



Dolphin Boy

Short story of Cs. Szabó Virág

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Dolphin Boy

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1.

The waves of the sea are softly rippling. The world feels now as if God had taken all his creation in his lap, rocking them immersed in his thoughts. There is no fear. Only peace. The deepest kind, like the sea itself.

In the world under water the rules are different than in the land of people. However, one cannot truly articulate this difference without being familiar with both.

There is a boy. He told me what it's like there, under the surface of the water.

-First you get scared because distances are much larger than on dry land. And the depth is simply inconceivable. If you were falling down in there, you would feel you were never going to reach the bottom of the sea. You are no longer a human there – just a victim. No different from an algae or a mouthful of crab.

After a long silence he continues:

-Still, or exactly for this reason, it is only there in the deepest deep that you can comprehend the wonder of existence. The mystery that is only exceptionally experienced here in human civilization.

He stops. He stands up, wobbles a little as he leaves the rock that has been sustaining his body. He takes a few uncertain, weak steps.

I watch him in expectation, fascinated by his fragility and the almost transparent beauty of his skin. His eyes embarrass me. They are pure blue, as if it was the god of the sea himself looking at me – and this look also holds some ungraspable, alarming sadness.

-I am at home – he finally says, with a subtle smile.

He slips when saying that. I would reach out to help but he won't let me, pulls his arm away to show he will manage by himself. He looks in the distance, immersed in his thoughts, then gently puts his toes in the cold water.

-You know what's the big difference between the world of people and dolphins? – he asks, not even looking at me. –That we only kill for survival –while you even for mere possession.

On a cloudy morning my niece, Mariann and I sailed out. We were in a good mood and even the fact that we got drifted to some faraway shores and the sky looked increasingly rough could not spoil that.

Mariann turned sixteen around that time. She lived her life with teenager revolt, despising all that's regular or obligatory. She was lying half naked with men's boots on her feet and sunglasses on the tip of her nose. She was evidently enjoying her unusual freedom. I was trying to ignore her, continuously reminding myself that once, perhaps not even so long ago, I was also like this.

Mariann turned to me fiercely all of a sudden. I looked at her without any serious interest, her vehemence made our already shaky little boat tilt anyway.

-Hey Adél, what do you think would happen to me if I threw myself in the water now? Would I die, drown or find myself in a world where no human could go before?

I didn't feel like chatting with her. Best if she is quiet and doesn't move, I thought. But she didn't leave it at that.

-Who knows what the bottom of the sea hides right here underneath us? Perhaps that very wave approaching us now is actually a gate to another dimension...and if I cross it I get into a much more exciting world...

And she moved. I quivered in panic and reached for her arm.

-Don't you dare! – I hissed.

She was capable of anything when in the mood. She lacked any sense of responsibility or danger. She has been up to destruction and havoc ever since her birth.

When we simply walked the streets together, I was trembling with fear if she would – just for curiosity – jump in front of a car. She wanted to find out how strong the brakes were or how good reflexes the driver had. And if she was lucky enough not to get in trouble, she had a good laugh. Of course she had quite a few accidents, hospitalizations, even at the psychiatry once, but all that could not discourage her from new attempts. Danger and diversity were her natural elements.

-I cannot leave even a corner of the world undiscovered – she looked into my eyes deeply and seriously now. –Weren't we born into this world to experience? Let me jump.

She made a move to set her arm free. I resisted. What will I say to her foster-father if we end up at the casualty again?

-Please let me go, Adél. You know well that once I have decided something, it is going to happen. You have no other choice. You let me go or I take you with me.

She didn't leave me any time to think. She jumped. My hand let go.

Time seemed infinitely long until she appeared on the surface. Her face was lifeless, her eyes closed. What will I say to András, that I let her daughter drown? –was my first thought. Why did I agree to take care of her for the summer while her father is away? I am at least as irresponsible as Mariann... then: God, please let her survive! I will give anything to get through this day safe and sound...God, please help!

Then Mariann's lifeless body began to move right towards the boat. It moved straight and determined, almost unstoppably. I couldn't believe my eyes.

I think I wasn't conscious. As the body reached the boat, I was somehow able to pull her up, together with a mysterious helper who looked like a human being and at the same time... non-human...

