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It's Nice Here - Novel

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Sample translation by Bradley Schmidt

pp. 9 – 10, 13 – 20

Trailer (pp. 9 – 10)

Water, land, mountains, clouds. Cities only brick-red patches. The piano crescendo, the camera swinging skyward, a sea of stars like you haven't seen in ages, here below it is foggy. The title is formed by the flickering stars:

CARPE DIEM

The piano becomes mellifluous, then quiet, then silent. No black, just white.

The first show starts with Olivier. He steps forward, stands directly in front of the camera, his gaze piercing the viewers' eyes.

Then he speaks:

"Today we're continuing to make history, today we're re-writing history, together we're making a better version of the world!"

He shows a soft smile.

And then the white swallows him.

The voice takes it from there, her words flowing down the screens in all the different languages:

We choose two courageous people out of thousands, a man and a woman.

They fly for us to a new, distant world.

A world where everything is still possible.

Up there they have the chance to do everything right.

They'll never come back, and through them, we'll become immortal.

Carpe Diem, seize the day, don't give up.

They will live!

A minute of silence.

Then the show starts with a bang.

The Letters I. (pp. 13-20)

You,

You always used to ask about the thing with your thumb, and we gave you age-appropriate answers, adjusted over time. Now you don't ask anymore and I still want to tell you: none of our answers were true. The missing half thumb is not a sign that you are a fairy tale princess, Irma, or the reincarnation of a famous scientist from the 18th century, someone alien or supernatural. It doesn't mean that you happen to be extraordinary. The thumb is only a mutation. Or what does "only" even mean? Nothing. It's a part of you, something you were always fascinated by, and that sometimes, I guess, upset you. We told you about the future in superlatives, so self-absorbed. That's just what parents do. But maybe we were even worse than the others. I'm sorry about that, but it might explain some things. Do you know that we're always searching for our failings? You don't give any reasons except for adventure. We're your parents, we need more than that. Irma, let's say it's the thumb's fault, the half that's missing. A part of you that doesn't even exist. So a non-existent half of a thumb is to blame for you wanting to disappear into the abyss. After your birth, the doctors said something like this could happen. That's just the way it is.

Dad

*

My Dear Child,

You looked so lovely in the clip they showed about your arrival! The blue suited you, but your hair looks even more beautiful now, and they braided it, and the dress was so pretty, I've never seen you in a dress, Irma, or am I mistaken? You looked like you were coming from a different age, one that only exists in fairy tales and legends. It really did suit you. And you really looked like you belonged exactly where you are now, wherever that is. I also liked the others, but not as much as I like you, my little Irma. It's very likely that I'm biased. You did a very good job with that first performance, even though I'm sure you were very nervous. I assume you know how many people are watching. Allow me to say just one thing: try to smile a little bit more! Look at Viola, she's got it down, even if it's a little too much. You don't

have to grin as much as Viola, heaven forbid, after all, you have other things to do. But I know how beautifully you smile, and I also know that you didn't feel like smiling very much the past few years. Do it now, Irma! Be friendly, be nice, be polite, and most of all: smile, beam! In other words, if you really want to go along, if you want to be selected in the first place. Otherwise don't, drop it and come back to your parents, who are fretting so terribly, although they should be glad for you: at least you know what you want! I'm not going to get involved, that's not for me to do. I'm just offering you a couple tried and true tips, just like I would if you'd consider building a house down here, for example. I could tell you a thing or two about that. But it's not a house for you now, just the sky and beyond. Reach for the stars, my dear.

Your Granny

p.s. The apples are excellent this year. I'll send you one with this letter. Share it with that boy they've named Sam. Believe me, he could use an apple! While you were a grim princess, he looked like a frightened child. He's not acting at all, which I liked, but he won't make it very far if he sticks to just giving the cameras that wide-eyed puppy-look. So give him a piece!

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Hey Irma,

Just one quick question, I guess you're busy: is there anywhere I can order your dress? That dress you wore when you first entered the arena. The green one! I really can't imagine any place or occasion in my life where it'd fit, but anyway I'd wear it on a completely ordinary day in my dull, sleepy town.

That's how much I like it, and that's how much you inspire me!

Thanks!

A very big fan

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Irma,

You've completely lost your mind! And I'm a coward, all the way to the moon, or up to your stupid new planet. I never told you that I think it's a fucking mistake. Complete madness. Come back right now! More earth, more life, there's more of everything here than anywhere else. Your friends are here, I'm here. By the way, I stole that picture of us from your pin board. You spent ages looking for it, right? It's in my wallet – you could have found it a million times, but you didn't. That's because you never really look, you four-eyes. I'm mean, but you are too. I'll just say it: I love you! I have been, for ages now, it's true. You didn't notice that either. Blind as a bat. That sounds so shitty... there's so much drama in this letter in the first place, letters are automatically dramatic, fucking ancient. They say that you can't be contacted any other way. That's bullshit, you could, if they wanted us to. I mean: just look at the arena! Whoever can plop a huge thing down like that can do better. With communication, for example. But they don't want to, they don't want us to reach you. They think they own you. Don't put up with it, Irma! Once again: I LOVE YOU. Whatever that means, for crying out loud, it feels like I really do, and believe me or not, I'm fucking horrified by it too. Words like that coming from me to you, and to top it off, in a letter. That's how far it's come for me and the world. But still: that's no reason. That's certainly no reason to give up everything. Let the comets come, let the sun burn up, let mankind completely go bonkers, and let the fucking rivers run up-hill. It was beautiful, but it isn't anymore, not without you. Just kick the stupid masks in the ass, just run as fast as you can. I know they won't let you off that easy, but you're fast, Irma, and you can make it. Come back. Not just for me or anyone else. No. But anything else would be bonkers. No one over here is flying towards the stars, you eat what you're served, and believe me: it doesn't taste so awful. (Just slightly of mealy potatoes, yellow peas, cooked millions and billions and trillions and quadrillions of hours, and just a few minutes too long). I mean, I can wait a couple more weeks, but then I'll pick a mate for life from the droves of interested candidates. See, I'm almost seventeen and time is running out.

