

Maja Gal Štromar

SURVIVED

the lost speech of Amelia Earhart

translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh

‘Free I am not allowed to live. Trapped I cannot live. I do not want to die.’

© Maja Gal Štromar, 2020

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

Like every ritual that, in order to become a liberating element, needs to feed on an enkindled psychic force expressed in verbal or mimetic formulas, so too the emergence, the appearance of the dark female simulacrum, should be accompanied by proprietary prayers, repeated pleas, seductive sounds, evocative litanies and also irreverences, challenges, insults, provocations, grimaces, a gamut of uneasy scepticism to exercise the dreaded failure of the event. In short, I would like to envelop the whole rite in this fabric, this kind of spider web, sonorous, sacred, and popular. Am I asking too much if I ask you to invent and to write these exhortations, this sad and scoffing prayer, frightened and mischievous, as old as the world and eternally childish?

Federico Fellini, letter to Andrea Zanzotto

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

Scene 1

In the darkness we can hear splashing water with an ever-louder acoustic atmosphere. Like the hum of the world, the planet as it rotates in all its mightiness and slowness on its ancient axis.

MALE VOICE *inaudible recordings, crackling*: This is Itasca. This is Itasca.
Over. We hear you. Over.

AMELIA: KHAQQ calling Itasca. We must be on you... but cannot see you.
Repeat, cannot see you. Over!

MALE VOICE: This is Itasca. Can I have your coordinates please. Over.

AMELIA: KHAQQ calling Itasca. Gas is running low. I repeat, gas is running
low. Mayday. Mayday. Over. *The crackling increases.*

MALE VOICE: Lockheed 10 Electra, repeat, Lockheed 10 Electra, repeat. Your
coordinates please. Over.

AMELIA: KHAQQ calling Itasca. We are on the line 157 337. I repeat, flying on
the line 157 337. Running out of gas. Mayday. Mayday. Over.

MALE VOICE *crackling*: This is Itasca. This is Itasca. Electra, come in. Over.

AMELIA: KHAQQ calling Itasca, on the line 157 337, I repeat, 157 337...
Mayday, mayday. Will repeat message, we will repeat this on 6210 KCS, I
repeat, we will transmit this on 6210 kilocycles. Await transmission. Over.

MALE VOICE: Awaiting. Over. Out. *Increased crackling, Amelia's voice is
barely comprehensible.*

AMELIA: Itasca, Itasca, mayday, mayday. KHAQQ calling. We are on the line
north – south. I repeat. North - south. Mayday, mayday... My name is
Amelia Earhart. I require assistance. Over. Out.

*Everything plunges into a lasting darkness. Amelia kneeling in a beam of faint
light, rowing with a broken piece of the aircraft's propeller. With every stroke we
can hear deep breathing, a splash of water, an echo, as if she is slowly rowing
into the void. The image sinks into the darkness.*

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is
strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

Scene 2

The scene is set among the wreckage of Amelia's aircraft Electra. At the centre of the stage an island/heap as an isolated space for gazing inwards. Amelia the castaway. Time – the present, though time and space in a symbolic sense touch upon the boundaries of timelessness and spacelessness. Moving from one to the other is essential. Amelia survived because a myth never dies. From one image to the next, the boundaries between illusion (actress, theatre) and Amelia are disappearing. A light shines upon her bare back, Amelia is combing her long grey hair, whispering in cadence a counting rhyme in an invented language of childhood, a made up poem, an invocation, old as the world and a timeless language with which she was able to survive.

AMELIA: Sa ca ta, na ma bi, chu ke roo, sa ta, ca... *Dancing with her back, gently, like a soft butoh dance. Then she turns round, contemplating the silence for a while, listening, quietly and slightly reserved.* Amelia, how often have I told you not to pull faces! Do you think this is nice? Just look at you, dribbling, you'll destroy your satin blouse... Amelia, can you hear me? Sitting on your ears again, flying in the sky?! Millie, the elastic on your white socks has slackened and you got them all dirty, they're black from the earth and have holes at the toes. And don't bite your nails, stand straight! *Laughter.* You find this funny? Don't talk back! Don't be crazy, you're not a guy! Where did you drop your hair ribbon? No, no, no way, how often do I have to say this, you're not a boy, you're a girl! And we girls don't pick our noses, even less do we stick our licked finger into the sugar pot. Amelia! *She grins and falls silent.* Ameliaaaa... A sha ba re, ka to ra me, sak e no mar, ke ko yu ye...

Music fills the stage, Amelia's back sinks into the darkness.

Scene 3

AMELIA: My name is Amelia. Amelia Mary Earhart. I was born on July 27th 1897 in Atchison, Kansas, but we soon moved away from there. In fact we kept moving. Every four years. Along the railroad. Father worked for the railroad. Kansas City, Des Moines, St. Paul, Chicago, later Boston, New York. I thus learnt early all about untying myself from bonds. Human bonds, relational ones, friendships. And most of all I needed to be free of attachment to material things. Perhaps that was my first lesson in freedom but also in courage, given to me in my cradle. Boys? Oh, I also never became attached to boys. They didn't pay much attention to me either, but I was not in any way disappointed about that. Well, perhaps I regretted their lack of interest but only in as much as it meant I didn't have a permanent dance partner. *Music. She starts swaying.* I adore dancing and if I had had a boyfriend I would probably have danced more often. Instead I listened to mamma's old records in the attic, swaying along to the music with my eyes closed, dreaming away... Perhaps that was the first time I felt what it meant to fly. Even though I loved chemistry and physics, I decided later to study medicine. I wanted to become a doctor. Towards the end of the war I visited Pidge, my dear little sister, who was at the time looking after wounded soldiers in a hospital in Toronto. And somewhere inside me I felt a strong calling, a feeling that I needed to help, needed to do something good for society, for this world. Something that will survive us and will help us survive. I worked hard as a nurse, days and nights. Oh, and they were happy to put me in charge of feeding the wounded, also because they knew that the whisky in the kitchen pantry was safe with me and from me. *Laughter.* It was a time when you could only see military planes in the sky. I remember the winter of 1918. Even now I can feel the cold biting into my cheeks as the ice and snow from the propellers showers over me. For hours on end I would stand near the