The being that mostly looked like a boy bent over Mariann, placing his hand on the girl's bare chest. And then... I cannot even find words for what I saw... the hand radiated clearly visible pure white light, and the heart began to beat again... The boy-being turned his happy eyes towards the sky, seemed like mumbling something, then turned his back to us and dived into the water.

My niece soon came to her senses. She was still gasping for air when she began speaking in a weak but enthusiastic voice.

-I saw him, and I saw that other world... it exists, Adél, it exists...

She closed her eyes, tired. She needed to sleep and I took her head on my lap. I gave thanks to God, or whoever that helped, that she was alive, unharmed... but what I saw made me so worn out that I could hardly wait to reach the shore...

-I am in love – Mariann said the next morning with her usual ease.

Otherwise she was the same as before, only her eyes became dreamier. We didn't even mention the special adventure to her father when he called, we thought it was best to keep quiet about it. The accident was our shared secret, together with the blond prince that arrived from the waves and whose image I couldn't get out my head either.

-I told you there is another world in the depth of the sea, I told you. You didn't believe me, see?

She was bragging.

-Weren't you afraid? –I asked embarrassed.

-No! I enjoyed it...even enjoyed almost dying...actually it was funny...

-But Mariann! How can you call something funny that is painful for others?

She burst out in a loud, offensive laugh. She didn't care about other people's feelings. When she was a child she loved killing insects, snakes and frogs...and didn't just simply kill them but spectacularly executed them. Once even a cat but then András punished her with big slaps – so she gave up with mammals.

-Adél, why would I care about others when having everything makes me feel good? If I feel good, what does it matter what the world thinks or feels? I am free, undisturbed –that's what matters. Why, isn't that normal?

I was wondering what could have made this girl so heartless. Her parents got divorced quite early – she might not even remember her real father as she hasn't met him even once since then and no one ever talked to her about him. Her mother was a quite average woman, with average problems and average mother's instincts. András, my brother was teaching at the university and came home quite seldom. He lived for science, nothing else. Mariann mostly lived with them – she was a good student who had everything at her fingertips but nothing really caught her attention. She spent the summers with me in the little house by the sea, with the parents' admitted intent that she would use her energy surplus here. No one ever asked me if it was a burden or not – everyone thought Adél is lonely anyway, the company of youth will do her good. And I didn't say a word. I didn't enjoy being with her, spending each summer day in danger, at the same time saying no was not one of my strengths and I might have been hiding a tiny savior motivation as well. Every time when she arrived at the end of May, I started the two months we

would spend together with faith that I was going to help her this time. I didn't succeed any year, and I broke down by the end of each holiday.

Mariann interrupted my train of thoughts:

-I need to find him – she suddenly said.

We were standing on the terrace, hand in hand. The feeling seemed to calm me for a little while, to “keep her in hand”, by my side, in peace. I was aware that this state could not last long.

-I want to show him to the girls too...this...thing...is so strange... When he held me in his arms it felt like fulfillment itself... - she laughed. –God, the words I'm using! I am getting pathetic... So, shall we find him?

I didn't want to let her go by herself, worried she would do something stupid again. And I was also curious of the boy who brought her back, to life.

Mariann snatched her hand out of mine. I reached after her in panic but I was late – the stag-beetle that visited my terrace was no longer alive. I was on the brink of crying. I felt I had no more strength.

-Why did you do that? –I attacked her, without wanting to.

I wanted to understand her.

She shrugged.

-It feels good to be the arbiter of life and death... - she answered a little cheekily.

-I think you are sick... - I found myself saying.

To my great surprise she burst out in a cynical laugh. I expected a different reaction.

-Me, sick? Look around, the whole world is like this! – she claimed with an edge. –Look into yourself instead – it is you who has a problem. You pay attention to all, give to everyone while you are left with nothing. The way you live is pathetic...

She was already sorry for having said that. She could feel she had gone too far.

-Of course that's also a way... - she added in a lower key. -... I'm just not sure it's rewarding...

She swept off the dead insect from the terrace with her bare foot.

-The world is not the way you think it is – my sixteen-year-old niece told me, the forty-year-old. –The world is a bunch of cretins. Fight for survival. And you are being emotional here, wining over an insect. You are what you fight out for yourself – that’s it.