I guess that was everything I wanted to write. That's it.

Tom

p.s. psych, you nerd! Right up until now, it was just the others who said that behind your back or to your face. Not me. But they're right. You always have to be the best, not just in math, with everything across the world. You never get enough. You can't be satisfied. Irma, you're the worst nerd I ever met.

*

Hey Irma,

I just wanted to say I'm not watching that shit anymore. There's just no way. Get home, or you'll never hear from me again! You just don't do that to your best friend. We're still best friends, right? As far as I'm concerned, we're not if you stay. Stop being so self-absorbed. Heroism beyond earth is bullshit, a fucked up game for cowards. You'll just burn up, it'll hurt like hell, and I won't watch it happen, even though the shows are really well-made. But I did a little research about the guys who are putting on this madness. You know I want to faze you, so you'll come back: they're amateurs. Complete dilettantes from a scientific point of view. A film producer, a building tycoon as old as the hills (a very long time ago he had an idea for an airport that was never finished, and now a cooperative started growing pitiful potatoes on its runways), an astrologist (don't even get it mixed up with an astronomer), and a guy that used to write pulp fiction and now invents your "adventures" in the arena. They're crazy, Irma, and they have absolutely no idea of the things they've got coming for you! Don't let yourself be exploited their madness, their crazy dreams! Come back!

Maja

p.s. it's so weird that they picked my name for him, that's just crazy, right?

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Sweetheart,

I'm so glad that you're alive. We went to the lake after the show. I guess you can imagine we weren't doing so well. Dad chucked some huge boulders into the water, letting out a long, drawn-out yell, something that sounded feral, the lion in the zoo back when, you still remember? (In case I have to write you more than this one letter, it'll be teeming with "you still remember's." That's what parents do, especially the abandoned ones. I'll ask you about neighbors who moved away when you took for your steps, I'll make reference to great-great-great-cousins – do those even exist? – who I only know from the stories my mother told me, her mother told her. I'll confront you with our shared past, expect for you to take appropriate steps, and I'll be upset, but not surprised when it doesn't happen.) Anyway, the lion roared like your father at the lake, you dropped your pretzel, and I had to throw it away, do you remember the smell in the lion house, piss and sweat and desperation? Anyway, I couldn't say a thing, for several hours. They take it too far. They can't let anyone die! I read the fine print on the release form. They can. Why did we sign? I don't get it.

We wanted to do everything right, and we let it come to this. The only consolation: I'm sure they won't do anything to you. They want to have you along. They talk different than they do with the other girls. They show you quite a lot and usually when you laugh. You've been laughing a lot recently, much more than I can remember. I should be pleased, but it makes me sad. (You see, parents are among the most egocentric beings in the world). You're popular. Do you remember back in ninth grade? You told me that there's no one who likes you, never will be. Now everybody loves you. They love you and those two strange boys, Sam and Anas. Do you like one of them? I'm glad that you're so important for them, but then again, I'm not, because it means you'll leave. I just hope this'll all turn out to be a gigantic, dumb joke. How Elin crashed. There were no safety measures, nothing at all. Why? They showed a short film about Anas while they took away what was left of Elin after the crash. Anas comes from a very small village with a name I've never heard before. His parents are proud, but concerned. They believe Anas has what it takes. And while they do, they feel like us: they could kick each other in the butt for how much self-confidence they gave their kid. And just like dad and me, naturally they don't because they already sense they'll need each other, as in the darkest hours. Don't worry, we're kind with each other. Irma, I hope you

didn't see anything. None of what happened to Elin, and how she looked after the crash. I know you're tough, Irma, but I reckon that's as bit much, isn't it?

Something else: we celebrated Dad's birthday, with cake and candles and everything. All the relatives were there, except for the children. So you're not the only one who's got something else to do. Your cousin is off to university, your other cousin goes to sea, or is preparing to. He won't say what exactly he wants to do there. I'll just say: even out here there are absurd dreams you could chase. This afternoon, I'll paint the hallways blue. It'll be dark, but beautiful. The clouds are hanging all the way down to the pear trees. I've had that sentence in my head all day.

Why don't they let you to get out of there once in a while? I just hope they don't hold you captive. Dad is writing too. He's very angry these days. The lion's roar, the boulders, you know.

A kiss. Take care of yourself.

Mom