



PARTIZANSKA KNJIGA

Series

Anglopolis

Book 2

PARTIZANSKA KNJIGA

© Miroslav Ćurčić

© Partizanska knjiga, for this edition, 2022

Editor
Dunja Ilić

Miroslav Ćurčić

**Champions Die, Too, Don't
They?**

Translated by
Novica Petrović

Kikinda, 2022.

Uncle died on the same day as Muhammad Ali. A few minutes before or afterwards, it doesn't matter now, he's dead and gone. Everybody was fond of him. He was a journalist, the life and soul of a party, a mythomaniac. He enjoyed inventing stuff. Sometimes he would, just for a lark, think up a story and be so convincing when it came to presenting it that any doubts concerning its veracity, even if they actually existed, would fall by the wayside eventually. He effortlessly erased the borderline between reality and imagination.

Of all things in this world, he liked boxing best. He often talked about the days when, while still a kid, he trained as a member of a minor-league club. He knew every single detail from the life of the three-time world champion. He was a year older than him. For a while, he kept saying he was sorry that he wasn't a Negro, for they were the best fighters in the world. They were able to withstand pain better than anyone else. A photograph of him with Ali – a large-format one, in which they stood embracing – adorned one of the walls of our living room for quite a while.

Even though the renowned boxer died in a far-off part of the world, the news about his death reached me before I found

out about the death of a man with whom I lived under the same roof.

Both news items reached me while I was in hospital, on the fifth day of my stay there due to problems with breathing. I was walking along a long narrow corridor, following a young orderly. The floor, covered with blue linoleum, shone as a result of having been polished earlier in the morning. The hospital toilets, on the other hand, are not so very clean. The young man in white who was taking me to have my lungs X-rayed had come back to work after his annual leave that day. He was nervous. He tried to mask his lack of focus pretending to be in a hurry and frequently clicking his tongue. He spent half an hour searching for a wheelchair to take me to the X-Ray Department. After a fruitless search and loudly complaining about this state of affairs, he asked me if I was strong enough to walk there. He looked at me, waiting for an answer. No one had told him anything. They hadn't informed him about my case. I nodded my head, turned without a word and went out of the room. Behind my back, I heard the thud of wooden clogs and a shout telling me to stop and wait for him until he came back with the referral note. A few moments later, he overtook me walking hurriedly, carrying a folded pile of papers in his hand.

We moved along the middle of the corridor. He looked ahead and nodded his head at each white uniform passing by us. He was bursting with strength; I let him lead the way, not intending at all to rush after him. The distance between us increased with each step that he took, and the only thing I thought about then was that I could do with a bit of respite. Strahomir, one of the patients I shared the room with, was coming towards

us. He was over eighty years old, even though no one would have guessed that judging by his face and movements. Tall, straight-backed, he was coming back from the small shop located in the main hall of the hospital. His transistor radio protruded from his pocket. As he was hard of hearing, he was forced to turn up the volume of the transistor to the maximum. At the moment we were passing by each other, the newscast was on. He winked at me when they announced that the great boxer had died. I paused and turned towards him. In the bag that he was carrying, apart from a roll of toilet paper I saw a clumsily hidden red pack of cigarettes. I could do with a smoke.

At last, the orderly stopped in front of a door above which a red light was on. On the door, there was a sticker containing a radiation symbol and a warning stating that unauthorized persons were banned from entering that room. The orderly paid no attention to me. He was gazing at the mobile phone screen, his attention preoccupied with sharing photos from his recently finished summer holiday. From the distance, the soft sound emanating from Strahomir's pocket reached my ears. I didn't feel any fear yet then.