision to stay here did not help me establish myself in the field of professional conducting.

The concepts of dislocation, longing, belonging, and identity shifts are concepts that every migrant and refugee deals with in the process of migration (Golob 2009). While trying to find answers to how to make migration less stressful, we must keep in mind the fundamental disjuncture between homeland and home (Tsuda 2004) – ‘between imagining and constructing a home (or homes) and defining a self’ (Golob 2009, p. 67). For me, the difference between homeland and home has blurred. I lost my homeland and haven't yet found my home. I “imagine” and “construct” my home in Australia by listening to Lithuanian music, reading Lithuanian literature, and displaying Lithuanian ornaments around me to remind me of my homeland. This helps me to define myself, here and now.

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