

Iztok Sitar

THE DIARY OF ANNA TANK



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Dark side of the rainbow: a graphic novel about heroin

'The first thing I saw was a frightening face, who wouldn't have screamed? My mother was a huge woman. I was afraid of her since I was a baby... my father normally took care of me.' The alienation in this narrative is overwhelming. Its ironic tone perfectly describes an uncomfortable childhood. This discomfort in Anna leads to a lack of belonging. The lack of belonging will later lead to rebellion.

The opening panels of the *Diary of Anna Tank*, with quite distinct signs, inexorably establish the scenic arrangement of a dysfunctional family, as well as the psychological state of the characters in this drama. Family relationships, its social condition, miscommunication, careless lies... the first inadequate reactions to Anna's frustrations are an attempt to manipulate others, an attempt to control a small but growing monster called life. The entire first half of this graphic novel involves the gentle triggering of an explosive mechanism, which will be released with destructive force in the second half.

heroin habit is the equivalent of walking on thin ice. One of the most devastating drug addictions is often rightfully equated with spiralling down towards death. In a moment of carelessness, the author could turn the story into a medicine-advertising poster, or conversely romanticise the heroin use.

Roughness will become Anna's shield from her own fragility. When her breasts begin to develop, it completely haunts her, as it does the majority of girls going through puberty. 'Every night before I went to sleep, I admired them in front of the mirror.' But it turns out this things are not as good as they seem. 'I walked with the pride of a peacock. But in fact none of my changes interested anybody.' Anna feels slapped by the indifference that life shows her, and returns this slap twice as hard.

Those with a good understanding of the *Diary of Anna Tank* have called it a combination of social irony, harsh facts and grotesque realism, a hardcore fairy tale for grown-ups who have



Sitar's perfect capturing of the awkward gestures between the characters

This is a brave, and even more importantly, the story without pathos about the pathology of drug addiction. I consider it an authentic precedent in the field of comic book media. The fine-tuning of the proper tone means the world to the reader here, because describing

kids. The first kiss, first attraction, first love, first masturbation, first drunkenness, first sex (although she was too drunk to remember it the next day), first joint, first trip, first ecstasy pill, eventually the first heroin use. But there is no ending, that is to say, Anna and the



'Happy days' at the start of the plunge, when the fall is still a flight

reader do not know the ending, and that is the only certainty. The black-and-white epilogue does not promise any light at the end of the tunnel. Anna is quite far from anything that would force her to overcome her cynicism and indifference towards life.

The talented casualness of Sitar's contour lines is the blues of brush movements dipped in ink. His use of the dry brush gives texture to the scene; the rough, freely improvised moves create a little bit of background in the panels. The thick, jagged line is in direct contrast to the Franco-Belgian tradition, which favours the refined, institutionalized style of the *clear line*. Whether he is describing growing up, which is always about love, sexuality and intimacy, or the deep plunge into sex and addiction, Sitar's feeling for the story, for the moment of authenticity, an unusual combination of caricature and harsh existentialism, explicit or suppressed irony, as well as his feel for the absurd and the ridiculous – they never leave us.

Zoran Djukanovic

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The Diary of Anna Tank



AT A PARTY ONCE, IN AN ABANDONED HOUSE SOMEWHERE NEAR BLEGOS, I MET A GIRL. HER NAME WAS ANNA, SHE WAS EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD BUT HAD ALREADY BEEN ON METHADONE FOR TWO YEARS. HER LJUBLJANA FRIENDS, AFTER AN ENORMOUS QUANTITY OF BEER AND WEED, HAD PASSED OUT, SO THAT IN THE END WE WERE ALONE. ALL NIGHT WE DRANK AND TALKED, SHE CONFIDED TO ME THAT SHE WROTE A DIARY AND WE WENT TO SLEEP AT DAWN. WHEN I WOKE UP IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, ANNA WAS NOT WITH ME SHE HAD RETURNED TO LJUBLJANA WITH HER FRIENDS, BUT AS A REMINDER SHE HAD LEFT ME HER DIARY.

I WAS A STRANGE CHILD, EVEN MY BIRTH WAS STRANGE; I WAS FACING THE WRONG WAY.



THE FIRST THING I SAW WAS A HORRIBLE FACE - WHO WOULDN' T HAVE WAILED?

MY MOTHER WAS A HUGE WOMAN.

