

Anna Margolin אַנאַ מאַרגאָלין

Anna Margolin (1887–1952), real-name Roza Lebensboym, is best known for her poetry, having broken new ground with her 1929 collection, *Lider*, but she also wrote fiction, essays and journalism under a string of pseudonyms. At the age of twenty-two she published the following story, using the pseudonym Khave Gross.

First published in *Di Tsukunft* in 1909, “From a Diary” is a cryptic and atmospheric account of a love triangle from the point of view of a young intellectual woman.

From a Diary

פֿון אַ טאַגבוך

From a Diary

The 5th of July

I APPROACHED HER TODAY. "I want you to tell me everything," I said. "Why? You understand perfectly well why . . . I must know everything about him."

I caught her gaze and felt pity; her hands nervously gripped her silk umbrella, crumpling the fabric. In her eyes I spotted tears glinting, just for a moment, before vanishing.

She didn't seem surprised, but spoke softly and haltingly: "I'll tell you everything, come to my place. Maybe . . . maybe it will spare you some trouble. Come visit me."

Then she added, "but not right now, it's complicated now. I'm leaving tomorrow and I'll be away for a month; come visit me when I get back."

She handed me her address, scribbled on a scrap of grey paper. I slipped it straight into my pocket without looking at it.

Another month, and I'll know everything.



I'd run into her several times before. The first time she'd seemed perfectly contented, until he entered and she became unhappy and distracted. Later, I noticed that whenever she was alone in a place where he was likely to turn

up, she'd be nervous, with a downcast gaze and a pitiful smile on her pale face. I knew she was his lover and so I paid close attention to her appearance: a pallid, inconsequential face—one of those unmemorable face you encounter wherever you go—dull, close set eyes, altogether somehow sombre and grey. I was curious to hear her voice, so once I casually asked her if it was cold outside. Her voice was shrill and childlike; it didn't suit her aging face.

I don't doubt for a moment that he has intimate relations with other women too. But she's the only one I know about for certain. It's as clear as day. The uneasy way she moves whenever she sees him tells me so, along with the guilty, satisfied grin that appears on his lips in her presence—in her presence, in mine and no doubt in the presence of other, unknown women too.

And she's aware of who I am too.

She almost certainly knows what binds me to her. We always greet each other warmly, as though glad to see each other. But today I couldn't bring myself to play the part. The words pounded in my head: *I must know, I must know everything*. And so I went to her.

One more month.

The 6th

A question briefly arose in my mind: “what right do I have to snatch a page of his life that he'd wanted to hide and read it by force, to sneak around, to spy over his shoulder?”

I'm choosing the harshest, most self-critical words: to *sneak*, to *spy*, and yet they leave me cold. I feel no shame, no guilt, only love.

It's my sole response, my sole defence: I am in love—I am lovesick. Not allowing myself to be deceived is making me ill, not being able to forget, even when we are together.

In those moments my senses of sight and hearing are monstrously heightened and on edge. Everything he does or says, his every facial expression, is a major event that I mull over day and night. I try to make sense of it, try to dissect it, break it down to its tiniest parts. A false tone or an artificial smile leaves me deeply unhappy. And always in my thoughts of him I hit upon a solid wall—his life, his private world that I'm not part of, that he wishes to keep hidden from me. I stand before it for hours with fixed eyes.

I love—that gives me the right. And if it doesn't, I don't need the right. I'll do what I must because I can't do otherwise.

I can't.

The 8th

I feel unwell.

In these dreadful times I relive an old, beautiful recurring dream. I don't remember if it first came to me in my slumber, or while I was awake.

This is how it always goes: when my life becomes dismal and sombre, I delve into my past and select sparks of pure joy, of untainted happiness and use them to light up my blackened soul.