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

airplanes, watching their magnificent take offs and landings. Unfortunately I caught a virus at the hospital that caused me quite a lot of trouble. A heavy infection of the sinuses that developed into chronic symptoms, ending with a number of operations and a long period of convalescence. And that was when, out of pure boredom while waiting to get well, I enrolled on a mechanics course and learnt almost all there is to know about machines, which also later came in very handy. After that came my medical studies in New York. I was a very restless and curious student, for example, I was the only one to discover all the hidden corners at the university within the first month. I investigated every nook and cranny from the basement to the attic. In 1922 I discovered an excellent spot from which I could, in the company of a well-known biologist, watch the solar eclipse. Oh, how charmed I was ... No, not by the biologist... *laughter* ...by the eclipse, staring into the sky, into the stars! I experienced my second eclipse in flight, in 1924, floating above the Californian island of Santa Catalina. The feeling that the darkness is literally devouring you was frightening. Perhaps that is what it is like to die, I thought at the time... Well, my medical studies didn't last long, neither did other studies before or later. As with all others, I also abandoned medicine well before graduating. My parents despaired with me but I knew that a degree does not in fact bring you anything, especially not knowledge, let alone wisdom. And even then I knew that bodily ailments are no more important than those of the soul. Perhaps it's even the other way round... One day I watched all the aircraft landing at Long Beach. I approached a uniformed young man and asked him how much a flying course cost. "A thousand dollars," he said and looked at me in astonishment. "A woman who wants to fly? Oh, come on, girl, get serious!" But that very evening the girl announced to her father that she wanted to fly. He didn't take her seriously either. And because money was short at home, I decided to get a job in a

telephone company and pay for flying school myself. So they rarely saw me at home. I would take the tram straight from work to the airfield. One fine day a gentleman who had a car offered me a lift there and his sweet little daughter sitting on the back seat asked me how I could fly with such long hair. "It might get caught in the propeller," she squeaked! It was 1920, a time when woman could not have short hair. So I secretly cut my hair every week, but only half an inch at a time, so that folk at home would not notice the change too quickly and make a big fuss about it, but then one day I plucked up the courage and cut it all short. Snip! And off it came! Of course criticism and comments about my eccentricity were inevitable. "Were you not scared? What was it like the first time? Come on, Amelia, admit that your knees shook, you probably shit your pants, didn't you?" they teased me. After that came my first solo flight. I don't know what it was like, but I felt like... an idiot. My first flight passed without any particular excitement, without praise, especially because its landing was not exactly textbook material. Only much later, when everyone realised that I did not intend to give up flying and when my flying skills were becoming better and better, did Mother take pity on me and helped me buy my first airplane. A second-hand one, of course. Mother had always been my silent ally even though she loudly complained about my excessively free behaviour. I very soon obtained my pilot licence and certification from the International Aeronautical Federation.

Scene 4

AMELIA *is playing cowboys, mimicking her father:* Boom, boom, boom... shooting behind the mountain. Boom, boom, boom... My fellow fighter, ready for battle, pulls out his pistol from its holster. "We're surrounded. Look, down there. The Sheriff is coming with reinforcements! No, no, we must hold out until they come! Hold out! Boom, boom, boom! The shots once again echoed in the rock face. Ouch, they've got me, Mac, darn, I've been hit! – My God, they really have shot you, Mr Earhart? – What? Did they really shoot me? Not just shoot me, they killed me!!! And I stayed alive only until the Sheriff arrived and saved everyone else. Well, I did revive afterwards. *Laughter.* How vividly he told stories about cowboys. Who? Why, my father! Edward Earhart! He always played the hero in his stories, of course. He entertained the entire neighbourhood, once he lost an arm, another time a leg, confusing the children who saw him alive and well walking down our street. What he liked most was playing cowboys and Indians with us. He bore battle injuries on his nose for a long time – a scar. In a passionate fight a little boy once slammed the door to the hayloft into his face. Oh, and letters, yes, he also wrote me letters. There were so many! Letters and notes with which he teased and entertained me... My Dear Parallelepiped... What? Excuse me? What was that again? Parallelelelle...? His writing always catapulted me into orbit, as I had to immediately figure out what new word he set up as a trap. Parallelepiped? For a long time I was convinced my father knew everything. That he had read all the books in this world and sucked in all the knowledge of the universe. And knew how to solve all crosswords! He was capable of answering all my questions, knew every word that I randomly looked up in the dictionary, even the most difficult ones. Yes, I loved Father's battles most of all, despite being a girl and Grandma trying to tame me with pink satin dresses and large hair bows,

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

and especially by insisting that, as a girl, I should be better behaved, though I preferred to play with the boys in the street. I rode without a saddle, played tennis, basketball, rode my bike round with the boys, and all this caused my Grandma's hair to turn grey. *She spits and laughs.* All that about girls being less capable than the boys, weaker, well, we would still need to prove that, wouldn't we?! My sister and I once entered an athletics competition. In a group where the girls were supposed to run – my God, how absurd! – in muslin dresses, the two of us turned up in shorts and forever earned ourselves the title of black sheep. *Reflector highlighting the face, she continues in a slightly more childish voice.* “Dear Daddy, Muriel and I have decided we urgently need a football. Please, please, please, get us one for Christmas, because we won't survive without one. As you know, we have plenty baseballs, bats, bikes and other things... more than enough, in fact, alright? And if you happen to run into Santa, please explain to him that we are still girls... Oh... and I almost forgot... We would not say no to a couple of air rifles.”

