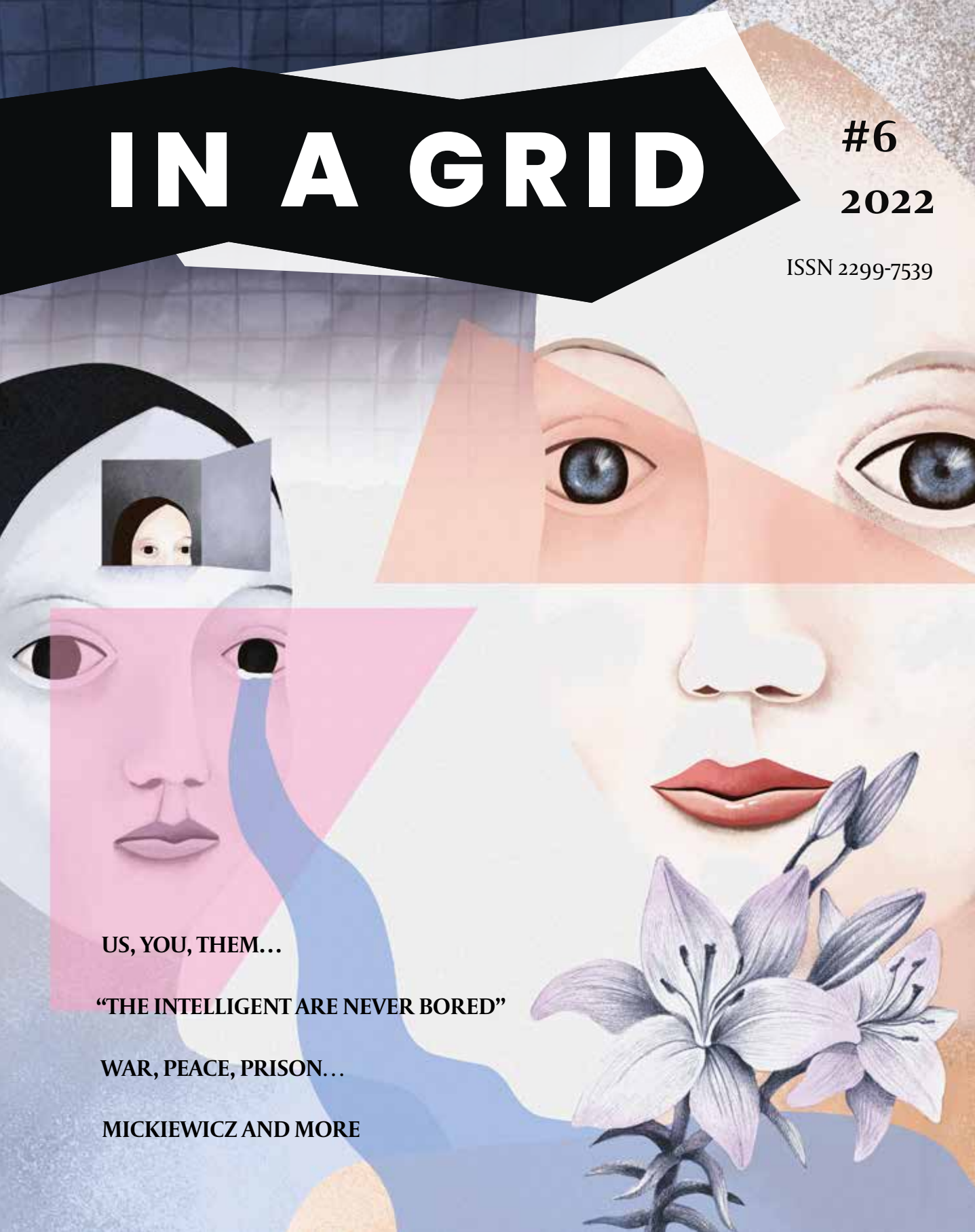


IN A GRID

#6

2022

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US, YOU, THEM...


“THE INTELLIGENT ARE NEVER BORED”


WAR, PEACE, PRISON...


MICKIEWICZ AND MORE


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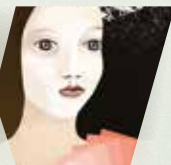
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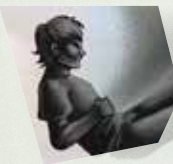
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The “In a Grid” magazine is an irregular published by The Culture House Foundation. It is a magazine created by women serving prison sentences in the Warsaw Detention Centre in Grochów, guests invited from other units in Poland, as well as artists.

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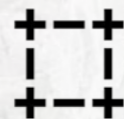
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**Ministerstwo
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I ● US, YOU, THEM...

That's right, we are the creators of In a Grid. Occasionally one of us disappears or just moves away to send a signal from another place in Poland... Sometimes there may be a guest appearance, or a new person may pop up and also have something to say to the world: the message may be shorter or longer, more emotional or restrained, overstated or rhyming, difficult or easier... There is no rule when it comes to that!

What are we like? There is no one way to answer this question. Still in the 6th issue of our magazine it will be mostly us that appear so it's worth for you to get to know us a little after all...

*Wiewióra, Fruzia, Iza-Iwi, Bonita,
Miszania, Świeżynka*



How long have I been here?

- Wiewióra* It seems to me like eternity, altogether I would say a year and a half.
- Fruzia* Too long.
- Iza-Iwi* 4 months, and 4 years in total.
- Bonita* 7 months, the total of 6 years.
- Miszania* Yet another stay... almost 4 years altogether.
- Świeżynka* It feels like eternity, but it's only been three years. Or maybe already three?



What was I wrong to be afraid of?

