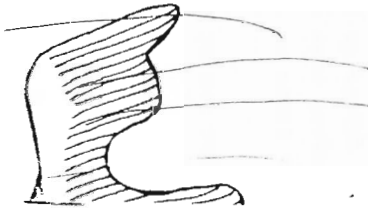


# WILD SHARKA AH

We have an old Czech tale about a girl's war.

Women were disgusted by men's rule and they started an uprising and fought. Not for emancipation; they wanted to rule themselves. One of the female heroes was Šarka - the English transcription would be probably „Shaarkah“. She committed suicide at the end: she jumped down from a high rock. - Today there is a nature reserve on a Prague suburb named „Wild Shaarkah“. We live close to the reserve; I like the name; and I like the mythical fighting women from the tale. So this is my personal fauzing.



... No 3, Feb. 1991 ...

BRONCHITIS, LARYNGITIS, OTITIS... AND ACUTE HYSTERIA  
/Maternity Leave, Czechoslovakia, The Eighties.../

## AN ESSAY ABOUT THE CULT OF MOTHERHOOD AND ABOUT MY OWN EXPERIENCE WITH IT

I love to be pregnant.

This fascinating feeling of creating a new human being.

It's simply great. Nothing can compare motherhood.

How wonderful to slip from boring research in the Academy of Sciences to a maternity leave and to stay two or three years at home with a small sweet baby...

I am fed up with genetic engineering, with all this laboratory routine, these piles of new journals and publications to study, by all the never-ending measurements and calculation.

I was educated by my parents and school to be a scientific worker, not a woman. And suddenly it seems really marvelous: to discover this utterly new possibility of being a mother and housewife.

### SELF-INTERVIEW

Q: Are you really convinced that you want to have a child just now?

A: YES! YES! Everybody has a baby, my friend from University, Mida, has a new baby now, and another friend from school, Táňa, is pregnant, too, and all the girls who don't study have children when they are nineteen or twenty. I am longing so much for a baby of my own! It was really hard work to convince my husband that we shouldn't prefer such things as saving money or travelling, or developing my career... I wept, I pleased him, and finally he agreed. Hurray!

A new flat on a new housing - estate. Prefabricated blocks of flats. Kitchen 12m<sup>2</sup>, sitting room 17m<sup>2</sup>, bedroom 12m<sup>2</sup>. What luck! A tiny flat, but it's absolutely impossible to get a flat in Prague. My husband's parents were members of a housing cooperative and got this one after twenty years of membership. Most young couples have to share a flat with their parents.





A new baby. Walking around the housing estate pushing the baby carriage. Mud. Lots of mud everywhere; the sidewalks are not finished, the lawns are not laid out, and it's necessary to wheel the baby carriage along the edge of a busy road, among the roaring lorries that rush quickly by and spray mud everywhere...

Never mind, we shall wash everything at home... oh. The water doesn't flow. This is not unusual. The underground pipes crack, since they lay directly on sharp stones - without insulation. No water. It's necessary to wash diapers, to wash the baby, to cook... but no water. Everything is sticky and dirty and everything stinks.

Hysteria.

WHAT SHITTING BLOODY BASTARD BUILT THIS STUPID HOUSING ESTATE? I CAN'T LIVE LIKE THAT! HELP!

These blocks of flats will be never accomplished.

The piles of earth and dust, the building machines never seem to go away. All the work proceeds extremely slowly. Possibly they will finish this part of the housing estate in three or four years, but the first houses will be very shabby and need repairs by then... The rain water leaks onto the upper floor, the linoleum on the staircase is torn away, the glass entrance door is broken and glass is replaced by wooden boards.

And no money to finish the central park in the middle of the estate, so perhaps it will always stay as it is now: piles of gravel, earth and debris. And weeds, producing lots of pollen to cause children's allergies.

I believe that my children will not be allergic to anything. I don't have any special reason for such a hope. Half of the children in this country have some form of allergy.

And again the water doesn't flow.

This time the pipes cracked because of the frost. A water-wagon couldn't be provided either as it would freeze immediately. So we are completely without water.

SELF-INTERVIEW

Q: Do you want to have another baby?

A: Sure! Some of my friends, and even the most intellectual women, have three. Why? Perhaps as a protest against consumption. Average consumption-orientated people have two kids. That's not too many; they can still earn money and buy things. Three kids - it expresses the will to create better relations among the family members, to concentrate on family life.





The Communists tried to control the population, I don't quite understand why. To focus people on their families rather than on public topics? Probably.

I've seen lots of TV plays about HAPPY MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF THREE... FOUR... FIVE...

But the life expectancy in Czechoslovakia decreases steadily.

Our country is one of the most polluted in Europe. And Prague is one of the most polluted areas. Sulphites, nitrates, nitrites, heavy metals... The figures concerning pollution and the health of our population are kept in secret.

The sources of pollution are mainly electricity plants, the low-quality coal heating, various toxins in food, and traffic /the highway for the heavy lorries doesn't go around Prague, but through the very centre of the city/.

