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(1. Prize)

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My name is Bibiana Rybarova. I am a fresh and critical 19 year old and, in order to complete the introduction formula, I should add that I like pork cutlet, my proportions are akin to a postmodern Moravian Venus, I don't know how to roll my R's and I come from Orava. I was born in Trstena and I am grateful to this fact because it has given me my euphonic Slovak, although with a slightly deformed pronunciation of the aforementioned letter. Now, I have been living in Zilina for 14 years. At present I study French at a bilingual grammar school in Zilina. The last year of my study is coming (thank God), but I have already successfully passed the A level for Slovak. At present, I am experiencing depression because I've always liked literature. To be honest, I would prefer to take final exams on Humanism and the Renaissance from morning till night than to attend even one biology or mathematics class. As for my near future, I have always subconsciously desired to study the dramatic arts (I participated in a drama club for 2 years and I acted in French plays) or the other possibility for me was journalism (I have been practising it up to now). I am definitely sure I want to devote myself to art, literature and such things.

The world is a junkyard, and we are the trash.

Sometimes I find myself with nothing to do. During these times I reach for my personal memoir, my wallet. Ever since I was small I was fascinated with special effects, probably due to having grown up with films like *Star Wars*. That is exactly why I have this leather thing, which was originally meant to carry money, filled with all sorts of lists, cards, and things that remind me of some event or a time in my life. I like it because it allows me to nostalgically reflect on everything

that I have managed to experience. Once in a while I am terrified by a rectangular shaped bureaucratic card, which at one point long ago could be proudly called a citizen's ID card. Today it is just some sort of caricature of what it used to be. Nowadays, if I thoroughly inspect it, I can only pretend to not be terrified by the picture. I look horrible, repulsive, distasteful, watered down and ugly... I would give myself five crowns, or 0.17 euros. I had curly hair going in all directions, unkempt eyebrows

and a mildly decent smile... a candidate for Miss Naturele. Clutching myself, I begin to calm down, knowing that today I am, to speak diplomatically, quasi-content as I move on to other information on the card. My name, Bibiána Rybárová, seems a bit strange. As a child I used to hate my name, and yet today I wouldn't trade it for the world. It is incredible how every now and then we radically change our opinions. My age – 18 years, eighteen, dix-huit, dieciocho – and that's where my knowledge of language ends. Jesus Christ, I am already an adult!

I have been living as an adult for almost a year now. Hence, I will soon be an adult plus one. I simply have to laugh, at least internally, because it is truly strange. Officially I am considered an adult, but whether I feel like an adult, that I simply cannot say. At the moment, I am compelled by my other self to go and look in the mirror. From the looks of it, I am definitely an adult. I see a developed face, grey eyes with black around them like Tutankhamen, full lips, large oval shaped silver earrings and hair dyed blonde. I fully acknowledge that I look like an adult – even I think so – but that's about where it ends.

The first time I realized that I was an adult was when a young girl came up to me on the street. She was probably around the age of six and she asked me *“Excuse me miss, but what time is it?”* I was almost forced to call an emergency. How could I have been considered a “miss” by her? I almost passed out, but thanks to my sense of self-preservation I managed to regain my composure so that I may answer the question. The girl then disappeared into the crowd, while I stayed frozen with my jaw somewhere between my knees and my ankles. For God's sake, I was considered

a “miss.” At that moment there emerged childhood memories. I know exactly what it's like to run around with my worn-out Mickey Mouse sweater, bothering the passers-by. How I would treat people, who might have been eight or more years older, as if they were close friends. And today I am the Methuselah, an eighteen year old “miss.”

Thinking about it, I always expected my adulthood to be completely different. All of a sudden I am here and I don't even fully realize it. At the same time, I am fully aware that I am new to adulthood. No one takes me particularly seriously, but that is obvious since my experiences cannot compare to a veteran admiral, a judge with over thirty years experience, or some grandmother in the countryside. Whether I want to or not, I have to ask myself, when I was a child, what exactly did I expect of myself as an adult?