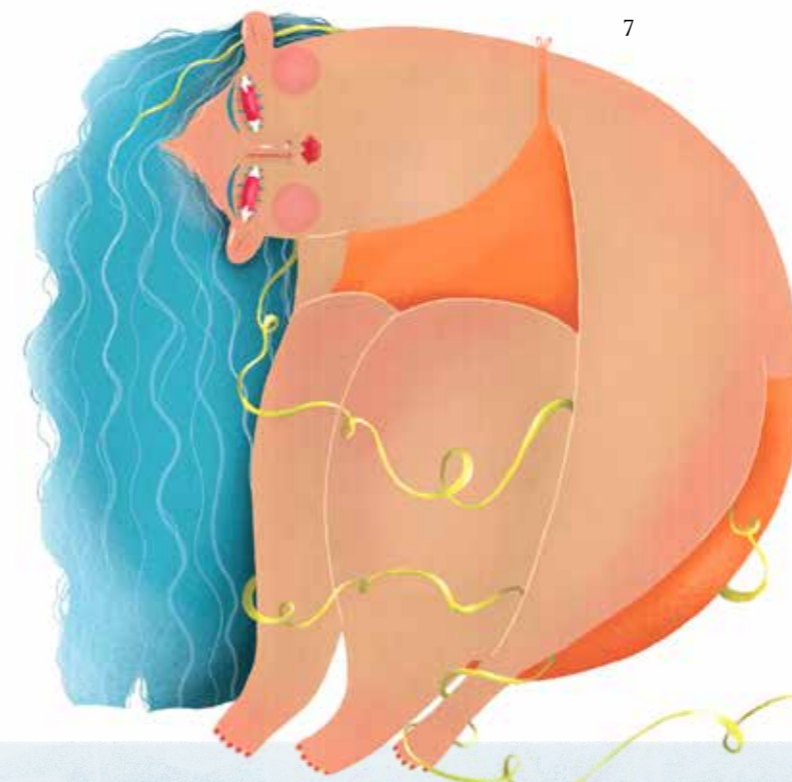
- Wiewióra* I was told they would beat you for nothing or take you for a thief without knowing you at all.
- Fruzia* That I would turn into a bitter, ruined woman from the gutter.
- Iza-Iwi* That I wouldn't be able to handle it.
- Bonita* The legends about violence and contempt told about fellow inmates.
- Miszania* I don't remember, it was 9 years ago...
- Świeżynka* Violence.



What was I right to be afraid of?

- Wiewióra* Other people's judgement of how I present myself, things I don't have...
- Fruzia* Unnecessary conflicts, oceans of longing... And that I wouldn't have enough to eat.
- Iza-Iwi* Limited contact with relatives, that I would have no help from outside, financial or spiritual.
- Bonita* That I would never make up for lost time with my children, family, my closest people...
- Miszania* I was worried about the baby. Because I was pregnant.
- Świeżynka* The time lost without family.

illustrations: Piotr Szewczyk



About the fears. Commentary

When I ended up in detention I had a few fears of different sorts. It's hard to believe the tricks one's head can play. The majority of them have disappeared when, after a few days, I started thinking rationally again, but one of the fears I remember to this day: I was wondering whether my people would abandon me. It was silly, and – best of all, completely groundless, because my family has always proved otherwise with every gesture, word and action.

Today my fears are of a completely different kind, though still family related. Most likely because over the years I lost my dad, my uncle, aunt, grandparents, every time I pick up the phone and dial my mom's number, my heart starts pounding and each time it rings I keep wondering if she's going to pick up. Is it mentally exhausting? Yes, it's super exhausting but every time she picks up brings unimaginable relief. It's not doom and gloom on my part. My mom is getting older, her health is deteriorating and I am aware of it.

In theory one tries to think positively, but when confronted with reality I am more and more scared. My relatives are worried about me and I worry about them, that's probably just our nature. Contrary to some opinions, I was never afraid to bend down to pick up soap or other such silly prison scare mongering straight out of the movies. Nowadays though I'm afraid of human stupidity and wickedness that prevail in this place. What used to be a matter of pride, today is pimping, and increasingly the only rule is that there are no rules and I don't mean prison rules but general life rules.

Małgosia



illustrations: Oleksandra Savkina



22 years ago, when I entered the penitentiary, there was just one thought in my 19-year-old head – I have to be tough, strong. I was convinced I would have to fight for everything: food, clothes, my personal safety, my place in the hierarchy. After all, that's the kind of things you see on TV. From the image I had in my head before crossing this threshold there's almost nothing left, because in a way I was only right...

Food. Well, I'm a little worried about it, not because someone will take it away from me (though theft does happen) but because I don't know whether I will have enough until the next write-out (prison shopping at the canteen three times a month). And the prison food – how do you put it mildly...? Let's say this: due to inflation prices increase but the food rate doesn't and if you consider that even before the high inflation it wasn't always great, it should surprise no one that nowadays I worry when the canned food in the cupboard is running out 😊.



I often worry about clothes because one can't have too many, say: four pieces of trousers. If you wear the same things all the time clothes get ruined mindbogglingly fast and you need to organise new ones which is hard. And personal safety? Well, so far nothing bad has happened to me. Of course you encounter different people, but I definitely don't need to look over my shoulder every step I take.

Inner strength and assertiveness do come in useful, but that's just life – whether you are inside or outside, you will always come across some "smartarse". Someone who will try to take advantage of you or deceive you. But there will also be people who will help you, who will turn out to be friendly. It could be someone ordinary or extraordinary, someone extremely talented or someone completely helpless – a whole cross-section of personalities.

My biggest fears disappeared when they were verified by reality. Nowadays I even smile with sympathy at my memories because what I fear is not at all in prison! What I am really scared of is that my relatives might fall ill, that there will be trouble in the family and of helplessness in the face of events that being shut in here I have no impact on. Of being on the sidelines, never in the midst of life. Yes, you need to be a tough, strong person, to survive whatever comes your way, not necessarily physically (though such strength is also useful), but definitely in this "centered" way.

Monika

What is the difference between what one sees on TV, hears from outsiders and what surrounds us behind the closed gate? The first thing that comes to mind is the menu. How lovely does it sound when you read that for lunch we have, for example, Ukrainian borscht, carrots with peas, potatoes, meat patties and on top of that a compote. A menu straight from a milk bar, but reality takes its course. The borscht looks pale, as if someone forgot to add the beetroot, carrots are unpeeled and to find the beans you'd need a microscope. Carrots with peas and the patties also leave much to be desired. The compote they forgot altogether. Anyone from outside reading this, will read that a prisoner eats better than a hospital patient. But the reality is different, unfortunately.