I stood there astonished, not understanding a word. Does this girl I have been taking care of since her birth really see me so pathetic?

But Mariann didn’t let me immerse in my thoughts. She went on.

-He will not understand me. He isn’t human...I think... But I still have to find him because he is so strange, so different that I must see him again.

-See – and destroy?

There was no blame in my voice, only sadness.

-No – see him and bring him out to dry land. Take him among the people, so that he can be normal.

I wanted to tell her she had no right to force her opinion and will on others. But all I could finally say was:

-You are simply the victim of an unusual dream, Mariann.

-That we dreamt together, right? – she looked at me, almost forcefully.

I really had nothing left to say to that. Finally I suggested walking to the beach together to see if her savior was there.

He was. Near the shore, sitting on a huge rock in the sea, with his back to us. He was fragile, his skin almost transparently white. His blond hair reached his shoulders. He was contemplating, naked, with his head on his knees.

He must have heard our steps because he quivered. He turned around frightened, then started shouting words we could not understand. And then, an amazing colorful butterfly took flight above his head and he followed it with his eyes with a long, sad look.

He turned to us only when the colorful guest had disappeared from his eyes. I looked away in embarrassment but Mariann obviously enjoyed the situation.

-Come here, I wanna talk to you! – she cried out, somewhat cheekily.

The boy narrowed his eyes. He didn't move. He was sitting on the rock, now turning towards us, with his knees pulled up, spying us persistently. There can't have been more than two or three meters between us.

Mariann wasn't shy. She marched right into the water in her clothes as she was and didn't stop until she reached the rock. The boy stayed motionless, watching the girl with an expressionless face.

-Don't you remember? It's me you saved yesterday – Mariann shouted.

The boy didn't reply. He was watching me now, contemplating. Then he suddenly dived into the water.

Mariann followed him indignantly but she gave up trying after a while and returned to the shore.

-I couldn't catch up with him – she grumbled disappointedly.

But from that day we both sat on the beach waiting for the new appearance of the mysterious stranger.

4.

One dawn when we already almost gave up hoping we would see him again – he arrived. He swam to the shore and sat beside us without a word, in the sand.

Mariann and I looked at each other, I saw an impish smile on her face that said "I told you". I felt perhaps I should leave them alone but I wasn't able to. I wanted to see and feel him, this special boy from the sea who was sitting on the shore innocently naked, watching us.

-Who are you? – I asked this time.

A long, expectant silence followed. The boy looked hard at me while drawing something in the sand with his index finger.

-Say your name. Your NAME! – Mariann demanded.

The boy didn't speak. Then he walked back in the water, leaving us behind.

There was a heart drawn in the sand – and something that resembled wings...

-I can't believe that was it – Mariann kept wining for days.

She took the message as a love confession and felt disappointed that we didn't hear from the stranger for a long time afterwards. To alleviate her selfish sorrow, I sent her for two days to her friend. I was also happy to spend some time without her and I knew she could equally do with some new experience, a change of environment.

The day when I was alone again, slicing fruit for the salad, I noticed wet footprints on the stones. It frightened me because I hardly had any visitors in my seaside house – I didn't really know anyone around.

I followed the footprints and found their owner very soon. It was the visitor from the sea, this time kneeling in front of my fish tank with sad eyes, watching the fish.

When he noticed me, he simply said without looking at me:

-Let them go.

-What did you say? –I stared at him.

He looked deep into my eyes, relentlessly.

-Let them go – he repeated in a determined voice.

As I didn't move, he took action. He stood up, lifted the heavy tank from the shelf and set out towards the terrace. He walked slowly but steadfastly and didn't stop until he reached the shore. He placed the terribly expensive fish rarities one by one into the sea gently and lovingly.

I was so astonished I couldn't say a word. He, however, turned to me with a satisfied look.

-It's all right now. Everyone has the right to freedom.

He took me by the hand and led me to the terrace, making me sit in one of the plastic chairs. He sat beside me, on the stone – pulling his naked knees under him. He was so beautiful, almost transhumanly subtle and aerial. His blond hair dried in the meantime, shining like gold now. His eyes were embarrassingly clear, his innocence made me forget he was naked. He looked at me for a long time, searching.