You can't give babies tap water /and you can't buy clean non-carbonated bottle water/ as it contains lot of nitrates and nitrites. Babies must drink mineral water. This is likely to cause some renal difficulties in the future.

But people are not much aware of all that as they don't have access to the informations.

Johnny is nine months old now.

He is sick for the first time. His temperature has risen considerably. So we go to the health care centre. It means three hours of waiting in an overcrowded waiting room.

Finally we are allowed into the doctor office.

The nurse asks: "Did you give him aspirin?"

"I read in handbooks that you must consult the physician first..."

"Hm. today, people know how to produce children but they don't know how to take care of them..."

I couldn't control myself and wept as we returned through the waiting room. People probably thought that I was told that my baby has some mortal disease.

All my memories to the children health care facilities are the same. Overcrowded waiting rooms, arrogant personal.

SELF-INTERVIEW

Q: You still like your motherhood?

A: I hate it everything about it. The illnesses come more and more often, and I hate myself for not being patient enough for several sleepless nights in a row, I hate my husband who demands his calm for sleeping /he must get up and go to work in the morning - Not me!/,



sometimes I even hate the child as he is so weak, pale, thin and always whimpering, never smiling...

I hold the baby in my arms and walk around the flat: kitchen 11m<sup>2</sup>, sitting room 17m<sup>2</sup>, sleeping room 12m<sup>2</sup>. Long rows of grim and monotonous days.

HAPPY MOTHERS OF THREE FOUR FIVE MY BABY WILL BE HEALTHY PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO PRODUCE CHILDREN IF I ONLY COULD SLEEP A LITTLE...

During the nights, the baby rattles, whimpers, can't breathe. Tracheitis. Penicillin. If he has blue lips call an ambulance. No, he never had blue lips.

Then bronchitis. Ampicillin. The same.

Then otitis. The ear starts to ache always after midnight when there is no transportation possibility at all. /We have no car - it's selfish to prefer buying a car to having a child... happy mothers... etc./ But we can't go straight to the hospital where a specialist perforates the ear-drum. No. We must first go to the emergency centre /At the other end of the housing estate, about 3 km away/ to get a paper: "Suspicion of otitis - please check it." The hospital is about 15 km away; it's necessary to catch the night bus which goes once an hour. The whole trip takes three or four hours. We go through this about ten times. The second baby is born. He is only three weeks old and my husband is in Moscow: I have to do all the travelling with both children, whimpering and crying all the time.

The second baby is not healthier: when he is five months old, it starts: rattling, not sleeping, hospital, penicillin, bronchitis, tracheitis, ampicillin, laryngitis... are there more organs to produce another "-itis" ? Hepatitis, meningitis?

But my children are really relatively healthy, in comparison with some other children.

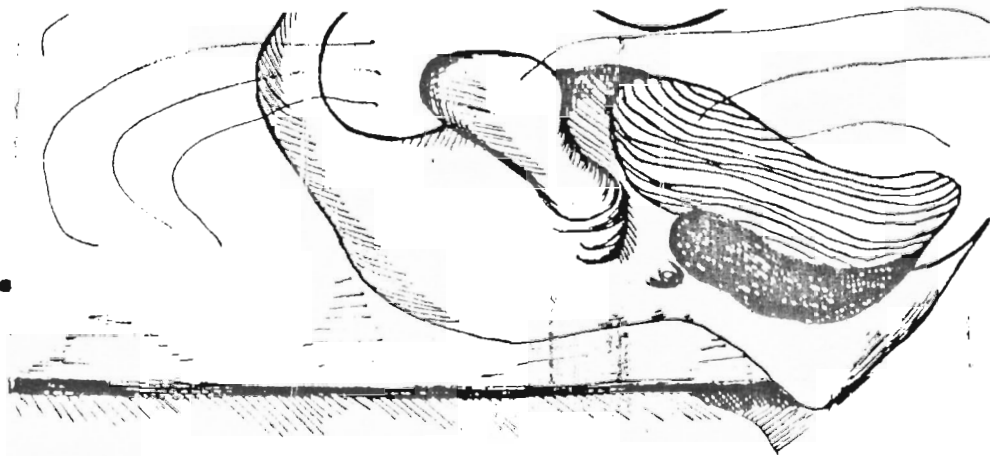
#### SELF-INTERVIEW

Q: But your neighbors seem to be quite content !?

A: Yes. They are grateful for these flats. Hot water, TV, heating... they don't wish for anything else.

Q: Did people realize how drastically the environment and the state of health were deteriorating?

A: No! Rather they disliked the communists for their privileges, which were so striking. But average people who earned enough to have a car and a color TV set and enough meat and beer - these people seemed to be quite content. They didn't read half-official environmentalist



journals as I did. They didn't search for information.

My neighbour: a red-haired, plump, easy-going woman.

She likes to talk with me. "My husband is away travelling. So I amuse myself wonderfully. But - oh - I am so tired! Overdrunk, oversmoked and overfucked! - hey, what about your husband? What's he like in bed?"

"Er... I haven't much comparison," I murmur.

The flat is now extremely small for four people.

