



MY TRANSCENDENTAL CHICKEN

Senko Karuza

The Easter holidays. The house filled with relatives, a million kids, it's a miracle we survived. One person wanting this, another that. I hated the Easter holidays.

Then someone sent us a one-day old yellow chick with a three-coloured ribbon around its neck. That's when the madness began. There was shit and food all over the apartment, from the toilet to the nuptial bed. I said it should be kept in one place only, and the children immediately accepted this. They tied its little leg to a string and put it under the television.

'I don't want to see shit here.'

The children accepted this, and every once in a while they untied the chick and carried it to the toilet. On one occasion it fell into the toilet bowl. I thought it was finished. They dried it with a hair-drier and, when it was rejuvenated, they rewarded it by not keeping it tied up again. I decided to leave them alone for those two or three days, and let things be. It's nice to encourage a love for domestic animals, especially in children from a large city, who mainly see them in butchers' shops, naked and frozen.

So, during the farewell there was waving and crying and arrangements being

made, the car door opened and closed again, and there was running into the house after forgotten items, and it was over. We let out a sigh and my wife and I, embracing, entered the house. The chick was tied up under the television and squeaked, maybe out of sorrow because of the leave-taking, but it was too late to call the cousins back. I picked it up in my hand and took it outside to let it go, just so long as it went somewhere. But the thing, evidently lost, began to squeak in panic. I again caught it and felt how its heart was beating quickly. It didn't want to be abandoned. When I let it go in the living room, it calmed down and became the same old, frolicsome chicken. It pecked at scraps on the carpet, peeled off the wallpaper from the wall and when I'd scream, it would immediately scamper under the television. There it did the most shits.

Hilda and I sat on the couch and mutely observed it for some time. It must have felt our stares, or even our thoughts, because it constantly twisted its little neck towards us, as though expecting something.

'Maybe it wants to become a member of the family,' I said jokingly.

With a distrustful smile Hilda glanced at me.

'Please,' she said hastily, 'it should be gotten rid of as soon as possible. The best thing would be to dump it on some youngster.'

I looked at that small being and recalled the torture it endured during these past days with the kids.

'Hilda,' I said.

'There's no way,' she replies furiously. 'You're not normal. You're behaving like a child.'

If it wasn't for that chick, I'd have surely been upset yet again by her accurate assessment of my thoughts. I couldn't have little secrets. That brought me even closer to the chick.

'I don't see any reason why it couldn't be, say, a pet. I'll make a little house for it on the terrace.'

She turned completely red. She knew I meant it seriously, even though I myself still wasn't sure.

She got up and started tidying the apartment. In these sorts of situations I too would have usually done something to make things easier for her, but now it suddenly seemed stupid to me. I gawked at that forlorn creature, which hopped around and escaped from in front of her legs, while she resolutely strode through the kitchen and living room, as though we were alone and there was no one else in the apartment. If she trod on it, she trod on it. It was evident that her decision was firm, and at least I knew she wouldn't do it deliberately. There was something provocative in her decision to show me just what she thought, and in response I observed with equal tenderness both her and the chick, for which I felt some trepidation lest it regrettably end up under her heavy wooden clog. There go the clogs!

In the end, the chick stayed in the house. Partly due to inertia, partly due to obstinacy, and mainly because I didn't know on whom and in what manner I should dump it.

A couple of times we ignored each other, other times we quarrelled, and then summer arrived. The chick was almost a chicken, even though it didn't look all that big to me. Sawdust was no longer successful in smothering the smells, which didn't bother me that much, even though everyone else took them very tragically. I decided to relocate it to the village, some ten kilometres outside the city where we had an old house, an inheritance, which we didn't visit all that often.

The neighbours were glad when I began visiting the ancestral estate on a daily basis. I didn't get round to explaining to them why I brought with me only a single chick, because I myself wasn't all that clear as to whether it could be a pet, especially in a village.

I began to torture myself, trying to determine the chick's significance, but I increasingly felt fear and helplessness. I reflected on it and Hilda simultaneously. I thought I would crack under the pressure, for neither of them was willing to give way. It was a question to which I would devote the summer vacation.