-Can I get you something?

Stupid question – in a stupid situation. There is a naked man sitting in front of me, on the floor – spying me. In the meantime I know , have seen, that he lives in the sea...at times appearing and calling me to account...and he is beautiful, almost scarily beautiful...why don't I ask him who he is?

He held his palm tight against my mouth. His hand smelled like fish.

-You always speak. Why?

He wasn't expecting an answer. He enjoyed the silence. Slowly his presence relaxed me so much as well that, overcoming the absurdity of the situation, I gave in to the music of the waves, the song of seagulls...

There was peace. It had been a long time since I last felt that. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the “nothing”...no pit-patting thoughts in my head, no fear, no preparation, no remembering and no waiting...only being...simply existing was surprisingly good...

-I love someone – he finally said quietly.

I opened my eyes and saw two teardrops sliding down his face. I thought of Mariann and suddenly felt very selfish that my first thought was not her. It's her that should be here...

-I will let her know, I tell her to come... - I jumped up quickly and hurried to the phone.

His voice stopped me.

-You can't. Neither can I. She will come if she feels like... But it's nice of you, very nice, to care about my feelings...

He stretched on the cold stone floor.

-I should go – he said, but didn't move.

-You could stay – I made a try.

I was filled with an unusual sense of security when he was around.

-I will cook something and we can eat. Then...

...then we watch the sunset together! –he became rather enthusiastic.

After the recent episode I didn't dare to offer him fried fish. We ate strawberries and pineapple. He enjoyed eating and didn't speak in the meantime.

-Tell me, what do people want from each other? – he suddenly asked, after finishing the fruit and giving thanks out loud for its sacrifice.

I didn't understand the question. What do people want from each other? What does that mean?

-You don't know the answer – he stated, somewhat disappointedly. –You don't know what that girl wants from you, or from me... I am afraid, I feel in danger around her... it's like she was hiding a net behind her back, waiting for the moment to throw it on me... and I don't want anything from anyone... I always just wait... and I'm happy if she comes...

Does he mean Mariann? Who is he speaking of?

-Mariann is a strange creature but she has a soul... I suppose... - I said, making an attempt.

-She has – he suddenly jumped to his feet. –Everyone has a soul. The question is, who dares to make it speak...

He left the house with strong, determined steps and dived in the water without goodbye.

5.

The next day he came again. He didn't greet me, didn't look at me – just sat there on the rock, talking to his butterfly. He looked happy.

I didn't want to disturb him. I was immersed in watching the scene and, although I could not understand his words, I could clearly feel that all was the way it should be... The butterfly lifted above the boy's head at times, preening itself, then settled on his shoulder, only to start its dance soon after again... and the boy watched it with a transfigured face... I also noticed that they were surrounded by that strange white light all the time, the same that I saw when he brought my niece back to life...

-Here I am!

Well, Mariann surely put the lid on this special, intimate moment. The boy looked up. His face turned desperate when he noticed that the butterfly had flown away with the loud arrival of my giddy niece.

Mariann immediately hurried to him. The boy watched him with a strict face, remaining motionless.

-You are back! I was really looking forward to seeing you – the girl said.

She threw her clothes off and stood there in a bikini, hooked on to the boy who was sitting on the rock.

-Shall we have a swim? In the meantime you could tell me who you are... Or we can go for a walk too if you like.

The boy looked at me asking for help. I looked puzzled, it was hard to say no to my niece.

-What's going on here? Conspiracy? – the girl provoked us suspiciously. – Come on, tell me who on earth you are! I already told the girls what's up – well, they wanna see you too...

The boy was not thrilled by the news. He was getting more and more embarrassed and tense.

-You know what, Mariann? We will invite him for an ice-cream, ok? Please get from the fridge what we bought last time, and bring three small plates... and spoons... -I said, trying to break the uncomfortable silence.

My niece obeyed reluctantly. She would have preferred staying alone with the visitor, instead of following my orders.

We were left alone.

-Is there something wrong? –I asked quickly, taking advantage of the moment, and I realized I didn't even know his name.

-She is gone... -the boy sighed in true pain, looking in the distance. –I don't know when she comes again...