But I bought a big canister and I have an emergency water supply in the bathroom.

And some sidewalks and lawns are finished at last.

We decided it's time for our children to go to the day-care centre. We are lucky, most children on our housing estate are two or three years older than our children and so we have no problems finding places in the day-care facility.

But the schools are too small for so many children. They must go to school in shifts - some before noon, some after noon. After a few years, the schools are empty.

It's really refreshing to work again.

But now I think about motherhood quite in another way. Why my generation was so enthusiastic with the parenthood? Were we so much manipulated by the communists? Or we longed for some certainty, for an island of family life and warm home in the ocean of absurdity?

I think that we were just bored. Awfully bored in the world where all the thoughts and possibilities were limited. Where we couldn't travel, study freely what we liked, and where all the informations were cut.

parenthood was at least some island in the ocean of boredom.

I have read:

SARAH LEFANU

IN THE CHINKS OF THE WORLD  
MACHINE

I don't feel like judging and dissecting this book. It was a lot of new information for me. And it led me to some conclusions about patriarchy and socialism which are perhaps more definite than my previous intuitive observations.

I apologize that I am so terribly repetitive.

The socialism was REALLY AWFUL, destroying the whole hierarchy of values, any creativity, moral etc., but it probably destroyed quite efficiently the patriarchic patterns, prejudices, expectations. Women in Czechoslovakia now started to search what femininity is, and the radical western feminists can't meet the way of their thinking when they are coming here and are astonished that women here don't fight for their rights.

I shall continue by a quotation of Vilma Kadlečková /our extremely talented 19 years old author of fantasy/:

"I stated that women are hens what endangered some men's idea of women being hens. But let's stop joking.

I am tired by women's emancipation.

Too often I chased for mammoths and that's why I forgot how to care of the hut and of the fire. Now I can't do well neither the first nor the second. I was predestined to serve to the master of my house for six days and in the seventh day, dressed in gold, to receive of him an armful of roses. Instead of this we stay one beside another, we look into the eyes of the other and we pretend that we don't differ - and moreover we pretend that to admit the existence of some difference means to admit injustice!

I lean against a closed door. I can't be a slave any more: I enjoy too much to hold the spear in my hand. The hollow in which my

roots were immersed disappeared as it's covered up. And if the man who is not my master would intend to kiss my hand I should look aside by embarrassment. But he will not do it: he knows that such honour doesn't belong to somebody who is only equal to him...

They stucked to me a slogan ATTENTION, AN ANTI-FEMINIST as I consider men ingenious and I am fascinated by the distinction between their and our way of thinking. But perhaps this is the most genuine feminism: desire that women don't try to get to the position that doesn't belong them, that they remained themselves - understanding and respecting men who all are half children and half heroes."

I don't completely agree with Vilma as she says that a man is a MASTER - while I only like the idea that a man is DIFFERENT. But it's a voice of a young woman who is not

oppressed by men at all - and still she is missing something.

Perhaps what we miss is the relation in which man and woman support each other in different and specific ways. We miss some conventions, some expectations for some "womanly supporting" or "manly supporting" behavior to the partner. My impression is that in Western countries these expectations are still very strong, determined.

It seems to me funny how the western feminists struggle against the sexual harassment. My experience is that if you want your male coworkers to realize that you are a woman you must express your femininity with great intensity /dressing, flirting etc/. I don't bother with it and so they don't probably realize at all that I am of opposite sex. Sometimes I feel like living in Ivan Jefremov's novel where you can only hardly recognize the gender of the characters.

I have only one coworker - in a children's magazine, in another office of our building - who says me always something like "hi, sweetheart, you look beautifully today!" when we meet; he kisses me my hands and so on. It's so wonderful that I really search for excuses to meet him or to cowork with him.

In this book I was surprised by the view of women like of a class - of an antagonist, oppressed class, as it was invented by Marx. I don't like this theory of classes that must inevitably fight one against another: I think that Marx was completely wrong and that it's utterly wrong to apply the class theory to anything. Moreover, this dualism is a product of a typically macho mind and culture.

WOMEN OF VISION - ESSAYS EDITED  
BY DENISE DUPONT

I found out that Ann McCaffrey is really a very conservative lady /what I expected when I read her story about Helva some time ago/.

I liked extremely Le Guin's essay of the Carrier Bag Theory: a lot of bright and witty ideas! And I was also attracted by Alice Sheldon's essay as it deals with the problem which I think is crucial - what of

of the gender roles is socially constructed and what is biologically determined.

THE LIBERATED MAN  
BY WARREN FARRELL

This book was published in early seventies and is wonderfully enthusiastic in the expectations of the future changes. It is written by a man who felt quite correctly that it's men's role rather than women's role that should be changed, developed, cultivated.

I found out that I didn't educate quite properly my own sons. I gave them dolls but they didn't play with them much. But I didn't play with dolls either when I was a small girl. - But I said to my sons: "You mustn't cry and wept so much, you are not a girl!" - Which was completely wrong as it cultivates in small boys an emotional obstipation - it blocks their capability of expressing their emotions later in their life.

