

Tautvyda MARCINKEVIČIŪTĖ

GAMES

The building was made of ferroconcrete, like a typical project, but standing apart from its absolutely identical relatives, its corridors daubed with grimy oil paint, the doors to its rooms sealed shut, its ceiling whitened with chalk, women of different ages knocking timidly on its doors but never dreaming that, at the other end of the corridor, a girl of three or four with blue eyes wide open would shoot them a friendly look, surprised that they tried to hide their flushed faces under kerchiefs or hat veils, as if a glance of theirs could kill the girl with the cold blade of a knife.

They were as smart as dolls, blondes and brunettes, but their industrial eyes needed work—they neither opened nor closed, nothing but decorated plastic.

Now when the girl grew up to play every day with blood pressure monitors and stethoscopes, it seemed to her that if those dolls, moving but not blinking or speaking, had only let her play with them back then, they wouldn't have stayed in that building forever, their hideously naked cloth bodies filled with sawdust, their wrenched-off heads and twisted-off arms and legs and poked-out eyes rolling who knows where, under the furniture—toys that one is sick of, toys that have served their time, banished to some utility room of the building. If only they had played with her! But the dolls had been keen to play with boys, not knowing that boys don't like to play with dolls.

THE GRAVE OF AN UNKNOWN PRINCESS

How lonely she felt in her ancestors' gray Gothic castle with the soul of her dead father, her invalid mother, and her two children whose hair smelled like feathers. On successful hunting days her husband would invite his whole clan to the castle: his still-strong father and mother, three brothers like oaks, four children from his previous marriage to an Italian countess who'd run off with the captain of the Hussars, who knows where, and the daughter-in-law who'd made him a present of his first-born grandson. It was like that forest of the future moaning and rustling on her grave.

The princess was thin and pale, living on the crumbs of her husband's love. He was hardly ever at home, now teaching the youngest son by his first marriage how to shoot with a bow, now feasting at the eldest son's wedding (at which the fugitive Italian countess had put in a rare appearance), now baptizing his grandson, now choosing a bride for his middle son. Certainly, it was good that he took care of his family, always organizing noisy feasts for them, at which she felt like a foreign body. But since the church had blessed his union with the Italian woman, the princess felt that not even religion could dispel the hatred and bitterness she felt toward her ambivalent life, that nobody inside or outside of the castle walls gave a damn about her, though she knelt for hours at a time in her ancestors' oak-carved chapel, begging heaven for an intercession.

It seemed that nothing was going to change until she died. That was why, above all, the princess did not want her husband's clan invited to her funeral: all those strange oak, birch, and ash trees rustling and swaying for all time in the one place that had always been hers alone—the grave of the princess.

Translated from the Lithuanian by Julie Kane