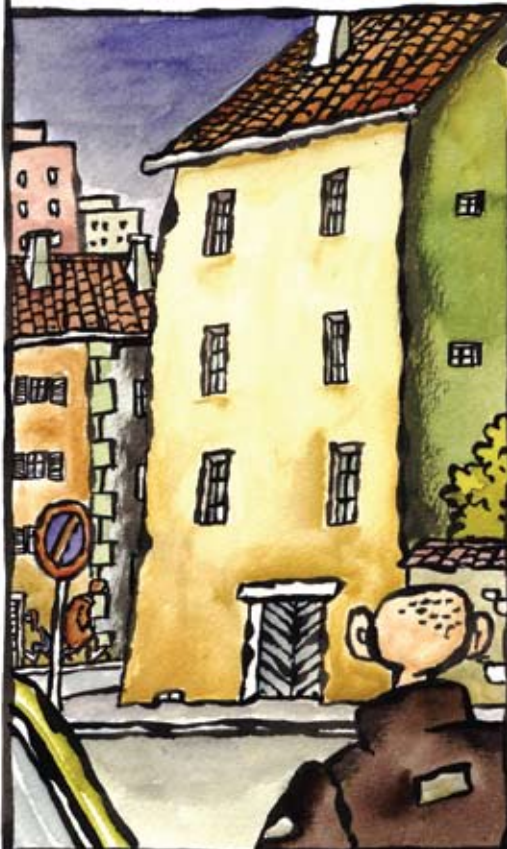


I WAS SCARED OF HER EVER SINCE I WAS BREASTFED.



BUT MOST OF THE TIME I WAS LEFT TO MY FATHER' S CARE.

WE LIVED IN AN OLD HOUSE IN THE MIDDLE OF TOWN THAT MY MOTHER GOT AFTER DENATIONALISATION, BUT SHE DIDN'T GET ANY MONEY FOR FIXING IT.



LIKE THIS!
ONE ACE
PLUS ONE
ACE IS TWO
ACES!



MOTHER WAS A PRIMARY SCHOOL
TEACHER.



THE KIDS WERE SCARED OF HER AS MUCH
AS THE DEVIL.

DAD WAS A SALESMAN FOR A
COMPANY THAT MADE TEDDY
BEARS. FROM EVERY WORK TRIP
HE WOULD BRING ME BACK A
PRESENT.



GUESS WHAT
YOUR DAD
BROUGHT YOU
THIS TIME??!

I HAD A HAPPY CHILDHOOD. I WAS A SPOILT CHILD WHOSE PARENTS GOT HER EVERYTHING SHE WISHED FOR.



IF THINGS DIDN'T GO MY WAY I KNEW HOW TO THROW A TANTRUM.

THEN THEY WOULD SAY...



ONE DAY GRANNY DIDN'T WAKE UP.



AFTER THAT, MY NANNY
WAS THE DAUGHTER OF ONE
OF MY MOTHER'S FRIENDS -
SHE WAS A STUDENT.



HEY!

BE GOOD AND
LISTEN TO
URSHA. BYE
KIDS.



JOHNNY
YOU CAN
COME
NOW!



THIS IS MY
FRIEND JOHNNY.
HE WILL LOOK
AFTER YOU TOO.



GO TO YOUR
ROOM ANNA,
JOHNNY
AND ME
ARE GONNA
STUDY.



IN ACTUAL FACT, I LOOKED AFTER BOTH OF THEM.

WARNING!
MOTHER IS
COMING!





YOUR
DAUGHTER
IS VERY
WELL
BEHAVED
- A REAL
STAR.

MMM...

IN THE EVENINGS
WHEN DAD WAS HOME
WE WOULD WATCH TV
TOGETHER.



THAT'S HOW I PASTED MY
FIRST SIX YEARS.

ONE DAY MY MUM BROKE
THE NEWS.

NEXT
WEEK
YOU ARE
STARTING
SCHOOL!



AND I CRIED.

THAT WAS THE
FIRST TIME
TEARS DID NOT
HELP ME.



SCHOOL WASN'T REALLY A PROBLEM, AND BECAUSE I WAS THE TALLEST IN THE CLASS THE BOYS DIDN'T MAKE FUN OF ME LIKE THEY DID THE OTHER GIRLS.



WHICH WAS GOOD BECAUSE I PREFERRED TO BE FRIENDS WITH THE BOYS.



GIRLS JUST CRIED OVER THE STUPIDEST THINGS.



MY CLIQUE WAS JAN, SASH, BIT AND ME, OF COURSE.

AT THE END OF THE YEAR I ASKED JAN IF HE WOULD GO OUT WITH ME.







THAT WAS MY
FIRST KISS - IT WAS
NOTHING SPECIAL!



AND SO WE GOT TO YEAR THREE.



THAT WAS WHEN I FIRST SAW
A DRUGGY. IT HAPPENED
DURING A SCHOOL HOLIDAY.
IT STARTED LIKE THIS:



MUM, WHY
DON'T WE
EVER GO TO
THE SEA-
SIDE??



WELL, YOU GO
WITH DAD TO
THE SWIMMING
POOL EVERY
WEEKEND.



SWIMMING
POOL - THAT'S
NO THE SEA!