To begin with, I should warn you about my unique personality. I am enormously stubborn, have an overactive imagination, am extremely creative and in some respects I am incorrigibly ambitious. Then there is one more trait, which I cannot seem to be able to put into words. Simply put, I think of myself as someone who sticks to and pursues her goals. That was an attempt at explaining myself, but if I would have to put it more plainly, I would say I am capable of pushing myself to the extreme. Perhaps this is why I always had in front of me a sort of Fata Morgana, which navigated me in accordance with my intuition.

Blindly and naively I believed my own expectations. I was excited that one day I would get out of the funny pregame of the world, which is commonly referred to as childhood. I was under the impression

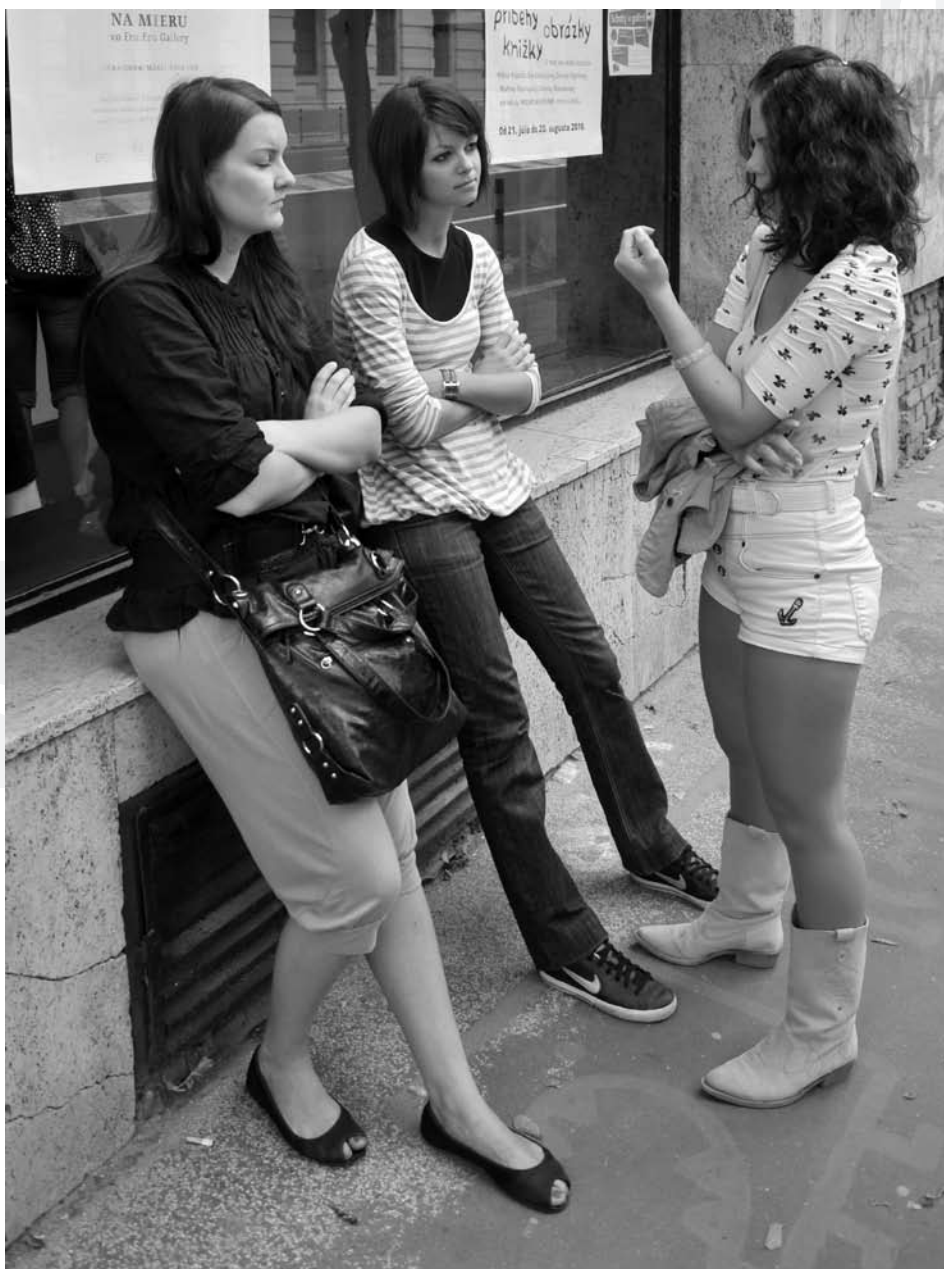


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that the right to make mistakes was only reserved for children or “*adolescents.*” I thought that adults simply acted differently. That they did not deliberately trip each other up, that they did not talk behind each other’s backs, and that they did not cause each other pain. Admittedly you’re right; it is comical and I accept that you make take me as naïve. For my childish ideals, I should just throw myself into chlorinated acid and have the nails of my phlegmatic soul pulled out with a pair of pliers just to prove how naïve those impressions really were. Ever since I’ve been able to see the world around me in a more intelligent manner I realize that these impressions are about as far from reality as the trans-Siberian railway. Yet, this fallacy of the perfection of the adult world was confirmed when I started working at McDonalds.

I came to understand dozens of things, some of which have made quite an impression on me. Therefore, please allow me to present my own hit parade of those impressions, which revolve around that great world of “those truly grown up.” I would be more than glad to summarize my own “best of” impressions, but for that I would probably need some time and perhaps even my own talk show. That is why I will try to greatly limit myself, which takes a lot of energy out of me.

First off, I am unbelievably fascinated by all this talk of equality. When I went to elementary school, I distinctly remember how the hierarchy was structured in class elections. One could be nominated based on various criteria, in which the logo of your apparel significantly helped (at the very least having Nike or Adidas sneakers, otherwise you were doomed).

Your parents’ jobs also played a huge role (Guess who was considered more? The daughter of a cook or the big eared idiot son of a businessman?). And, of course, the more exotic the vacation, the better. If you happened to say that you spent the summer with grandma in Stránavách or at Balatone you immediately fell down four castes. Your intelligence, personality and your good-will counted for nothing. The adults would always laugh at this, “Those kids! Later on it will be different. We are all equal.” Yeah, I saw...