Scene 5

AMELIA: In 1922 I get my first plane, a bright yellow, second-hand Kinner Airstar biplane. I call it The Canary and with it I set my first record for female pilots, reaching an altitude of 14 000 feet. In 1923 I become the sixteenth woman to be issued a pilot's licence. Yes, I am the only woman to have completed an uninterrupted intercontinental flight. In 1930 I break the international speed record for 100 kilometres with a cargo of 500 pounds in a single engine Lockheed Vega. In 1932 I reach a new record, flying non-stop without adding fuel from Los Angeles to Newark... People often ask me what it is that an excellent pilot needs. Well, what else? Coffee, oranges and tomato juice, chocolate and 20 litres of water, a couple of scarves, a toothbrush and comb, an egg omelette sandwich... and of course a husband to prepare it before your flight. *Laughter.*

Scene 6

AMELIA: Flying... People often maintain a misguided perception of what it means to fly, of the sensations up there in the clouds... Many imagine that flying is similar to the sensation you get if you stand next to an open window in a very tall skyscraper. But they are mistaken. When you are in an airplane there is no feeling of vertigo. Flying is so natural that a passenger is basically not even aware of it. Up there any sense of distance abandons you. The abyss under the plane only lingers in the mind's imagination. But when we look out of a window from a skyscraper we are still in contact with the ground, the ground we are standing on and also the ground we are looking down upon from the twentieth floor, down in the street. Vertigo or at least a sensation of unease stems from the focused point that is located within the field of vision of the observer on the ground. In an airplane, the three-dimensionality or verticality in relation to the ground fades away. All you have between the aircraft and Earth is a thickening atmosphere and this gives passengers an entirely different feeling. There is no real contact point with the ground. All earthly afflictions disappear, or at least it seems so: earthly fear, the sensation of gravity... What also disappears is the sense of speed. The eye of someone travelling in an automobile gets caught on trees, on stones and thus creates a sense of speed and distance. It is the eye's way of figuring things out, of calculating. But in the sky there are no stones, no trees or candelabra, no reference points to remind us that time is running, that space is passing, that life is passing and that there is less of it with every moment. Just Earth... somewhere far below us, almost in timelessness, stretching like an amoeba. Altitude flattens everything, disarms, relativises. Even the highest mountains are no longer imposing, trees become shrubs, cars like beetles, the heavy clay soil that people work on with anguish and devotion becomes an attractive soft patchwork quilt, towns chessboards... Was I ever afraid of dying? In the

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

air? I have never heard of a pilot dying in the air, well, unless they happened to be pecking away at cherries and a stone got stuck in their throat. *Laughter.* From up there you cannot really perceive man. And there are very few human problems in mid-air... They only appear when we touch ground.

Scene 7

AMELIA: 10 horizontal: a-l-c-o-h-o-l-i-s-m, 9 vertical: A-L-C-O-H-O-L-I-C.

Another new word, Father, isn't it? Alcoholic, someone who excessively consumes alcoholic drinks; chronic, notorious alcoholic; did you think I didn't know? That you'd hide behind an always-merry face, buffoonery and wisecracks, laughter and endless battles between cowboys and Indians? You drank more and more often. You'd come home and leave behind you a trail, the stench of alcohol. No, not germicide and disinfectant; you lied to us about helping fix the engine... Getting cut and having your wound cleaned. Alcohol destroys all germs, you tried to convince us ... In the end it destroyed you, your relationship with Mother and our family... Oh, you played out the wounded act excellently: you wrapped your hand, hiding a perfectly healthy hand under the bandages and a boundless wound in your soul. You didn't stop, even though we caught you lying. You said they bandaged your colleague Mitch's hand and only wrapped yours in solidarity. Forever making up stories... Did you think we would not notice your red, puffy eyes and shaking hands, your slightly tilting posture and an ever more bent back trying hard to hold its balance? Your heavy breath spared no one. And your lies could not heal the wound that spread like metastasis, deepened and in the end ate away at your heart. My highly esteemed grandfather, federal judge Alfred Otis, Mother's father, disagreed with her marrying you. When Mother first brought you home, he saw you simply as a failed lawyer, a useless clown, a descendant of a dried up and sombre Lutheran pastor who had no clue about making money, no clue about business and who did not fit into the bourgeois salon refinement and sophistication. Even at your first meeting he let you know with all his judicial arrogance and haughtiness that you were not good enough, that you did not meet his expectations. Like a humble puppy you followed him, wanting to try. You thought that you