And here it is, my beautiful dream: A quiet, trembling night spread its wings over the blooming valley, shrouding it in starless darkness. And in the center of the valley, a mountain rises up, high and proud, blanketed in snow, its peak towering up into the open skies. Here and there in the valley, campfires flare up, and around the fires, men and women dance in wild, seductive circles. The air is hot and heavy with their sinful songs, impudent laughter, drunken kisses and caresses. I, too, am there, wandering among

them, singing and dancing, with untied hair on which gleams a braided garland of red poppies. But my heart, full of sorrow and yearning, is not with them. My eyes are trained on the snow-capped mountain, on its fog-shrouded peak. And the louder their joyous song rings out, the stronger my sorrow and yearning draws my soul upwards, giving it wings to reach the sky. Quietly, I slip away from the wild circle—no one notices—and I go wherever my heart desires. The darkness and I embrace the mountain—both of us pining for its luminous heights. The darkness reclines by the foot of the mountain, suddenly weak and tired, while I climb to its hidden summit. The wind snatches away my garland. The song resonates down below; I go my way without songs or flowers. And the mountain will not allow me, weak child of humankind, to touch its proud head; it tries to frighten me with chasms and slippery rocks. It tears at my clothing, bloodies my body, wounds my feet. But at what cost to glimpse the earth from afar, to see the sky up close? There's the sky, ever closer, ever closer—you could just reach out and touch it!

Yearning conquers fear. Down below, the daytime fires still smoulder. The first rays of the the rising sun gently fall on my trembling body, on the hard snow that envelopes the summit.

The 9th

Yesterday I was so intoxicated by my own dream I had to stop writing. But today I feel like I've been carried high over the earth. As though my recent suffering has grown milder and paler.

The 11th

I just want to know what sweet words he said to her: the same ones he said to me? Or did she inspire different words in him? Did he pursue her? Did he tell her he was sick with passion, that he needed no one else but her?

I just want her to tell me. Nothing more.



Reality and dreams are weaving together, pouring into each other and I don't know where one ends and the other begins.

I am a queen . . . What? Is it hard to imagine that I'm a queen? I sit now in the sombre throne room and I have allowed her, my lady-in-waiting, to sit by my side.

With a stony smile I bid her tell her story. And the lady-in-waiting (her face ashen, her eyes dull) recounts in a low voice, with frequent pauses, how the great artist sought her love, telling her that he was sick with passion, that he needed no one but her.

I listen, cold and proud, playing absentmindedly with my diamond encrusted diadem, so that no one should see how the queen suffers. But she continues her story: how hot his kisses are, how gently he caressed her, what words of love he found for her. And I give her a sign to stop. She falls silent and, bowing deeply, leaves the hall. The cold, proud smile lingers on my lips, and my hands continue to play with the diadem: no one must see how the queen suffers.



So childish! So ridiculous! I'm no queen—I'm a tired child with big dreams. She is no lady-in-waiting, she's a poor working girl. He is no artist.

I know she'll tell me everything, but that knowledge does not make it any easier. It's hard to contemplate. If only the impossible were possible—if only he would come to me himself and confess everything.

I choke up with tears.

The 14th

My books, my great friends, gaze down on me with quiet resentment, calling me to them.

The 15th

He wasn't alone, when I met him today. His acquaintance, in the few minutes he spent with us, mentioned her name in passing among others. When we were alone he said: "She is a very important friend," even though I had not asked him anything. And what does he tell her about me? Perhaps with the same defensive expression: "she is a very valuable worker."

I feel sorry for him. How much he has to strain, how many lies he has to tell for me to consider her "*an important friend*" and her me "*a valuable worker*," and we are not even the only unfortunates.

Sometimes it seems to really pain him, he seems to feel genuinely guilty that on account of petty desires he has shattered young lives in bloom and mutilated young souls.

I feel sorry for him.

The 17th

I have returned to my books. I've been working a great deal today, to the point of intoxication.

Night

Once again, I'm delving into my work with elation. I'm young and strong and not afraid to stare my sorrow in the eyes, drinking it down to the dregs. And because I am young and strong the work draws me in, just as life does, the joy of life.

Lately I find myself pausing in wonder when faced with the creations of the long-gone, half-forgotten peoples. The past is becoming as familiar and dear to me as the present, as the advance fulfillment of tomorrow. I sometimes feel as though I'm bathing in the light of those stars, long dead, which continue to send us their bright, shining light. We are bound to them by thin threads, spun from gold.

