

In the spring of 1943, the Princess of Gundulic Street, the house number is no longer important, launched a bit of magic, with the help of which or whose god it's not known, to become invisible.

Such were the times, when princesses could not wish for more than invisibility. And we need not to be reminded of how much arrogance was needed for this kind of wish.

The ceilings were four meters high and cloudy from cigarette smoke. Father smoked before they took him on a trip. Mother smoked before they took her on a trip. Even grandfather smoked, but they didn't take him as he died before the trip.

Ruta Tannenbaum was fifteen years old and she was not to blame for the cloudy ceilings. But for six months she lived alone under them, she was very scared and for that she wished to become invisible.

Ooh, how arrogant she was!

When they came to take her on a trip, all that was left of Ruta Tannenbaum was her right foot. Everything else was already invisible.

But even that was something, something indeed, said the people from the tourist agency and took Ruta Tannenbaum's right foot all the way to the freight train station. A small bare foot walked along beneath the princess's white dress.

I tell you, that was something to be seen.

They loaded her onto the cattle wagon. We're going to India, thought Ruta Tannenbaum, there where cows are holy animals. She felt a cow's warm tongue licking the salt off her right foot. And so she laughed for the last time.

She was arrogant and not too bright, that princess, since who would think of traveling to India in the spring of 1943.

No, the train was going to Poland. It was dark and smelly, so that the invisibility didn't help much against the fear. Indeed, what did it mean for a princess to be invisible, in her white dress, if one could still see her small right foot.

We could say this is how she lived to her death. And it would not be a mistake. Ruta Tannenbaum never made it to India, nor really to Poland. She disappeared somewhere along the way, imagining the cow's warm tongue licking her right foot.

How arrogant was that princess.

Look at that dress, maybe she's still in it. Where did it hide Ruta's right foot?

excerpt from the novel *Ruta Tannenbaum* by Miljenko Jergovic