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

needed to give more and more, ever more. Oh, how much you tried, Father. But with these people that's not enough... with these people there's no talking, no helping each other, no growing... No, Daddy, with these people there is trade, calculation and counting. And however much you tried to get the noble and esteemed judge Otis to accept you, no, not grow fond of you, just more or less accept you as a commendable and loving father of his grandchildren, you did not succeed. You became a trailing dog, ever more docile and desperate. And judges don't like subservient dogs. Grandpa continued to successfully judge, ponder and make decisions, not only in the courtroom, everywhere. And soon there was no difference between judgements and prejudices. Had I been grown up then, I would have trusted you with a secret, Father: all your efforts were in vain, nobody ever succeeded; with these people nobody ever succeeds. You were obtrusive because you were alive. With your liveliness you lifted a mirror to their deadness. How hard it was meeting Grandpa over the years and always sensing the contempt in his eyes, the tiredness and disgust. And perhaps even resentment that you will never be able to make his little girl, my mother, truly happy. *Laughter*. I thought that these things happened only to women! The first time you and Mother got divorced was when, after Grandpa's death, you spent all of his fortune. *Laughter*. Oh, Daddy, perhaps it was out of pure wantonness or revenge that you went to town! Boom, boom, boom!... Mitch, let's go for a beer, Otis has died, the old vampire! What a victory! You buried Grandpa and his money and I had to sell my plane so we, Mother, myself and my little sister Pidge could survive. Not fly, survive... Then you came creeping back. Oh, no, of course you did not come creeping... You always knew how to make an impression, a drama, a comedy, with big promises and bunches of flowers, vows and pledges... All in vain, it was an abyss, your love for us too weak, your love of alcohol ever stronger. So you separated

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

once again... Edward Earhart, my father... *A transition on stage into another dimension.* You took me to a fair and pointed up to the sky. An aircraft flew across it. Look, Millie, that's freedom! you called out. Then you fell silent, chest thumping. Boom, boom, boom... A tiny tear appeared in the corner of your eye. Oh how I wished that you would smile, wink at me as you used to, when we played cowboys and Indians. I was eight and held your hand. With the infinite sadness that paralyzed you, this was apparently all I was capable of doing as a child... Boom, boom, boom... my own chest thumped. Gently, as gently as possible and carefully I took your hand, praying that you would not move it away. I thought I could ease your pain, chase away the black ravens that obscured your sky and built a wall of silence between us. No, you did not move it away. We stayed silent, standing in the middle of the noisy fair. There was a smell of spicy sausages, fries and sticky candyfloss. I looked up to you, you looked up to the sky. We became allies in pain. I was your nurse, your saviour, you were an immature child. And perhaps then we made a silent pledge to each other that one day we would escape. You further into drink, me into the sky: I would become the successful, brilliant grandchild, the rich son-in-law to a grim grandfather who would finally judge in our favour... And maybe my loyalty will be so great, Daddy, that I will relinquish the woman within me, the mother of a never born child... You know, we mustn't anger Grandpa too much... I will go there, Daddy, where you failed.

Scene 8

Victory scene. Confetti falling from above in a narrow shaft of light, Amelia with a bunch of flowers, waving and bowing, pulling individual flowers from the bouquet and throwing them in all directions. The sound of an aircraft overhead can be heard, Amelia runs downstage, the scene vanishes.

Scene 9

AMELIA *picking up the confetti from the previous scene, sifting it into an urn:*

My goodness! The dangers we exposed ourselves to, poor girls, as we set out on such a long and arduous journey! Feminine beauty tempts all sorts of crooks and scoundrels! Attracts them more than pure gold... would it not be easier if... my figure is by its nature already slightly different... *That I did suit me all points like a man? A gallant curtal-axe upon my thigh, a boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart lie there what hidden woman's fear there will, we'll have a swashing and a martial outside – as many other mannish cowards have that do outface it with their semblances...* Oh Shakespeare! Eleanor and I were sitting in the prestigious box at the theatre and looked at each other and giggled as the actress spoke of *mannish cowards*. We met at the White House in April 1933 at a dinner organised by President Roosevelt, Eleanor's husband! Well, yes, yes, it was in my honour, after all I am the first woman ever to fly solo across the Atlantic! Well, yes, the shit I am! Cross my heart, I don't really count 1928. I was just a silent witness, placed as a naive, pitiful birdbrain into the hold of the airplane. One day in April in 1928 the phone rang. "Helloo, you don't know me. My name is Railey... Captain Railey! Would you like to fly the Atlantic?" And I responded, "What? How? Fly the Atlantic? My God, I would. Yes, I would, of course I would, indeed I would! But, well, what about... Of course I had a few what-abouts! The woman who financed the trans-Atlantic flight, the wealthy London-based American Amy Phipps Guest, had no problem buying the

Fokker Trimotor and renaming it *Friendship*. To mark the friendship between England and the United States.

So, Amelia, are you ready to fly the Atlantic? In the event of an accident you renounce your right to file charges and relinquish the rest of the team of any kind of obligations? What did you study? Are you healthy? Are you fit? What piloting experience do you have? What do you intend to do after the flight? Do you agree that the male pilots will be paid while you will not be? Pilot Bill Stultz will receive 20,000 dollars, the mechanic Lou Gordon 5000 dollars. Your payment is your entry into the world of aviation, you are doing it for your reputation and fame; of course all the royalties from interviews and other journalistic items belong to the organiser. Oh, another thing, you won't be piloting. You will sit in the plane and simply witness the flight. That's enough for a lady, but you will enter aviation history, oh yes, that you will *become part of* aviation history.