The next difference that comes to mind is that between the Executive Penal Code and reality. According to the Code, we have so many opportunities, privileges, everything is meant to go our way. The life behind the gate verifies it. Take the option to use passes after completing quarter of the sentence, where in fact, it is just an article, as during my 7-year long sentence, I never met anyone who would have come out with such a pass. What most know from tales about prison life and actual life behind the wall are definitely different. There are many myths, even if there is a grain of truth in everything.

Zolza



And then you have to wait for everything, serving a sentence consists of constant waiting. Initially there is no choice so you brave it. Later, you know more, you notice the not so equal treatment so you start to get nervous, lose patience, and then you become indifferent.



After so many years I had to change the unit again and apply for everything from scratch: I have no equipment to play music in a seven-person cell, where I can't find space for myself. I can't concentrate, every now and then someone or something distracts me from writing or reading. It's been two weeks that my two parcels are at the gate and no one will

bring them to me, because the "parcel guy" is off. For me it is a novelty that I will not jump over, that I can't control. I have to wait and that's it. Or the short, time restricted phone calls at the half-hole... As he saying goes "every country has it's customs", the penitentiary is like that too.



I also advise against oversharing, talking a lot. They won't like you more if you keep talking about your personal life, reminiscing, sharing problems. Basic things by all means, that opens the other person onto you, but make friends later and with the person you already like.



There is no point being on the sidelines, because that can be perceived in various ways; listen, talk, be your "normal" self, just a smaller version. Don't repeat rumors even if you have heard them. Avoid taking sides – it's not good.



Read, write – escape as much as you can. Into music or languages. In most penitentiary units one piece of music playing equipment is allowed in every cell, so try to get your own CD player. If possible get a job as quick as you can, even if it's social work or work at the ward; get out of the cell, do something, "earn" the good opinions. Set a target – the half-hole

from which the next door opens, and if someone has already got it, after the transitional cell for example – freelance work or school.



Participate in activities organized by the prison, meet other people, listen to what they have to say. Don't judge, don't harbour the fear of expressing your own opinion.



Adapt to the rules in your cell, it will make things easier for you. Take care of yourself and your personal hygiene – this is the biggest problem and it's surprising that it occurs among women. Don't be ashamed to go to the bathhouse, don't be afraid.



Above all, don't give up. Don't doubt. Have a cry and get back up.



The people on this side are the same people that used to walk the streets of the free world, each of them had to get to know the closed world and find themselves therein. Just as those who stayed on the other side are not in or they are not yet in, and no one pays it no mind while queuing at the checkout, likewise on this side you will meet peaceful and helpful people. Barely anyone is just looking for a fight. Don't try to force finding a soulmate, don't assume the worst but don't trust anyone who smiles at you either.



Don't be ashamed to ask, there are no stupid questions. You do it all exclusively for yourself and those close to you. That's why it's worth enduring.