The 24th

I sometimes dwell on the fact that there's one thing that time and humankind will not be able to take away from me, leaving me rich, richer than Croesus: the bliss that I derive from a Heine poem, from a Beethoven sonata or a DaVinci painting.

The 25th

No sooner does one rise a little above one's own petty joys and pains, than crystal clear wellsprings of new joy and new pain open up. One watches humanity and its bitter struggle against mortality, its feverish ambition to

transcend the frontiers of the possible, to gain access to the mysterious and eternal, embracing it with steady arms.

Is it not like an eagle that rises above fog and cloud, ever higher and higher to touch the sun's fiery bosom with its mighty wings, to feed on its eternally flowing light?

Is it not like...

No, not like that, I have no desire for rhetoric, for platitudes, and cannot find the words as deep and great as my awe for mankind, like my awe for its creation. Not with words—I will prove it with my life.

I want to prove it with my life, my brain, my nerves . . . all of my force I will devote to my work.

And I am not deceiving myself about my abilities; I am not overestimating myself?

If my idea is weak, it will flare up just for a moment, halting, fearful of every hurdle. I want to select the brightest and most beautiful idea in generations, ideas which have until now only revealed themselves to a select few, and make them clear and comprehensible for thousands and tens of thousands of people. May those thousands, tens of thousands, warm themselves in the same sun that shines for me, may they enjoy the same happiness that has been lavished on me.

The 27th

In the last few days I've almost completely forgotten about the address, not forgotten exactly, just not thought about it. Today the whole scene suddenly came to the surface of my memory: how I went to her, asking her to tell me everything ... The blood rushed to my face, and I was ashamed to face my books.

I must forget it, for a while at least, in order to feel pure. I must work.

The 28th

I sit with my books all day. But then the evening comes, quiet, nostalgic and sad and, unnoticed, the work slips away out of my hands. I suddenly get the urge to see wide, open skies and dark earth, the urge to breathe freely and not suffocate under heavy stones. Here in the long, narrow streets between high walls, you won't find wonders such as these.

I throw myself down on the bed, close my eyes and my fantasy takes me away to where the sky is broad and wide and the earth is free to breathe—to my poor Lithuania.

My poor Lithuania. A sickly-pale summer's evening has already descended on one of its ancient, pensive towns, descended calmly and quietly so as not to disturb the town in its sad musings. With shimmering moonlight it pours down the broad road that leads into the dark, green fields, with their scattered many-branched trees. There's no one to be seen, no passing cart, no birdsong; everything is mute. And I feel ill. A long expected unhappiness has caught up with me. Too heavy for my shoulders—impossible to carry over. I need to hide it deep down so that no one should see it, not even the all-seeing sky. I cut across the wide road and walk towards the grassy field, where the trees rock sorrowfully. Without tears, without words, I fall upon the damp, well-trodden earth, so many others having already passed through it to reach the stooping tree, which has known so many storms and thunder. I snuggle up to them—my companions in grief. Everything is mute, as though a shadow of great suffering has passed over the heavens, fluttered down onto the earth, touching it lightly, passing through for a while, causing the heavens, the people and the earth to pause in astonishment at the magnitude of the suffering

and then to fall silent. The silence embraces me in its tender arms, gently kissing my astonished soul and telling of strange worlds where silence and silence alone is the ruler. And not far from me, in bright rows, lie the houses of my town. I recognise my mother's house among them. I know that there's no light on inside—no one is home. My mother has long passed over to the other side of the sea. I know that the window is open and beside it stands my mother, old before her time, anger and sorrow frozen on her face. And I know that she is gazing towards the dark field, towards the old trees that robbed her of her child. Her gaze calls out and beckons, demands, and beseeches. I cannot heed its call. In mute sorrow I arise. I walk across the wide road, bathed in shimmering light, toward the houses of the sleepy town, to the window where my angry, forever-sad mother stands.



Child, you dream too much. You must not—it interrupts the work.

The 30th

My days pass in learning and contemplation. I write a lot in the evenings. I'm beginning to have faith in my youth, and in my will.

The 4th of August

I have to go to her tomorrow. It weighs on me, weighs on me like a heavy burden. I don't like the whole thing. Not one bit.