I used to work at McDonalds behind the cash register. This one time, a lady got to the front of the line. She wanted to order a cup of coffee and a bite to eat. She was wearing Guess and expensive sunglasses. That would all be alright, in fact, she would have gotten a prize from the fashion police, had it not been the middle of December with the furthest degree of inclemency outside. She started talking to me in a very demeaning tone, as if I was of some inferior species, as if she was the one who was obviously rich, successful and, most of all, perfectly dressed...

I was the one who was dressed in one of those boxy uniforms, baggy pants, and a quickly done ponytail on my head working for a truly ridiculous hourly wage...

Yet, after a question like “*Excuse me, but what’s the quality of the chicken meat you use?*” I came to understand the meaning of “*Not all that glitters is gold.*”

I experienced hundreds of similar scenes, even when we were all equal. Whether at the ophthalmologist, who is more important than a five koruna, or at the bar as His Excellency the owner walks in. Otherwise I fully agree with what they have filled our heads with since we were

young, that everyone is equal and has the same opportunities. The theme of “*equal opportunity*” immediately raises my blood pressure and my heart goes into palpitations. Mainly because the ADULTS are leaders in the sphere of LETS NOT RAISE EACH OTHER.

Secondly, my favorite topic – egotism. When I was small and I was presented with canapés in front of my unseeing eyes, I would leap forward and eat as if I hadn’t eaten anything for three years aside from grasshoppers. Yet, my archetype of a perfect adult would always stop and tell me “Come on! You’re not here alone! Think about the others!” and I would retreat. The same went for candy, chocolate or other goodies. With God’s help, I was forced to think about others. But yet again, I am submerged in memories of McDonalds. I recall working on the ground floor. I had to take out the garbage, wipe the tables, and make the place look comfortable. Despite having 4363 trays in my hands, I was willing to go blow up some balloons at the request of a mother for her son. I came back with about twenty balloons and put them in their respective places. You should have seen the reaction it triggered – the grasshoppers attacked from all sides, and what surprised me the most was that aside from the children, parents also joined the battle for balloons. A tall and bald father grabbed eight balloons for his daughter, while five other children stood there empty handed. BUT OTHERWISE, KIND CHILDREN, SHARE! I would say that it functions more like everyone for themselves, with no regard for others. Think of yours, and that’s how it goes, or, better yet, just think of yourself. So why don’t we define it like this from the beginning? At least we wouldn’t be filling

our heads with cabbage and pretend to be a pseudo mother Teresa...