Pełnoletnia



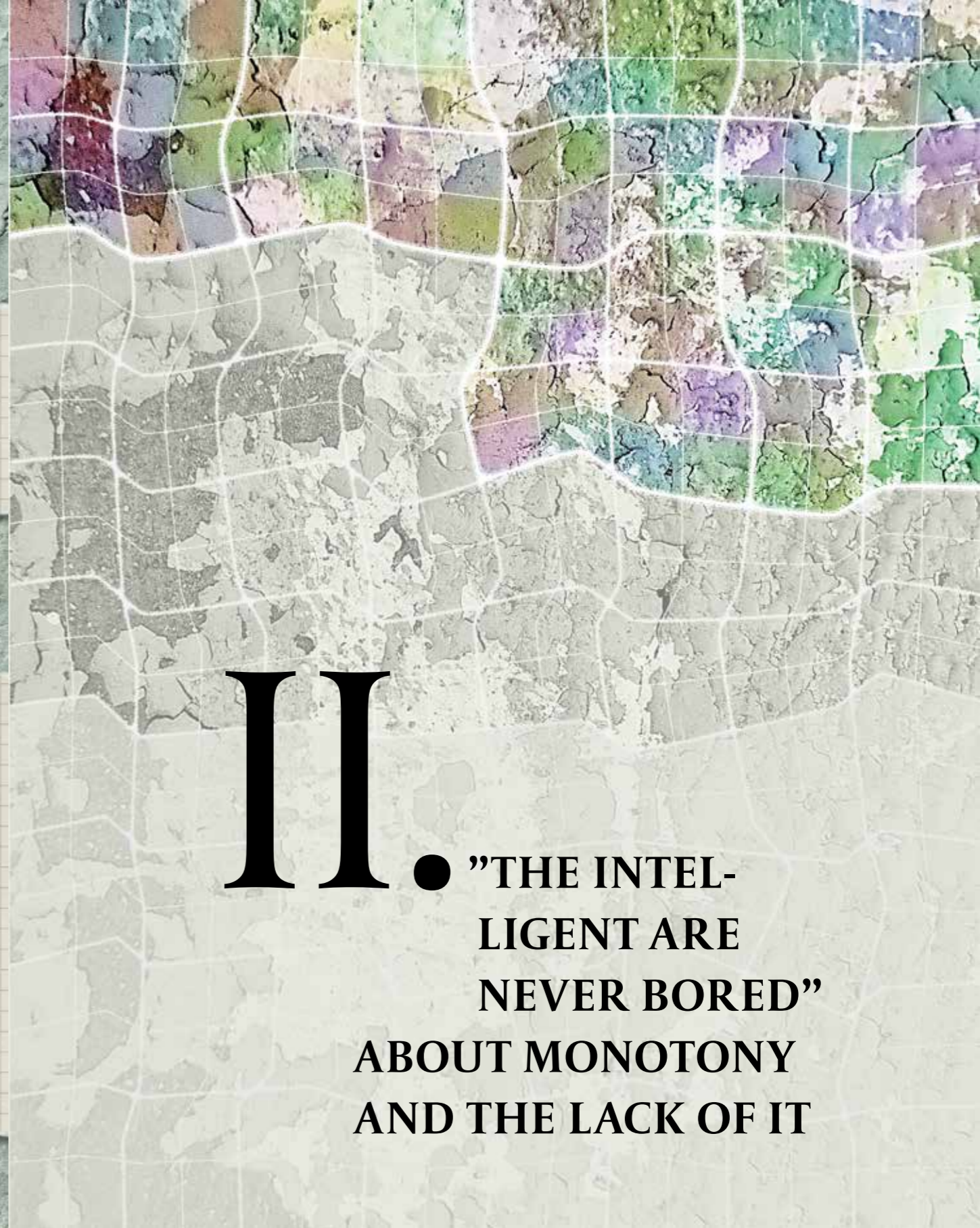
My most frequent dream

- Wiewióra* The surface of water. And that I greet my beloved daughter.
Fruzia The smiling faces of my daughter and my fiancé.
Iza-Iwi Freedom and the guy I love :)
Bonita My partner and our dream wedding, which we often talked about when I was free.
Miszania It's hard to remember them. In a recent dream I was buying a mug with Winnie the Pooh for my husband in a park somewhere.
Świeżynka Home, family, life outside the walls.



What I want to add from/about myself...

- Wiewióra* Every free moment I get I enjoy fresh air while relaxing in silence. I would compare myself to a bookworm that hangs out at the library but doesn't really like to read. What I have up my sleeve though is embroidering and altering the impossible. I appreciate honesty and kindness.
Fruzia I don't tolerate lies, disrespect and lactose. I am spontaneous and scatterbrained, I am like the ocean - calm until the storm comes. I value happiness of my loved ones most of all.
Iza-Iwi I'm Iza, I'm 27 years old. I love to draw. When I do it, I forget about my problems and - as the saying goes - I'm in my own world. The most important thing for me is to be myself, and one day to start a family, have children away from this terrible place...
Bonita I'm Bonita, I'm 34 years old and I'm a mother of four :) By profession (and passion) I'm a beautician. Relationships with family and friends are what's most important for me, relationships that I have been building throughout my life. I want freedom in every sense of the word and that my children grow up to be good, happy people.
Miszania I'm in my thirties. This is yet another stay, but an old matter. It taught me humility, peace and patience. My closest people who I want to be with when I'm free are still most important to me...
Świeżynka As they say, in this place I am a Freshie. When I hold a pen, I like to draw a heart. And I just want to thank everyone who takes part in the In a Grid project.



**I ● "THE INTEL-
 LIGENT ARE
 NEVER BORED"
 ABOUT MONOTONY
 AND THE LACK OF IT**



7 am. I hear the slamming of the doors – morning roll call. I get up momentarily, half asleep, to give the ward lady a chance to count the inmates. And then I'll lie down again, I always claim it's just for a minute, but then it lasts till breakfast or longer. I often forget to eat the breakfast, in fact, I lack the time for it before dinner.

Okay, I'm getting up! I open one eye slowly, open the other, I hear the chattering around me. I go to have a quick wash – face, armpits, feet, teeth, bum. Now the deodorant – where is it?! It's usual place is in the drawer, so I throw everything out of the drawer, turn it upside down, put it back in order and so an hour goes by, while it's just there on top of the sink as it always was. In the meantime I forgot three times what it was I was looking for there but the most important thing is I found it :) Body lotion, delicate make-up and morning routine is done. Or not! Still need to shave the legs, do the feet, but first cleaning. Turn the music on to make fighting dust more pleasant. When my "shift" is

over, I go back to shaving my legs. While at it I spilled water from the bowl. There's a flood in the cell, so I'm going over the floor again. The sun has gone out, I'll change my pants to long ones. I open the drawer, oh NO! I've set it up all wrong, inconvenient, I'll fix it in the afternoon cause I don't have time. I go out for a walk.

An hour of fresh air does me good. I always spend the whole time walking, the entire hour. Truth be told, I can't even look at the sky cause the damn mesh above my head is in the way, but I always imagine it's not there. Then it's nicer.

On return, lunch is already served at the ward, so I just had time to wash up and I pick up my meal. When we are done eating, we quickly wash up and it's time for a nap, because my eyes shut by themselves. When I wake up, I have a moment to escape into the dreamworld. I imagine the future, I remember the past, I glance at the photos stuck to the bed, the smiling faces of my loved ones.

The door opens – a phone call. YAAAY! I will get to hear my fiancé's voice. 5 minutes of the greatest joy of the day! He tells me how things are at home, how our daughter is doing and what a bother my dog is :)

– Kisses, darling, we are waiting for you – words that give me wings and give me power.

– Love you – I reply and the time is up.

After returning to the cell, we courteously exchange news on whether we had good chats and dinner arrives. We pick up the signature dish of the kitchen – cottage cheese – and I go to work. I clean the hallway. As a matter of principle, I'll ask the ward lady if I can make another call. Of course I don't get permission, unsurprisingly as I know the rules, but I always ask because maybe one day her heart softens. Even if I get scolded, so be it, in the name of five minutes of happiness it's worth a try. I return to

my M1: roll call, evening wash and bed. Evening is the time when we watch TV together.

This is what one of my days looks like, due to lack of time I have to put off many things "till tomorrow", I have no room for monotony or boredom. Everything is in our heads and it depends on us whether we organize an activity or lie all day complaining about the lack of it. In the end, remember that smart people never get bored.

Fruzia



When we end up in prison, our world turns upside down. Then we often think “this is impossible to survive”, “how much can you endure here”, “how will I cope until the end of the sentence”. The only thing we have at the beginning is time.

The detention centre is the worst. There the options are very limited: television, books, newspapers, crossword puzzles. You can also get materials from a councillor or guardian,

such as crossword puzzles or sudoku, prepared by other inmates. Currently, the option of receiving newspapers or other materials from outside is limited. It's true that subscription is an option, but if we want to diversify the subject matter, it incurs higher costs than parcels from the free world.

After the sentence, that is at the penitentiary, people have – in theory – “easier” access to variety. I will present my path from the perspective of three years spent “at the castle” and not at all as a princess.

Watching TV is always on top, and if not watching, then listening to it play in the background. The TV is our sixth co-inmate (I am in a 5-person cell). Without TV it's hard to live, at least for me, although sometimes I like deafening silence.

