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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 as brick-red patches. The piano crescendo, the camera dynamically swinging skyward, a sea of stars like you haven't seen in ages, here below it is foggy. The flickering stars form the title:

CARPE DIEM

The piano becomes mellifluous, then quiet, then silence. No black, a 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 are continuing to make history, today we are re-writing history, together we are making a better version!"

He smiles slightly.

Then the white swallows him.

The voice takes it from there, and the corresponding text flows down the screen in the appropriate language:

*We choose two great hopes from thousands, a man and a woman.*

*They fly for us to a new, distant world.*

*A world where everything is still possible.*

*There they have the chance to do everything right.*

*They will never come back, and through them, we 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 corresponded to the truth. The missing half thumb is not a sign that you are a fairy tale princess named Irma, or the reincarnation of a famous scientist from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, someone who is an alien or supernatural. It doesn't mean that you happen to be extraordinary. The thumb is only a genetic mutation. Or what does "only" even mean? Nothing more. It's a part of you, something that you were always fascinated by and sometimes, I think, upset you. We told you about the future in superlatives, so much megalomania. I think all parents do that. But maybe we were a little worse than the others. I'm sorry about that, but that might explain some things. Do you know that we're constantly 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 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 that could happen. That's just the way it is.*

*Papa*

\*

*My Dear Child,*

*You looked so captivating in the movie they showed about your arrival! The blue suits you, but your hair looks ever more beautiful, any they braided it for you, 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 generally you looked like you belonged exactly where you are now, wherever that is. I also liked the others, but not as much as 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 excited. You probably know how many people are watching. Allow me to say one thing: you could smile a little more! Look at Viola, she does it well, even if it's a little too constant. You don't have to grin as much as Viola, heaven forbid, after all, you have other things to do. But I know how nice your smile is, and I also know that you hadn't had very much desire to*

*beam 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 even want to be selected. Otherwise don't, drop it and come back to your parents, who are fretting so terribly, although they should be glad for you: you know what you want! I'm not going to get involved, it's not my job. I'm just giving you a couple tried and true tips, just like I would if you would consider building a house down here, for example. Everything you have to keep in mind, I could tell you a thing or two about that. But not a house now, just the sky and beyond. Show everyone you best, my dear.*

*Your Grandma*

*p.s. the apples this year are excellent. I'll send you one. 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 keeps on looking clueless. So give him a piece!*

\*

*Hello Irma,*

*Just one question, you probably have a lot to do: is there anywhere I can order your dress? I mean that dress that you had on during your very first appearance in the arena. The green one!*

*I can't think of a place or occasion where I would be able to wear it, but I'd just put it on for a completely normal day in my boring town. That's how much I like it, and that's how much you inspire me!*

*Thanks!*

*A very big fan*

\*

*Irma,*

*You're completely out of your mind! And I'm a coward, all the way to the moon, or to your stupid new planet. I never told you that I think it's a fucking mistake. Complete madness.*

*Come back! 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 that was on 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 say it now: I love you! For ages now, it's true. You didn't notice that either. Blind as a bat. That sounds so stu... in this letter that's extremely dramatic in the first place, letters are per se dramatic, completely ancient. But you can't be reached, contrary to what they claim. That's ridiculous, you could if you wanted. I mean take a look at the arena. Whoever can plop a huge thing down like that can do better. Make it possible to communicate, for example. But they don't want to, they don't want us to reach you. They think you belong to them. Don't put up with it, Irma! Once again: I LOVE YOU. Whatever that means, for crying out loud, it feels that way, whether you believe me or not: I'm taken aback myself. Words like that coming from me to you, and to top it off, in a letter. That's how bad it's got for me and the world. But still: that's no reason. That's certainly no reason to give up everything here. Let the comets come, let the sun fade, let humanity completely go crazy, and float up the fucking river, it's beautiful here. It was beautiful here and without you not so much. Give the ridiculous mask a kick in the ass and run as fast as you can. Of course, they won't let you go that easy, but you're fast and you can make it. Come back. Not just for me or anyone else. Just because anything else would be bonkers. No one over here is flying towards the stars, you eat what you are served, and believe me: it doesn't taste so bad. (Just slightly of mealy potatoes, yellow peas, and cooked millions and billions and trillions and quadrillions of hours, and a few minutes too long). I can wait a couple more weeks, but then I'll pick out a mate for life from the hordes of interested candidates. I mean, I'm almost seventeen and time is running out.*

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

*Tom*

*p.s. psych, you nerd! Up till now, everyone else only said that behind your back or to your face. Not me. But they're right. You always had to be the best, not just in math, with everything, in the world. You could never get enough. Irma, you're the worst nerd I ever met.*

\*

Hey Irma,

*I just wanted to say I'm not watching anymore. There's just no way. Come 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 when you stay. Stop being so egotistical. Heroism beyond earth is meaningless, just for cowards. You'll just burn up, it'll hurt like hell, and I won't watch it happen, even if the shows are really well-made. But I did a little research about who is putting on this madness. I want to make you worried, so much that you come back: they're amateurs. From a scientific point of view, absolute dilettantes. A film producer, a builder as old as the hills (a very long time ago he had an idea for an airport that was never finished, and in the meantime a cooperative has been growing pitiful potatoes on its runways), an astrologist (don't even confuse it with an astronomer), and a guy that used to write pulp fiction and now thinks up your "adventures" in the arena. They're crazy, Irma, and they have no idea what they have planned with you! Don't let yourself be used for their madness, their crazy dreams! Come back!*

Maja

*p.s. it's weird that they picked my name for him, of all things, right?*

\*

Darling,

*I'm so glad that you're alive. We went to the seaside after the show. You can imagine that we weren't doing so well. Papa chucked some huge boulders into the water, letting out a long, drawn-out scream that you've only heard from animals, 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 remembers." That's what parents do, most of all the ones that are abandoned. I'll ask you about neighbors who moved away when you took for your steps, I'll make reference to great-great-great-cousins – is that a thing? – who I only know from the stories of my mother, and from her mother before. 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 remember the smell in the lion house, piss and sweat and desperation? Anyway, I couldn't say a thing, for several hours. You can't so far. They can't let anyone die! I*

*read the fine print on the release form. They are allowed. Why did we sign that? I don't understand us. We wanted to do everything right, and then this. The only consolation: I'm sure they won't do anything to you. They wanted to have you along. They talk to you different than the other girls. They show you more frequently 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. (By the way, parents are among the most egocentric beings in the world). You're well-liked. You remember back in ninth grade? You told me that there's no one who likes you. No everybody loves you. 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 go. The hope is that this will all turn out to be a gigantic, dumb joke. How Elin crashed. There were no safety measure. What was that about? They showed a picture about Anas while she took away what was left of Elin after the crash. Anas comes from a very small village whose name I've never heard before. His parents are proud, but concerned. They think Anas has the right stuff. But they aren't feeling any different than us: they could kick each other in the butt for how much self-confidence they gave their kid. And just like Papa and me, naturally they don't because they already sense they will need each other, as in the worst of times. Don't worry, we're kind to each other. Hey: 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 imagine that's as bit much, isn't it? Something else: we celebrated Papa'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 has something else to do. Your cousin is studying, 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 here there are absurd dreams you could chase. I'll paint the hallways blue this afternoon. 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 long. Why don't they let you two out once in a while? I hope you're not captives. Papa is writing you too. He's very angry at the moment. The lion's roar, the boulders, like I said.*

*A kiss. Take care of yourself.*

*Mama*