Of course I was against it, I did not want to just be dead weight, a poor feckless woman, a meagre disenchanted person, sitting miserably in a pretty dress on a flight across the Atlantic – and most of all I did not want a whole load of untruths about me spreading around! What a hero, the first woman to fly the Atlantic! Do you think she sat in the back of the plane peeling oranges? Ha, ha, oranges... No, in fact I wasn't peeling them! Due to the thick fog we were not able to figure out our precise coordinates and were unable to land; we knew, however, that we were not off from the coast and when the ship below us that we hoped could help and guide us had not spotted our plane and did not respond to our radio calls, I was forced by circumstances to figure out a special strategy: I threw the bag of oranges, yes, our entire supply, onto the boat below us with a note: Occasionally it would be great if you looked up at the sky! You might not see God, but you will see our plane! *Laughter*. And the bag of oranges fell right in front of the

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

captain's cabin. Fortunately it did not kill anyone. And who can say now that practical, housewife logic does not fit into the domain of pilots! It was never talked about, of course. It would mar Bill and Lou's fame and business. Dear gentlemen, Bill and Lou, what was your strategy for a successful crossing? – Women throwing oranges! A light-weight category! *Laughter*. Yes, what soon became clear was that I would not achieve much through stubbornness and rectitude, through being straightforward and truthful. You know about Psyche's task with the golden fleece, don't you? You have to wait until dusk when the beasts fall asleep. You need to put on a mask, lie in wait, breathe shallowly and pretend that you're fine with the way things are... Oh, how I hate these obligatory bourgeois tactics of survival! Taking things slowly and cautiously, just in case your abilities and talents hurt their ego! We have to make sure we beat about the bush, belittle ourselves and humbly feign helplessness, continuously letting them know that they are more, they are better, they are everything... Yes, what was expected from me was the usual female reconcilability, a fairytale silence and softness, large, surprised eyes, and yes, putting it expertly, female receptiveness. Take it or leave it. I didn't take it, but I also didn't leave it. Zero hour came at the end of May. But the first time round we failed. Well, not me. I never fail. I don't know anything about failing! *Cynical, laughter*. When we wanted to take off it was too windy, another time we were obstructed by thick fog. And of course we were too heavy. And who was it that, after hours of pondering and extreme disappointment, not to say giving in to fate, advised the pilots Bill and Lou how we could, despite everything, still take off safely? A woman! How? Well, I sacrificed my wardrobe. *Laughter*.

Scene 10

AMELIA: In 1932 I finally earned my nickname Lady Lindy, after Charles Lindberg, who completed the first solo flight across the Atlantic. My flight from Newfoundland to Ireland lasted for 15 hours. And despite the loss of fuel, despite the layer of ice that kept thickening on my wings, and despite the cracked connector from which worrying flames kept spitting towards the cockpit for the last part of the journey, I managed it. And I became famous more or less overnight. That is how I came to meet Eleanor Roosevelt. What a woman! The instant we set eyes on each other we understood each other. My sister Pidge was far away and I missed feminine solidarity, the kind without words where it is what you do that counts... Towards the end of the dinner held at the White House in my honour, we slipped away like two stowaways, ignoring strict state protocol, and found a plane at a nearby airfield with which I took her on a night flight from Washington to Baltimore. After this flight I promised her I would teach her to fly, but this unfortunately never happened. I know she kept looking for me after that fateful 2 July 1937 when I disappeared half way across the Pacific Ocean; she put pressure on various people, on her husband, President Roosevelt, to try and find me, to finally open up military archives. She did not succeed. Top Secret. This information with the truth is still highly classified. Why? Because the Pacific Ocean had to remain 'pacific'... I became an unsolved case! Or rather a case never solved. Amelia Earhart, a lost case. *She smiles.*

In the background a recording:

MALE VOICE: Awaiting, Electra, still awaiting. Come in! Over. End.

Increased crackling.

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

AMELIA: Itasca, Itasca, mayday, mayday. KHAQQ calling. We are on the line north – south. I repeat. North - south. Mayday, mayday... My name is Amelia Earhart. I require assistance. Over. Out.

The noise of airplanes is ever louder. An entire squadron flies over. Then there is silence.

Scene 11

AMELIA: How much longer will I have to stay on this island? Have I not repented enough? Is this what I am paying for the freedom I allowed myself? Do you still think I am too small, too much a woman for a trip round the world? Too daring, too demanding? One day this will be a triviality, one day my sisters will reach the Moon, not just the Moon, Mars, Venus! My hands are hands of someone no longer young. But I can still spread them wide. Like wings. With these hands I hugged huge trees in the park close to our home, giant sequoias and dreamt of new world. Now I am but a paper icon, a theatrical figure that disappears from the actress' face after the applause, sinks into her body, falls silent so as not to be too obtrusive. I am condensed into an archetypal female warrior, a great Amazon, marginalised, a victim, a pioneer, oh, yes, and a feminist. I became a paper symbol of perseverance, courage, passion and female awareness. What was that most often quoted quote of mine again? Hang on, yes... Never interrupt someone doing something you said couldn't be done! Did it help? Was it all in vain? There will be plays, films will be made... But where in this paper sea of all the superlatives is Amelia, the woman, the actual woman of flesh and blood? Look at me! What is it that you don't understand? I *am* a woman! What is it that bothers you, my trousers? My pilot's jacket, my boots? My goggles, my aviator's hat? Is it the fact that I'm straightforward, clean, without an agenda, or simply that I'm alive? Countless women before me have fought the same battles, they even flew balloons, many devoured by flames. No, not at the stake, though, I suppose, them as well... but I'm talking of the flames in the air, oh yes, the alchemy of the soul that burnt for the freedom of equality: Jeanne Geneviève Garnerin, Madame Blanchard, Éliisa Garnerin, Margaret Graham. It was not enough. Despite these brave flights, many women today remain trapped in their own dreams. Dreams that they had to give up on,