During these few years of serving my sentence, I went through various stages of diversifying my time. The thing about me is that I get into something, then I add something else, change it, give up. In this way, a chain of activities is formed, I go back to some, others I store deep in the drawer. At the beginning of my prison journey, I threw myself into the whirlwind of reading, partly because I didn't use to have time for it when I was free and I was catching up. I did it alternately with watching TV, simultaneously getting into Turkish, Brazilian series and whatever else was on TV. Paradoxically in prison I most readily watched films with... the prison theme :) We would laugh then with the girls from the cell that something must be wrong with us, since we don't seem to have enough of it...

Meanwhile, crossword puzzles, crossout puzzles and other brain-teasers joined my string of boredom-killing activities, and the ones I solved, I used to prepare materials for the counsellor lady, intended for inmates in need of time management. Thanks to my family, who bravely supports me in my efforts to diversify the monotony of my current life, I discovered coloring books – “anti-stressers” and coloring by numbers. They are a really cool thing for someone who wants to practice patience and perseverance and wants to isolate from the environment and be alone for some time. Then after such encounters, you can write letters. Believe me, some letters written by the girls are real “literary masterpieces”. I believe that it makes sense to write, it is easier to transfer thoughts to paper, even if such a letter

will never be sent. I know, I know... it's not a new discovery, but it occupies time and thoughts.

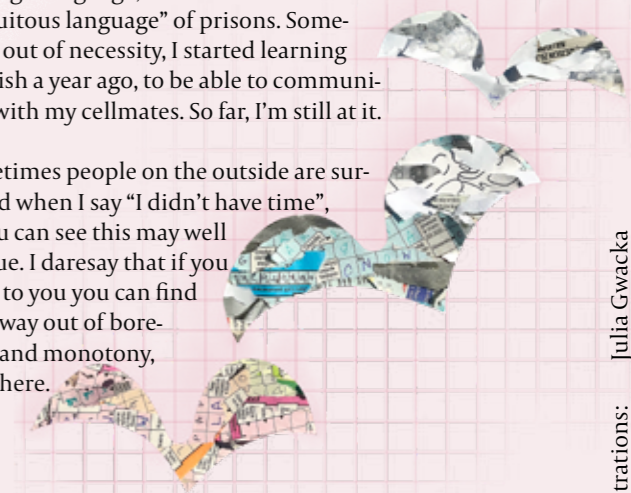
Last on my list of distractions from the monotony of prison life are walks, going to the playground and the common room. I use the latter when I want to borrow books or exercise using the equipment available. Even though I know fresh air is necessary for the body and mind, I rarely go for walks or to the playground. The sight of the sky and the trees through the mesh remind me that for some time yet I won't be able to enjoy freedom. Most of the girls enjoy those benefits. It's important to find something that suits us, that makes us feel good. I know that a large group of people regains the will to live during walks, especially when the sun is shining. It always puts you in a better mood.

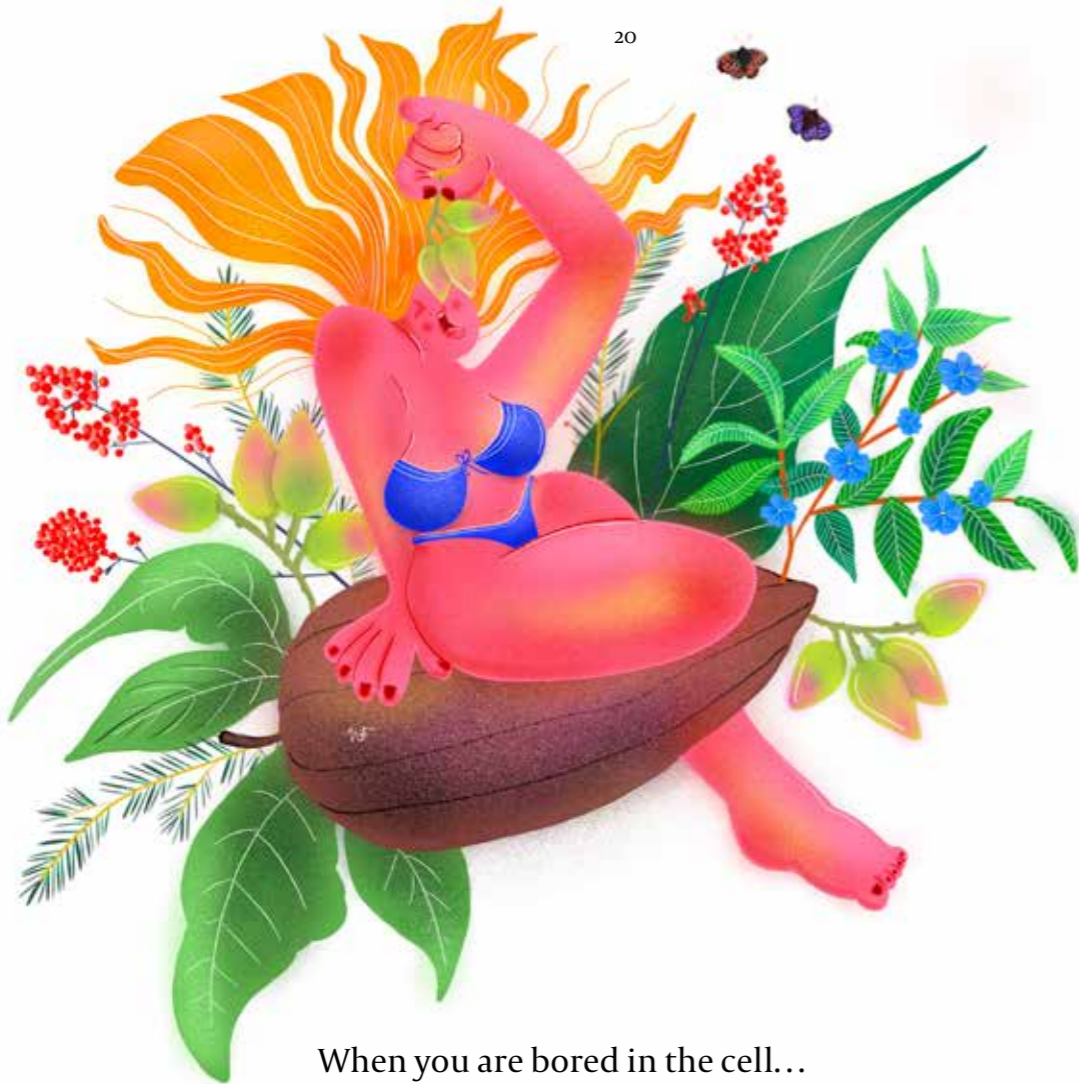
Oh, and I will also mention the opportunities for employment, whether paid or voluntary doesn't matter, it is worth going out to work – leave the cell, change the environment, look at different faces, feel somewhat useful. I personally recommend it :)