ALL MY FRIENDS
GO TO THE SEA-
SIDE AND THEN
SHOW OFF, BUT
I HAVE TO STAY
QUIET!





I HAVE TO ADD THAT WE NEVER HAD A CAR. MOTHER WAS TOO FAT TO DRIVE...



...AND DAD DIDN'T HAVE A LICENSE. HE ALWAYS GOT A BUS OR TRAIN. WE WENT BY TRAIN TO KOPER,



AND TO FIESA BY TAXI.

WHAT, WE CAN'T ACTUALLY BE STAYING IN THIS SHANTY PLACE? THEY DEFINITELY DON'T EVEN HAVE AIR CON!







FOR ALL THE REST OF THE TIME WE WERE ON THE BEACH.

THIRD DAY OF THE HOLIDAY...



MUM LOOK AT THOSE WEIRDOES!



THEY WERE ALL IN LONG TROUSERS AND EVEN JUMPERS IN THE MIDDAY SUN.



DON'T LOOK OVER THERE!

BUT WHO ARE THEY?

ERRR...

FOR THE WHOLE WEEK THE DRUGGIES WERE THERE, BUT THEY PAID NO ATTENTION TO US AND MINDED THEIR OWN BUSINESS.



I THINK MUM WAS JEALOUS BECAUSE ALL THE DRUGGIES WERE REALLY SKINNY.

IN YEAR THREE, I WAS AN EXCELLENT STUDENT AND ME AND JAN WERE STILL AN ITEM.



IN YEAR FUR WE
GOT MARRIED.

DAD, I
NEED TEN
EUROS.

I NEED IT
BECAUSE ME AND
JAN ARE GETTING
MARRIED.

OK, JUST DON'T
COME ASKING ME
FOR MORE MONEY
WHEN YOU GET A
DIVORCE.

NOW I NEEDED TO FIND SOMEONE WHO COULD MARRY US.

SMACK

OK OK,
YOU HAVE
PERSUADED
ME.

JAN ZAN,
DO YOU TAKE
ANNA TANK TO
BE YOUR LAW-
FULLY WEDDED
WIFE??

AND YOU,
ANNA TANK, DO
YOU TAKE JAN
ZAN TO BE
YOUR LAWFULLY
WEDDED
HUSBAND?

FOR
WHAT??

I DO.

I DO.



I PRONOUNCE YOU
MAN AND WIFE,
FOR BETTER AND
FOR WORSE, TILL
DEATH DO YOU
PART.



IN YEAR FIVE, WE
OBVIOUSLY DIVORCED.
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
SCARED OF INJECTIONS,
AND WE HAD TO GET A
VACCINATION AT SCHOOL.



THEY
WEREN'T
JUST ANY
INJECTIONS,
BUT THE
GIANT ONES
THAT THE
OLDER KIDS
TERRIFIED
US ABOUT.



WE STOOD IN LINE, I WAS
SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE, AND
WHEN IT CAME TO MY TURN...



...I RAN TO THE
BACK.



IN THE END MY
TURN CAME. THE
NURSE EVEN GAVE
ME A TEDDY BEAR
SO THAT I WOULD
STOP BEING SCARED.



I HADN'T
CRIED IN A
LONG TIME,
NOT EVEN
AT HOME,
BUT NOW I
WAILED LIKE
A SIREN.

OUCH!

A A A A ...

NO ONE ELSE
CRIED, NOT EVEN
CRY-BABY BIT, HE
JUST WELLED UP A
SINGLE TEAR.

THE WHOLE CLASS LAUGHED AT ME,
AND JAN TURNED HIS BACK AND
WOULDN'T LOOK AT ME.

JAN WAS STILL IGNORING ME.
WHATEVER, I DIDN'T CARE.

BIT, WILL
YOU BE MY
BOYFRIEND??

ME??

WHAT DO
I NEED TO
DO?

NOTHING
JUST BE
NEXT TO ME.

NOW WE
ARE LIKE
A MARRIED
COUPLE. YOU
CAN KISS ME.

WHO?
ME?

SO I KISSED HIM INSTEAD.
WHAT ELSE COULD I DO??!



NOW SAY
SOMETHING
NICE.



HM...v



I REALLY HAVE NO LUCK WITH MEN!

DID I SAY
SOME-
THING
WRONG?



HMM... AT HOME
I HAVE A NEARLY
COMPLETED STICKER
ALBUM OF THE
ANIMAL KINGDOM. I'M
MISSING JUST A FEW
STICKERS, BUT I HAVE
A COUPLE DOZEN
DOUBLES IF YOU WANT
THEM. HEY, DO YOU
HAVE ANY SPARE
STICKERS?

JAN AND I AVOIDED EACH OTHER ALL YEAR. BOTH OF
US HAD TOO MUCH PRIDE TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE.



HM...