Then he made up his mind – he walked out of the water and hugged me without a word.

-I knew you would understand. You hold the light... - he whispered. –That other one doesn't, she only thinks of herself, but you know the law of love.

I was shaking all over. It was such a special experience the way he spoke, his hug, that I was almost close to fainting. I was happy and for a moment I thought I knew everything about the wonders of the universe...

Mariann's hoarse yelling brought me back. The boy let me go with a gentle smile and turned to her as if nothing had happened.

-What the hell are you two doing here? – the girl attacked him.

-Cuddling – the boy replied very simply.

Mariann stared at me then hissed:

-Traitor.

I didn't feel I was. I was happy and still stunned by this recent experience.

We were eating the ice-cream quietly, hardly saying a word. Mariann kept looking at the two of us alternately – failing to understand what it was that connected us with an invisible thread. Of course I couldn't understand it either, was only happy it happened to be that way, that I had the chance through this boy to experience emotions like never before. It wasn't him I fell in love with – but the entire world. Ecstatically and all-embracingly... and I only learnt later that the white light appeared around me as well...

He came every day. He hardly spoke, we never even found out his name. Mariann kept asking him but I didn't – didn't think it was important. I was happy with his presence, that's all...

He, however, was obviously far away in spirit... although with us, eating ice-cream together or simply listening to the song of the sea, his eyes were spying the air and he got more sorrowful each day...

-The one I'm waiting for is not coming –he whispered once, leaning close to my ear so Mariann would not hear.

I remembered the butterfly. And that this particularly pure being had once said: "I love someone".

Could the little colorful butterfly be the love of the boy from the sea?

He blushed when this thought emerged in me... he couldn't look at me... I was right... and he saw my thoughts...

Mariann was chitchatting. Silly things about clothes and boys. She still kept trying to get his attention...

-You don't even know how uplifting and empowering it feels when they scrape for you... when the other would do anything to catch your smile – you know you have power in your hands... can break their heart in an instant, annihilate them...

The boy quivered. He took a long sad look at the girl, then said:

-You don't respect others, and that's a problem. You don't know yourself – that's also a problem. One cannot help the world without knowing oneself and respecting others. You don't have either of these abilities, although that's what you should be striving for, instead of humiliating others.

Mariann got all red. Perhaps it was the first time in her life she could not react to something... she narrowed her eyes sullenly and hurt, her entire being was imbued with the rage she was trying to hide...

And I made a decision.

-Mariann, you are staying. I am expecting an important telegram, you will be here to take it – and I took the boy by the hand.

-Come with me!

Mariann was loudly swearing at me, I could still hear it from afar.

The boy and I went to the lavender field near my house. The sight was indescribable – the green of the sea and in front of it this infinite purple... but I didn't have time for it... the millions of butterflies took my attention... they were flying about, battling, primping and dancing... and the boy's eyes suddenly lit up:

-There she is!

And he ran, barefoot and naked... traversing the purple field of flowers and dived into love... the little butterfly also got excited, although it tried to hide it... no time soon they began intimately whispering... and the white light appeared around them again...

What followed was really the last straw.

-What's all this secrecy?

Mariann was furious and determined. She pushed me aside and waded through the flowers, making the charming cloud of butterflies scatter. Then she reached the boy and grabbed his shoulder aggressively:

-I've had enough. Tell me right away who the hell you are!

The boy grew pale. His eyes tried to catch the butterfly but it was already gone.

A heavy battle began between the two of them. A battle of eyes and spirit. Wordless.

Then the boy regained control and let go of the emotion.

-You will learn... -he finally said gently and set out towards the water.

The girl didn't leave it at that. She ran after him. She was selfish and malicious. I was scared of her, that she was unaware of what she was doing.

-Tell me at once what you want from us! – she screamed and hit the boy where she could.

He turned around, looked straight into her eyes, stroked her arm then turned towards the water again. At this moment he was really like the god of the sea. Strong, protective, immovable in his faith.

Mariann was trying to find a spot where she could break the boy's stability. She wanted to hurt him, see him suffer. I dreaded this face of my niece... I have seen it a few times and it always ended bad... And just when the boy reached the sea:

-Can it be her you are looking for? – she asked defiantly.

The boy turned around stiffly.