And finally. I know girls who, out of their own free will (or necessity), learned or polished a foreign language, I do not mean the “ubiquitous language” of prisons. Somewhat out of necessity, I started learning Spanish a year ago, to be able to communicate with my cellmates. So far, I'm still at it.

Sometimes people on the outside are surprised when I say “I didn't have time”, as you can see this may well be true. I daresay that if you want to you can find your way out of boredom and monotony, even here.

Alicja





When you are bored in the cell...

You can write a fairy tale together, not necessarily for children, just for laughs.

The rules of the game are that we write one sentence each, and place the last word in the line below, so that's the only one revealed. We fold the page to cover what we wrote apart from the one word and pass it on. This is the result of boredom...

– Once upon a time, there was a sterile prince with crooked legs and one instead of two...

– He massively enjoyed playing with it; he felt proud to be a big boy. He had been waiting in solitude for many years, so he got used to the games he himself came up with...

– the idea that he would look for a wife the way out of the “Cinderella” fairy tale, but not by the size of the slipper, but the size of the bust, which was important for him, so he bought a size D bra and set off on the quest...

– He searched high and low, checked out nearby brothels, go-go clubs, residential estates and streets...

– He shone a lantern into every corner of his soul. His only friend was his own big toe...

– Then magic happened, abracadabra...

– hocus pocus, I will have fun in...



– he dreamed of ripping off her sexy underwear as soon as possible and entering...

– into the wall that tasted of pistachio, mushroom windows, chocolate doors...

– the cakes they found when they entered the forest of magic dust...

– overed their shoes, the prince grabbed a broom and swept them vigorously and, proud of his endeavours, set out on further conquest...

– She got so angry with his betrayals that she kicked him out of the house...

– Jakub, which was the big toe's name, invited him to play in the “shoe”.

If you want we can try to create something together? The volunteer will hide everyone's sentences and then read the whole thing. I go first...

– Behind seven tables, two chairs, and one armchair in a small hole under the door lived...

Petnoletnia



In my opinion intelligent people are never bored. Sometimes there is not enough time in the day for basic activities. The other day I was so busy that when I put henna on my eyebrows in the morning, then ran here and there until at 3:00 pm I looked and – surprise! it's still there. But it's okay, my eyebrows didn't fall off.

Each day brings something different. Some people say it's "groundhog day", not for me though. After 11 years, it's just routine. I get up at 6.00 (there's coffee for me on the table, as a friend makes it), I drink it on the bed until roll call – just a guilty pleasure of mine. A quick morning wash then, every other day, I go to work as I am currently serving meals. I start the day at 9.00. Exercise is essential, because we are here so stiff that it's good to move a bit. Breakfast, phone call, laundry at the

cell. In the meantime, I take various classes, e.g. yoga, blogging classes, calligraphy.

On top of that, we have sewing machines at the ward and for the past two months I've been sewing toys, tablecloths, backpacks. That's why I don't know what monotony is. Because I myself organize my days the way that makes each day different from the previous one. Once a week I have a spa day. I love this day because I spend half of it in the shower (pedicure, facemasks, exfoliation). I go to the kitchenette to bake cakes, cook a little something for myself...

That's why I reject the notion of monotony in prison. It is up to us to arrange our day so that we are busy and don't think about unimportant stuff or we have no say in it.

Eveline



illustrations:
Anna Birecka



The monotony in this place is probably the biggest problem. Every day is the same, if you were to sit down and make a plan for every 15 minutes of the day, those quarters of an hour would not be much different from each other.

It is up to us how we organize our time, how much this day will resemble the previous one. My trick for monotony? I don't think there is such a golden trick. One day, I start the morning reading a book with coffee by my side, so that this head somehow stops thinking about the problems of freedom. A good book can take the weight off your shoulders for some time. These days the books by a guy called Mróz do it for me. Another way is to make postcards for children; my favorite lately is crocheting. It can relieve

stress somehow and occupy your thoughts. And the satisfaction with the final result! Some time ago I still had the rare opportunity to work and time flew by much faster. Every day was different. Unfortunately, since I've been visiting prisons, I can't pick up work. Having the TV in the cell can also be a way to pass time somehow, watching, for example, documentaries which I like.

One thing that these days have in common for sure: each passing day brings us closer to the freedom we long for, to moments with loved ones.

Zolza

illustrations:
Agnieszka Semaniszyn-Konat

Monotony according to such a dictionary definition is uniformity, lack of variety, repetitiousness bordering on boredom. A nice word of Greek origin and that's as far as its charm goes. It's damn hard to convey it from the perspective of a convict, but I'll do my best to paint a picture for you. Although everyone wants to forget about it, I will go back to the time of the pandemic, when most people were grounded in their own homes. Parents were at some point forcing themselves to invent activities for children, spouses or partners fainted at the sight of their "other halves", people cooked just for the fun of cooking, looked for new things to learn, chatted via messenger, played computer games or console just to have somehow in touch with anyone in the world, kept up to date with news services, etc., etc. Even though you had plenty of different options at home, after some time you'd run out of ideas and many people were really fed up with this monotony and boredom.