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

settling for less. With an eternal NO, NOT YOU! You won't, you are not allowed to, you are incapable of, this doesn't suit you, because you are – well – just a woman! And it would be too childish to try and find whose fault it is. Men? Again? Really? Is it really always men's fault? It is probably all very much simpler: the two demons we have within us – inertness and fear, held on to by immature and unweaned infants – forcing us into distorting the spirit; blindly following self-proclaimed authorities drags us into a self-imposed obligatory inertness. Because the first and only betrayal occurs within ourselves. Beyond gender. All the rest are excuses and shifting responsibilities. Why are you staring at me, especially you, my dear friends, sisters, who set up traps for me out of your own sense of powerlessness, out of a bitterness that arises from a sense of yourselves being unable to move out of your own limitations, from your own adult inconsistencies, sisters, you who during the day lay wreaths on my grave, rose your fists and shouted about equality, yet in the evening, out of fear and humiliation, perfidiously created nests for those who kept sacrificing you for their own little victories, for a breeze on the bay. *She sings. "Little boat, you sail the sea, trees bow as you pass the bay, sail little boat, oh, sail little boat, let the wind in your sails carry you far away..."* Did you think that I would stay silent because it is not appropriate to raise your hand against your own sex? The truth is always above all that. Beyond it. It is all a single battle. I'm sorry, I had to. Actually I am not sorry at all... The word solidarity is still and all too often a rhetorical cliché for weepy soap operas.

Scene 12

AMELIA: I never despised men. Never! Quite the opposite, I loved them... I loved him... I bury my face in his shoulders. I know it will not last. It cannot last. So we remain silent. We look out into the vastness that shortens with every breath. We listen to finality as it spreads across infinity. Perhaps an hour, perhaps two. Without words. I can hear the wind blowing sharply. I can hear the rattle of engines, perhaps it is the beating of our hearts. Boom... boom... boom... An endless valley... under the rough shield of my isolation, my single yoke, he lifts my blouse above my belly button and kisses it. His tongue circles the planet. *She smiles.* My acrobatic pilot: 45° line, a loop, dogtooth, a barrel roll, flying upside down, backturn, Cuban Eight... *Laughter.* From afar I can hear my name. Amelia... It is a man, saying my name. A man capable of saying my name. A man competing with me. What is it that keeps us so high above the Earth? The burning in the loin intensifies... I feel deracinated. Someone has smashed the kaleidoscope and mirrors with thousands of images are flying into the sky. I am so sad, suddenly so intoxicatingly sad as death approaches. I can feel it penetrating me, breathing more rapidly, clinging onto my readiness and gasping restlessly. Inside me it is arising plumes of pain, just a little more, a little longer, and I shall be free. The sadness will go away. It will abandon me forever. The intensity of unbearability is about to smack me in the face. The tongue that never expressed what it should have, what it could have...

Scene 13

AMELIA: George Putnam, my husband. He proposed to me seven times before I accepted. Why only then? Living an ordinary life means being disappointed. And I did not want to be disappointed. The higher the ideals of life you wish to live by, the deeper the fall into disappointment when we once again land on the hard ground of ordinariness. And who knows better than me what it means to be high up and how it is when you have to land. Land technically flawlessly on a hard, slippery, asphalt landing strip, land safely even in fog, heavy rain or a hailstorm, in any weather, *landing by agreeing to compromise*. If you do not land, you die? At first George was merely my manager, my promoter, my motivator and advisor. He looked after my public image. He looked after my finances, my fame. I had to write articles for the *Cosmopolitan*, books, did adverts for cigarettes and even launched my own fashion line. Whenever we had to appear in public, he would hide my favourite trousers and worn leather jacket. Yes, the very one I had slept in when it was new. I wanted to make it look old quickly so I would look like real pilots. George chose expensive silk dresses for me at boutiques, took me to milliners to order the best and most wonderful hats, often impregnated with shellac from acacia sap, for he knew that I never hid from the rain under an umbrella; he would buy me expensive furs and, whenever I was being photographed, he would remind me if I smiled too broadly at the camera, “Don’t show that ugly gap between your front teeth, darling, it’s like the Bermuda Triangle, it will sink our business.” He would choose – as he liked to say – places most suiting and distinguished for our business, where I was supposed to appear in public. He thought carefully about who to invite to social events, important and wealthy people who could help me in realising my flights. The ethics of these choices? Often deficient. Help was counted in dollars. And George did not blink even when arms dealers, drug traffickers

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štormar: maja.stormar@guest.arnes.si

and suspicious owners of nightclubs joined in on the financing. He remained nimble and gallant. I often wondered whether I could have done it alone? So did I, after all, indeed agree to compromises? I am the only woman to have completed a non-stop intercontinental flight but I never managed to bridge the distance between us.

Scene 14

AMELIA: The die is cast. I am to fly round the whole world. I will be the first woman to have even dared to do such a thing. Dared! I will fly around the equator and in 40 days fly around 29 000 miles, starting and finishing in California. The trip will include around 20 stops: Africa, India, Thailand... Well, Fred and I might make an extra stop or two, depending on higher forces such as bad weather. The plane I will fly around the world is a twin engine Lockheed 10 Electra, the silver eagle, the steel bird with tanks that hold 1200 gallons of fuel, much more than the customary fuel capacity of around 200 gallons. Yes, my plane is called the *Electra*. I wanted to laugh when they first called me from the factory and told me... King Agamemnon sacrificed his other daughter Iphigenia at Aulis for the wind in the sails of his battle ships, so his army could advance. Goodness, please, not too much wind, so I can take off! *Laughter*. I chose the best as my co-pilot and flight navigator, Fred Noonan. Former marine. Although George had his doubts about this choice. Fred had had treatment for being an alcoholic. I know, I saw how his hands shook. He realised I noticed and so he persistently pressed them into the pockets of his leather jacket, under the table. "Come on, Amelia, don't be crazy, you cannot trust a man whose hands shake, especially not when it comes to precise cartographic calculations! Milly, please, rethink this! Sometimes we're talking about millimetres, and these millimetres could cost you your life!" George pleaded with me. Hands... Shaking hands... Father's palms, hand in hand in the middle of all the noise at the fair. Boom... boom... Boom ... I can smell spicy sausages, fries and candyfloss. I looked up at him and he looked up to the sky. We became allies in pain... Perhaps I insisted on Fred merely because I wanted to give Father another chance. On 21 May 1937 we took off from Oakland in California. At 8.43 precisely. And we were successful on our first attempt.