But yes, I'll go. A promise is a promise.

The 5th

I tore up the address, just went ahead and tore it up.

It was this morning. I got dressed to go to her. I'd promised after all. I found it so difficult. My head was spinning. I took out the grey note to check the street number. I looked carefully at the uneven, childish letters and simply did not see, as though my eyes had been covered in a fog. I don't know how it happened, but I thoughtlessly tore it up, tossing the pieces out the window.

Now I can breath easily and freely. But I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed to face myself: how could I have done it? How could I even think of doing it? My face burns with shame.

The 8th

I met them both today. She regarded me with cold animosity. And he, with a guilty smile.

I don't know if they read in my gaze the love and compassion that it imparted. I wanted to approach the poor girl, embrace her like a sister, and find words that would awaken joy and pride in her. I wanted to look deep into his weary eyes and tell him that I felt sorry for him. That he should not be surprised—I pity him. And that he should never feel guilty about me. For even if he brought me the worst unhappiness, even if he should cause my soul to age terribly, there's one thing that he could never kill inside me—my striving for higher things, my ardent longing for the mountain peak.

פון א טאגע-בוך



ינפטען יולי.

היינט בין איך צו איהר צור
גענאנגען און האָב איהר גע-
זאָגט: „איך וויל איהר זאָלט
מיר אַלץ דערצעהלען. פאַר
וואָס? נו, איהר פערשטעהט
דאָך.... איך מוז אַלץ וויסען;

ווענען איהם.”

ווען איך האָב אויפגעהויבען די אויגען, האָב
איך אויף איהר רחמנות געקריגען: איהרע הענד
האָבען פיעבעריש געקנייטשט דאָס זייד פון דעם
שירם; אין די אויגען, האָב איך בעמערקט,
האָבען אויפגעבליצט טהרערען און באלד פער-
שוואַנדען.

זי האָט זיך ניט פערואוואַנדערט און שטיל,
אַלע מינוט זיך אָבשטעלענדיג, געענטפערט:
„איך וועל איך דערצעהלען. קומט צו מיר.
אפשר... אפשר וועט עס איך אָבהאַלטען פון
עפעס. קומט צו מיר.”

6טען.

אויף אַ מינוט וועקט זיך
אַר אַ רעכט האַסטו מיט
ייענען אַ בלעטעל פון זיין
יל פון דיר בעהאַלטען, אונט
ופיאַנירען אונטער זיין פליי
איך קלייב אויס די האַרנ
ערטער: „אונטער'גנב'ענען
ון דאָך האָבען אויף מיר
ליטה ניט. איהר שעהם זיך

דערנאָך האָט זי געזאָגט: „ניט איצטער.
איצט איז מיר שווער. מאַרגען פאָהר איך אַוועק
און וועל זיין צוריק אין אַ חודש. דעמאָלט וועט
איהר צו מיר קומען.”

זי האָט מיר איהר אַדרעס געגעבען. אויף
אַ קליין גרוי שטיקעלע פאַפיער האָט זי איהם
אויפגעשריעבען. איך האָב אויף איהם קיין קוק
ניט געטאָן און גלייך אריינגעלעגט אין קעשענע.
נאָך אַ חודש, און איך וועל אַלץ וויסען.

עטליכע מאָל האָב איך זי בעגעגענט. צוויי
מאָל מיט איהם צוזאַמען. ס'האָט זיך דעמאָלט
געדאַכט, אז זי איז גוט און גליקליך. דערנאָך
ביי איהם אין צימער אַן אומעטיגע, אַ פערזאָרג-
טע. דערנאָך אַליין אין אַלע ערטער, וואו מען
קען איהם טרעפּען, שמענדיג אַ ציטערנדע, מיט
אַראָבגעלאָזטע אויגען און אַ רחמנות'דיגען שמיי-
כל אויפ'ן בלאַסען פנים. איך האָב געוואוסט,
אַז זי איז זיין געליעבטע און האָב דעריבער גוט
בעמערקט איהר אויסזעהען. אַ בלאַס אונבע-
דייטענדר געזיכט. איינס פון די געזיכטער, אָן

פון אַ טאָגע-בוך

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