Well, now imagine that you are stuck at home, in one room with just a toilet, no kitchen, no Internet, with people you definitely do not love, and often with people you don't even want to look at, and during the hour long walk you are

accompanied by the above faces and characters, a 6-8 minute phone call once a day and skype with relatives for a quarter of an hour twice a month. Such isolation within isolation that lasts not for two but for, say, ten - fifteen - twenty years. So where do you look for ways to deal with monotony? There are not many options, so one uses every way possible. For me reading books is life-saving. For some time, while it was possible to have a console, I played games as I like it very much, but this hobby of mine was taken away, and it could effectively occupy my time and mind. I learned crocheting, cross-stitching, went to a tailoring school and added machine sewing to that, paid for a Spanish language course... Actually you grab anything you can here just to be able to do something other than staring at the ceiling stupidly. Anything is always better than nothing. The opportunity to participate in activities organized by The Culture House Foundation was the pinnacle of joy for me because they occupied time and mind in an almost impossible way, and here it is essential to be able to do something and try out something new, because only then monotony won't be able to kill you.

Małgosia

Many people complain that in isolation every day looks the same. Of course, if you refer to daily life, where your time is limited to hmmm... one hour of walking, playing cards or waiting for lunch, then you can definitely call it monotony! My days are full of variety... I always have something to do and I don't complain about boredom... The first days after incarceration, like most of the convicts, I spent listening to stories, playing cards, etc. I just got pulled into the environment, but after a few days I decided to do something, to revive myself and look around to see what I could do so as not to get stuck in the prison monotony...

To be honest, at first everything seemed like a waste of time, but when I started thinking about myself and things that I could use in life, I began to see the point in my activities. Today, things that I used to find completely useless give me pleasure, and when I started to combine the pleasant with the useful, my world became so varied and rich that I regret to say that unfortunately there is not enough time for everything...

Here is a list of my daily activities that I want to share with you:

- work
- reading books
- writing letters to family, friends, loved ones and interesting people, foundations, associations or companies that, in response to letters, provide me with the knowledge I need :)
- everyday exercise, including breaking my own records - really fascinating! e.g. every month I break records in push-ups or sit-ups...
- yoga, meditation...
- education, including school, taking advantage of all possible courses, trainings and programs offered by the prison
- writing poems, books and keeping a diary
- drawing, painting
- artistic creation, handicrafts.

So, good advice for all those bored with daily prison life: "Ladies and gentlemen, if you want to free yourselves from boredom and monotony, try to do everything possible like me! Certainly, the beginnings are difficult and you will encounter many obstacles, but it is enough to do something by all means, to never stop, and you won't even notice when the gate opens for you 😊.

Dawid



illustrations: Darren Kruk

III ● WAR, PEACE, PRISON...

The slogan “War and Peace” automatically makes two phrases appear in my head – “Leo Tolstoy” and “Russian literature”. It has nothing to do with prison – in the sense of a name of such caliber or whatever literature. Out of big names, you could maybe find some “Górska” or “Olbrzumska” but otherwise nothing major. Even war doesn’t exist here either, more like scuffles or little battles happen, though it probably depends on the times and people. When I have to tackle this topic, I feel strange confusion in my head, because I don’t know how to approach it. In the past, officers fought wars with us convicts, and it went both ways, neither side remained indebted to the other one. It may not have had the momentum of World War II, but it was happening, oh yeah... it was so intense that neither side could count on anything even approaching human behavior.

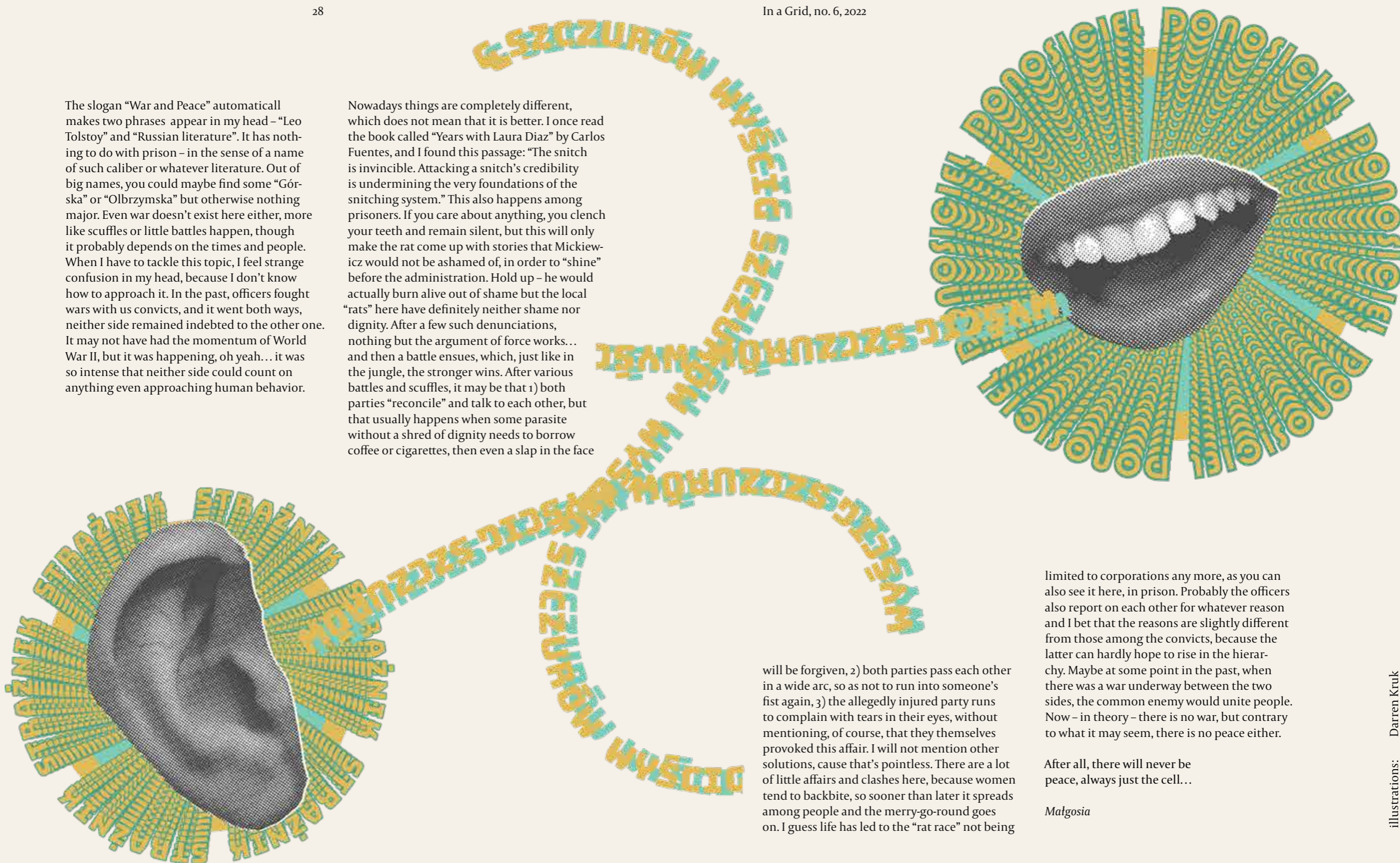
Nowadays things are completely different, which does not mean that it is better. I once read the book called “Years with Laura Diaz” by Carlos Fuentes, and I found this passage: “The snitch is invincible. Attacking a snitch’s credibility is undermining the very foundations of the snitching system.” This also happens among prisoners. If you care about anything, you clench your teeth and remain silent, but this will only make the rat come up with stories that Mickiewicz would not be ashamed of, in order to “shine” before the administration. Hold up – he would actually burn alive out of shame but the local “rats” here have definitely neither shame nor dignity. After a few such denunciations, nothing but the argument of force works... and then a battle ensues, which, just like in the jungle, the stronger wins. After various battles and scuffles, it may be that 1) both parties “reconcile” and talk to each other, but that usually happens when some parasite without a shred of dignity needs to borrow coffee or cigarettes, then even a slap in the face