I would like to continue and express how the world of grownups has disappointed me. However, I cannot, because I hear the voice of my own imaginary psychiatrist and I feel the straitjacket... I would rather not continue with examples from my own experiences... but I do remember them quite vividly.

Perhaps you are laughing, because this all seems absolutely trivial. They are simply various interpretations of everyday life. Perhaps you are scratching your heads and wondering what I am trying to say with this mildly rambling style, whether I am trying to imply something or whether I am trying to just go right out and say it. Yet, I want to go right out and say it.

It is truly comical, when we try to take on the roles of either the young and the undeveloped or of those adults. We all live within the same script known as life, with but a few alternatives. Everyone works; everyone has their flies and their moods, which affect those closest to their hearts. Everyone can make a mistake or be disappointed, and not just once. Every single one of us has a right to skip a beat, to make a complete error, but of course each of us is also responsible for those mistakes. However, these mistakes are made by children, teenagers, the groups known as the young, the adult and even the elderly. That is why I think we should finally realize that we are but people, instead of pretending to be something we are not. We shouldn’t pretend to possess all the world’s knowledge, as some adults often think they do.

This is exactly where I am trying to get at with my mildly rambling style. This entire series of reflections is all over the place,

presented in a disorganized but detailed way – precisely like the soul of a young person. We are young and we are constantly learning. We aren't any better or worse. We are our own individuals, who will one day be just like you. But we have in front of us a choice, which falls solely on our shoulders. I don't like announcements such as "this is wrong, this is not allowed!" All of a sudden there is a crash and our great idols go the same way. As I already implied in my two examples, Are we going to raise each other? You claim that something is wrong, yet why don't you serve as examples? "Behave and don't do bad things!" And yet you cheat at work and lie in your relationships. Be faithful and act politely, but the fact that unfaithful relationships are all too common seems alright. Think of others and share, despite you simply taking things for yourselves. Do not talk behind each other's back and do not insult one another, yet you cannot shut your mouths about the evil neighbour... Should I continue? The entire world of grownups seems wrong and ugly. Okay, I admit I have read *Catcher in the Rye* and I completely agree with Holden's views. Yet, it is precisely us, the next generation, who is constantly scorned, is responsible for everything, and should listen to every word that this perfect adult world has to say, this perfect world, which is fake and deceiving. The worst part of it is that I know that I will end up the same, maybe I already am. I am a product of my environment, just as you are. We try to act genuine, that there exist some values which we propagate with great conviction, but that's about where it ends. Only a few of us are actually capable and willing to stand behind our convictions. It is sad.

It is truly beautiful that there exist numerous archetypes of various ideas, of love, honor, and tolerance. But we all know that it is more of a myth than something resembling reality. So why do you keep acting like some sort of masters of the world? No one wants to take away your experiences, no one neglects your suggestions, and we value them. Why are you so disgusted? We are nothing but your own reflection.

The world is a junkyard, and we are the trash. When I was small, I had something like a mask, which protected me from the outside world. But today, I no longer have sticky eyes like a new born chick. Today I see. In fact, today I even have contact lenses, which is even worse because it makes me sick. I want to go back amongst the innocent and not see the mess, not smell the odour and smog that we produce. I don't want to see how everyone just cares for themselves... I do not want to accept how everyone is just racing to the front, while no one is willing to stop and look. I don't want to be in the middle of the crime, fraud and deception. The worst part is that I know there is no way out, no way back.

I am an adult and I have to fight with destiny. I have to call out to battle today's distasteful priorities. Perhaps I will lose, but perhaps it will be good for something. Maybe it will no longer bother me tomorrow. There is a chance that it will never again burn my veins and I will be the first materialistically oriented person. Maybe, but at the moment I only have one thought running through my head. Adults, seniors, men and women, turn around and realize what a mess we made with your famous humanity. REPULSIVE.