Scene 15

AMELIA *the rumbling sound of airplanes*: Hushhh, can you hear that? They are flying overhead again; it has been like this for a hundred years. How much longer will I have to speak an unknown language for them to hear me on this isolated ridge than no cartographer has ever managed to find, let alone draw and map? They say this island does not exist. Just as I also probably no longer exist. I am an idea. An illusion. Surrounded by tonnes of water, an ocean that never stops groaning. Days and nights, decades, a century, the same roar of the waves that slowly but surely drives you crazy. And these beasts... I watch them every day, circling around, smelling blood, smelling food and waiting, patiently. Waiting for me to get hysterical, throw myself in the water and start swimming towards some unknown land to save myself, to tell them I'm still here, still alive, even though they have long declared me missing, disappeared, and dead. Oh, George, I can just see the beautiful gravestone you've put up for me. Shiny marble into which you probably had the silver outline of my elegant airplane *Electra* carved. I cannot believe you too gave up. How pathetic and predictable.

Scene 16

AMELIA: Love? Was it love? Have I ever really fallen in love? Or is love just reverie for literature and the theatre? The panacea that helps us survive? I will probably never know for sure... They say that until you break the spell of fascination, until you experience disappointment, it is not possible to really love and be loved. But I wanted to fly. I wanted freedom. I wanted not to be afraid in doing so. To overcome the fear of allowing myself to concede to life. And perhaps... I don't know... that was why I was afraid of love. Because in love you need to fall. Oh certainly, we want calm and safety but at the same time need constant excitement; we are hungry for storms that boost our adrenalin, move us from the comfort, even if we are afraid of them. That is why we are eternally on the search, so we can eternally not find. We pretend to expect. Expectation and the expectation of expectation does not lessen the breaking apart of the enchantment and the pain that these disappointments create does not abate over the years. So what was I looking for up in the skies? The afterlife in this life? Was I escaping? Looking for Love? But a love that would not be binding? Yes, this world is a world of performances. Yes, and we all live in performances. Amelia Earhart also lives only in a performance. Really? Oh, George, my dear guardian angel... Even before our wedding night I wrote you a letter, remember? In our marriage I demand complete freedom. I will not restrict you and I expect the same from you. How terrible it must have sounded? *I demand complete freedom.* Without the need to relinquish anything, without demands, without expectations. That was how high my flight took me. And higher than that. My promise to myself. And he who flies high falls low? *Laughter.* But I wanted... Everything. All! Or nothing. Was I a slave to an ideal, was I blinded or was I the only one to dare believe and stand up to the truth? Looking up at the truth can be dangerous. Icarus knows this well... the price

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

for daring is high. Humans, such strange, self-centred and selfish beasts! Capable of scourging, capable of divine blows. You demand safety and distance, closeness and coldness, excitement and conciliation, strength and weakness, shake up and pacification, all this and much more and perhaps none of these... When, out of loneliness, I still went chasing after someone, I perhaps was not looking for myself in the mirror but for someone who would be capable of penetrating my uniqueness, shaking up my defence mechanisms, shaking me through and through, redefining me, setting me up anew... Still selfish, isn't it? Do I have the right to demand freedom and take it away from someone else through dictating expectations? This strange demand for handing yourself over to the other person... is this preoccupation not almost a kind of well-intended terrorism? All these decades later I am still here and I still don't know. I feel like I am circling above an isolated island with a hidden treasure... yet I never reach it... Amelia Earhart, case unsolved, unable to land. Many are convinced that loneliness is a precondition for recognition, yet it seems it is impossible without a mirror... Love is here to unravel us, calm us down and then unravel us again. ... Oh, George, why do I keep using the plural?

Recording in the background

AMELIA: Itasca, Itasca, mayday, mayday. We are on the line north – south. I repeat. North - south. Mayday, mayday... My name is Amelia Earhart.
KHAQQ calling Itasca I require assistance. Over. Out.

Scene 17

AMELIA: On the morning of 2 July 1937, the 42nd day of our flight around the world, Fred and I took off from Lae, New Guinea. My God, in other words the on call meteorologist, *Laughter*, forecast a mild day without anything out of the ordinary. We had already covered a stunning 22 000 miles and only had 7000 remaining. On our way home we were to stop on Howland Island, where we were to top up our fuel. It was slightly overcast and the patchy cloud was about to break up whence we should have sighted the group of coral islands below us. We flew at a speed of 140 knots at a height of 7000 feet. Then I went up to 10 000 feet, which is not ideal in terms of fuel. Why did I do that?... When I was still a little girl, Father and I watched the way water in the sink moved as it ran into the drain. It would swirl faster and faster, gurgling its departure. Look, Amelia, the water will always twist towards the left, in an anti-clockwise movement! Why, I asked. I don't know, but what I know is that a left-hand spin foretells death, a right-hand one life. Fred had just sent me a message. A note attached to a fishing line. *Amelia, Urgent! Look to the right, immediately!* I raised my head towards the right, the dense, damp greyness was breaking up, the impenetrable thickness was breaking up into an unusual light, flashing evenly, more blinding than the bright whiteness of snow. I closed my eyes. My God, blue birds, how many blue birds! A flock, not just a flock, a swarm of birds like a plague of biblical locusts was flying towards us. No, they were not flying, they were swirling like a typhoon, in a left hand spin. And as I approached them, dangerously close, I thought for a moment that I recognised my Father's eye in the eye of one of those birds. I stopped breathing. And jerked the yoke upwards.