'Tomorrow Igor and Lea are coming from Zagreb,' said Hilda one hot evening.

And indeed, there they were! Who would credit that once we were the best of

friends? They were different people.

‘We decided, therefore, to enrol in that course on transcendental meditation, just like that, out of sheer boredom. Man, what a discovery that is! Only now everything has meaning, it’s like having new eyes, telescopic eyes, and the relationship... don’t even ask!’

Hilda was more interested in the topic. I restrained the rage within me.

‘I heard that some Japanese guy will open up a course on hara-kiri in Zagreb this winter,’ I said.

They said nothing. They didn’t get angry at all.

‘We bought a chick,’ I tried again.

Lea smiled. ‘Leave it for another time. We’re vegetarian.’

‘A live chick, I mean. Alive!’

A hush fell. Hilda got up from the table, disappeared.

‘What do you mean, alive?’ asked Igor.

‘Alive,’ I said. ‘I took it to the village. I feed it there. It’s great, two months old, maybe a little more. It goes crazy when it sees me.’

They thought things weren’t okay with me. That’s why they didn’t smile, that’s how I knew. But who’ll explain it to them? Let them meditate.

That evening was tense. Regardless of how eagerly she had anticipated the visit of her friends from the big city, Hilda was also relieved when we somehow agreed that they would spend the summer at our house in the village. That way I wouldn’t spend money on petrol for a while, and they’d feed my chicken and look after it as though it were their own. By then it was all the same to me. Perhaps I was one step away from Nirvana, in spite of how much I hated it.

After a week we decided to visit them.

‘They’ve surely died of boredom,’ I said, as we drove to the village. ‘Only a chicken can save them.’

‘You’ve become poisonous. What the hell has gotten into you?’

‘Maybe they’ve eaten it, the vegetarians.’

‘Ha, ha, very funny!’

She remained silent for a time. I had to watch the road.

‘Whatever I say, it can’t be funny. Irrespective of how funny it may be. That means...’

‘Come on, come on, how can you?’

I felt miserable.

‘No one can do anything to help you.’

‘Why don’t you try something with the chicken?’

I really felt miserable.

And there you have it. We’re here. Lea sits in front of the house with her feet on the wooden table, reading. On the table there’s a bottle of wine, glasses and the leftovers from lunch. Chicken!

Hilda looks at me, she expects me to explode. But it’s all the same to me. ‘Where’s Igor?’ I ask Lea.

‘Meditating.’

‘In the house?’

‘No, in the chicken coop,’ she says, and looks at me questioningly.

‘He’s fallen in love with your chicken. He’s established communication with it. They’re together all day long. He says it’s special, you were right. He’s even changed his mantra.’

From the chicken coop can be heard a long kooooooo, which doesn’t resemble the sound chickens make.

‘There he goes, that’s him,’ laughs Lea. ‘He’s gone completely mad.’

I try to laugh and say something, something funny, but nothing comes out.

‘Kooooooo?’ I ask finally.

Hilda and Lea burst into laughter and the conversation gushes forth of its own accord, just like during the good old student days. I don’t have time to think about what prompts people to persistently create the illusion that they’re not swimming in crap.

Suddenly the doors to the chicken coop open, with a bang. Igor comes out from the inside, totally naked and as red as a lobster. He is holding something in his hand

above his head, smiling, while clumsily trying to hide his nakedness with the other hand. He obviously isn't up to it. He runs to the table and places an egg on it. A small egg, no larger than a dove's.

'I've done it!' he is beside himself with happiness. 'An egg! Two months before! Two! We fucked up nature! Divine!'

Out of the chicken coop came the chicken, slowly, turned left, and rummaged around for something. It didn't even look at me. I knew that I had again missed the opportunity of being around someone with whom something could be done.

Translated by Damion Buterin

First published in the UK by [Pulp Net](http://www.pulp.net)
<http://www.pulp.net/50/my-transcendental-chicken.html>

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