And he saw the broken little butterfly, the love of his life sentenced to death on the girl's palm...

Mariann lifted the tortured little body coquettishly and threw it into the sea with a single move...

The boy was shaking all over then burst out in a loud, desperate cry. His face was like that of a child. I had never seen anyone so honestly, admittedly sad.

The girl was frightened. She took two steps back, didn't dare to face the consequences of her action.

The boy's face filled with hate.

-All right, if that's what you want! Come, I'll show you my world! – he reached for the girl's hand, squeezed it and dragged the shaking body of my niece into the sea with misshapen rage.

I couldn't even move. I think my spirit froze there and then – waiting in the hot sand, in the middle of the lavender field.

I have no idea how much time went by. A minute, an hour, a day... or perhaps years, thousands even...

...and when I had almost given up hope that I would see her again...

...the body of my niece appeared among the waves... she was strong and full of life... accompanied by a bunch of dolphins...

-They saved me from the depth... they saved me... from myself –she said later when I asked her about it all.

She told me what she had been through deep down there... the boy took her deeper and deeper violently, driven by his rage... and he became more and more desperate and revengeful... his clear eyes turned dim... Mariann had to face all kinds of cruel emotions and situations during their journey... and finally, when she was almost out of air, the boy shouted: You wanted to know my world? Then face it! Face who you are...

This was the last sentence the girl could consciously comprehend... after that only their souls communicated with each other... that of the boy who came from the dolphins – even if he was rather human now... and that of the girl who lost the mask there and then that had been covering her true self... and when she was at the threshold of drowning, facing her own death... the boy suddenly turned back into a dolphin... calling the others who immediately took action – bringing the body, and the reborn soul to the surface...

Mariann transformed. She became grateful, for life.

And I have changed too, through knowing him, the dolphin boy...

I saw him only once after the accident. When he buried the fragile, soaked little body in the middle of the lavender field.

That's when he said what I often recall ever since:

-You know what's the big difference between the world of people and dolphins? That we only kill for survival –while you even for mere possession.

Then he turned around, stepped up to me and gave me a passionate hug. I could feel his heartbeat.

-No need to be afraid. You are here to teach – he whispered, already crying. –And now the girl is here to teach as well. The two of you already know the message of dolphins, the teaching of the sea, what people today still don't even come close to understanding: that respecting life is more important than anything. There will be more and more of you who live this way, as an example to follow... and one sunny day when I will no longer be among you, and perhaps neither will you or the girl be here anymore – people will become part of a great cohesive community, sharing everything with each other... they will be like we dolphins are... living in freedom and abandon... doing nothing but playing with sunshine... there will be no competition, only cohesion... and love...

The great white light permeated us both. I followed him with my eyes very long, as he disappeared in the waves...

Sometimes, in the evening, when Mariann and I sit outside on the terrace of the house by the sea, our eyes look in the distance and we both – without saying so – think of him. The special boy who once, long ago loved a butterfly...

The waves of the sea are softly rippling. The world feels now as if God had taken all his creation in his lap, rocking them immersed in his thoughts. There is no fear. Only peace. The deepest kind, like the sea itself.



About the author, Virág Cs. Szabó: I have been writing short stories and novels since the age of 5. Six of my books were published in the last fourteen years, one of them became a basic of a musical (Mandralínia). I write articles, blogs, and I have talks, trainings for those who would like to find their harmony in their life. More than ten years ago we – my husband and I – established Our Light (Fénypont Kreatív Műhely) for inspiring the development of people who respect us with their trust. I am happy to do work as a journalist and a drama - creative teacher, among adults and children, as well.



About the translator, Katalin Gál: With a MA in English and French, I mostly worked as a language teacher and I loved working with people. In the meantime I spent a few years abroad in the US and Europe and realized I equally enjoy translating inspiring texts, also because as the mother of a beautiful boy I was happy to find solutions that allow more freedom. When I first met Virág's writing, I was amazed how close it all feels to my heart. Soon after I even had the chance to work with her, translating her articles for an online magazine which was the most enjoyable work I have done so far. Somehow putting such gems of Hungarian text into English, thus sharing them with a wider audience, is what gives me the most joy. I hope you will also find joy in reading them and take some treasure with you.