Recording in the background

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

AMELIA *offstage recording, image:* Mayday, mayday. KHAQQ calling. My name is Amelia Earhart. Mayday, mayday.... The water is up to my knees, I require assistance. Mayday, mayday. KHAQQ calling. Water up to my throat, mayday, mayday, I am still talking... Sa ca ta, na ma bi, chu ke roo, sa ta, ca...I still CAN talk...

generation could continue to avenge their ancestors with blood, that in their arrogance they could continue to inflame money-making conflicts, wars, genocides... Soon after the wind picked up in Aulis... From here I watched the airplanes flying over, the sea turned red. Airplanes turned into albatrosses, condors and falcons, free birds into bombers in the hands of banal people. No, they were not terrible, they were just terribly banal... And there was much terrible noise, boom, boom, boom, a terrifying noise... Now I know and I am no longer sad... this world of constant antagonism is not ripe for a transition, not mature enough for welfare. The march of the most terrible totalitarianism began as a small joke, a naive game in which the big industrialists tried to save their own substantial bank accounts, their own small, constipated opportunistic arsens. That was how they placed upon the pedestal the man who gassed half of Europe. Terribly banal... The sky up there seems further and further away, the earth is collapsing in on itself! History is no success story, instead we stagger from one class struggle to the next, from one kind of oppression to the next... *Laughter.* What? Words too heavy for a woman? But this is just a play! Put up with me just a little longer, I'm leaving, and there will be drinks after the performance! Let's pretend that someone else is writing our history and we just helplessly keep quiet. We are all just plain hypocrites on a rotting left bank of caviar. A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye... Humanity has long gone blind! It is hard to perceive, even harder to accept, that each individual is a battlefield of their own. An island of rebellion. That each individual must first and foremost be responsible for their own actions. But now only the waves reply to me... And for this flight into your own darkness you do not need a pilot's licence. I have grown old on this remote island... And you still wonder whether things are different, better, today? There are ships out there... Waiting for the sacrifice that will bring wind to the bay, ready for new battles. "...sail little boat, oh, sail little boat, let the wind in your sails carry you far away..." Capitalism is taking a stroll along the knife's edge,

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

and it is about to tip over. Boom, boom, boom... Into barbarism of fascism. Cultural cretinism and self-importance, bureaucratic narrow-mindedness, no, not the truth that resides above the Gods but opinions of loudmouths and rumours are throttling us, the banality of evil... Does this sea ever end? The sea I look across every day? The sea that groans, that roars, does not allow me to sleep... The sea on the horizon of which I look out for boats of salvation, ocean liners... It seems as if I am waiting for it to be too late... I need only a pair of eyes to open and see me, save me from this desperate loneliness, this strange, bitter truth that takes away my sleep... **Free I am not allowed to live. Trapped I cannot live. I do not want to die.** The enemy was gentler than my own fathers; they allowed me to live on this remote island. Was this punishment? If not the enemy's, then whose? I can hear an applause, many applauses. Oh World!!! You have given my name to bridges, schools, streets. And now, in the epilogue of a performance about her who knew how to and managed to fly, I am supposed to tell you whether it will work out? Is that what you wanted from me? Catharsis? An intravenous drip of courage, so you can persist just a little longer... Did you want to find out whether things would work out? Whether we have enough courage for things to work out? For as long as so many people have to fall, die for an idea, for as long as we see these deaths as necessary collateral damage, we are not worthy of the word love. This performance will end like the lamest of crime novels, the most kitsch pulp, without a clear dramaturgic line. *Laughter.* Oh, people, clarity is an overrated virtue! – The world will end and collapse in on itself. A few rounds of Agamemnons will kill each other, but more will be conceived by wet nurses of dead generations. Facelifted Clytemnestras will die in horrible spasms, contemporary Iphigenias will still continue to please and happily surrender their lives at the altars of cultural fathers who do not recognise independent spirits. Perhaps it really is easier to stay on a remote island, by a sea filled with the threatening teeth of sharks... I was an obstacle because I was alive. Because I did

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štomar: maja.stomar@guest.arnes.si

not want to land... in safety... because I did not want to agree to all this... “*Rather death than this humiliating genocide of your marmalade...*” Maybe the day will come, oh, the future tense again – another slippery category – *Laughing* when women will rise up... not only to the skies... They will rise against social stratification, against separation, against hunger and killing, against comparatives and trading... There will come a day when the word *victory* will no longer be in the dictionaries because when I say *victory*, I am also forced to say *war*... There will come a day when men will rise above women only with free flying or in looking for a kiss, there will come a day when fathers will be able to cry and play cowboys and Indians to their heart’s content and all will survive because it will only be a game... There will come a day when sister will no longer raise their hand against sister, brother against brother. When we will no longer mutually insult each other with the word *man* and the word *woman*, when humans will no longer rise above others or above nature. The day will come or we will be no longer... No, I did not land, I never force landed. Because I don’t accept force... Did I love? I don’t know... I flew. And my death has never been as alive as it is today... Free I am not allowed to live. Trapped I cannot live. I do not want to die.

The End

Maja Gal Štromar
Ulica Pohorskega bataljona 8,
1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
Email: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si

Any use or reproduction of all or any part of this text without the written permission of the author is strictly prohibited.

Maja Gal Štromar: maja.stromar@guest.arnes.si