will be forgiven, 2) both parties pass each other in a wide arc, so as not to run into someone’s fist again, 3) the allegedly injured party runs to complain with tears in their eyes, without mentioning, of course, that they themselves provoked this affair. I will not mention other solutions, cause that’s pointless. There are a lot of little affairs and clashes here, because women tend to backbite, so sooner than later it spreads among people and the merry-go-round goes on. I guess life has led to the “rat race” not being

limited to corporations any more, as you can also see it here, in prison. Probably the officers also report on each other for whatever reason and I bet that the reasons are slightly different from those among the convicts, because the latter can hardly hope to rise in the hierarchy. Maybe at some point in the past, when there was a war underway between the two sides, the common enemy would unite people. Now – in theory – there is no war, but contrary to what it may seem, there is no peace either.

After all, there will never be peace, always just the cell...

Małgosia



Let's talk. Let's listen to each other.

In the course of the interviewing workshop we established that people are somewhat selfish. And that attentive listening is an art. That's why we asked each other what we felt when the war broke out

...

- E* You're not Polish...
- Świeżynka* No.
- E* And how is that?
- Świeżynka* I don't understand.
- E* To be here now under such circumstances.
- Świeżynka* I miss my family, my country. My daughter.
- E* Where is your daughter now?
- Świeżynka* She's there.
- E* And when you came to the penitentiary was she in Poland with you?
- Świeżynka* Yes.
- E* How was she?
- Świeżynka* She has always been most important, she knew she was most important.
- E* Yet something was more important.
- Świeżynka* I don't understand.
- E* Well... Something must have been more important since you are here.
- Świeżynka* It was an accident.

- E* Had accidents like this happened before?
- Świeżynka* Not with this result. (laughs)
- E* Okay. But let's get back to the war. What time did you find out?
- Świeżynka* At 7:45, from the girls during a meal. They let me make an extra call, because we are allowed five minutes every day... But it's okay, they're healthy. For three or four days at a time didn't even know what was happening...
- E* Has your daughter seen death?
- Świeżynka* No, fortunately not. It's just that the atmosphere is tense and the longing and despair.
- E* Have you heard about the Warsaw Uprising?
- Świeżynka* Yes, I attended a lecture on the history of Poland. Why?
- E* I keep thinking how not long ago it made no sense to me and the situation in Ukraine made me think differently. And you?
- Świeżynka* It made sense to me. To achieve something, you have to sacrifice something. I'm not a fighter, but given the opportunity I would go defend my country no matter what.
- E* And your daughter?
- Świeżynka* No, no, I wouldn't let her. Nor my family. Me – yes, but not them.

- Ewelina* Since when have you been detained?
Monika I was detained after February 24th.
Ewelina What did you feel when the war broke out?
Monika Fear, above all, the fear that it would reach all of us.
Ewelina How have you perceived the war since you got detained?
Monika I'm hungry for information and I'm even more afraid, because life in ignorance is a lot less comfortable. So I'm anxious, but I am also capable of pushing the thoughts about war away and focusing on my personal problems. I think if I was able to watch the news, I would perceive the war and myself in it much more. Right now I can't form an opinion on this topic. It's irritating.
Ewelina Are you worried about your relatives?
Monika No, because the war has not reached us yet. But somewhere in the subconscious there is fear...



- Iza* How did you find out that war had broken out in Ukraine?
Bonita From the news.
Iza What was your reaction? How did you feel?
Bonita Fear, huge fear. At the time, my best friend was in Ukraine.
Iza What was he doing there?
Bonita He was waiting to be deported because he was in prison. It's a very emotional topic for me... I called his family, the consul, the embassy and no one had any information about his whereabouts. The family was crying, I couldn't be with them, support them... The consul told us to wait for two weeks. How can you wait two weeks? When they show mass murder on TV, massacre before the eyes of the whole world.
Iza What happened next?
Bonita The family went everywhere they could to bring him to a Polish prison.
Iza Did they succeed?
Bonita Yes, but it went on for over three weeks before he arrived. In one piece.
Iza Have you spoken to him?
Bonita Yes, but he pretended to be tough cause he's the macho type. He was talking about other people's fear, but not his own. That he'd heard explosions, the atmosphere being tense. That he would get three slices of bacon and half a loaf of bread for lunch, that there was shortage of drinking water...

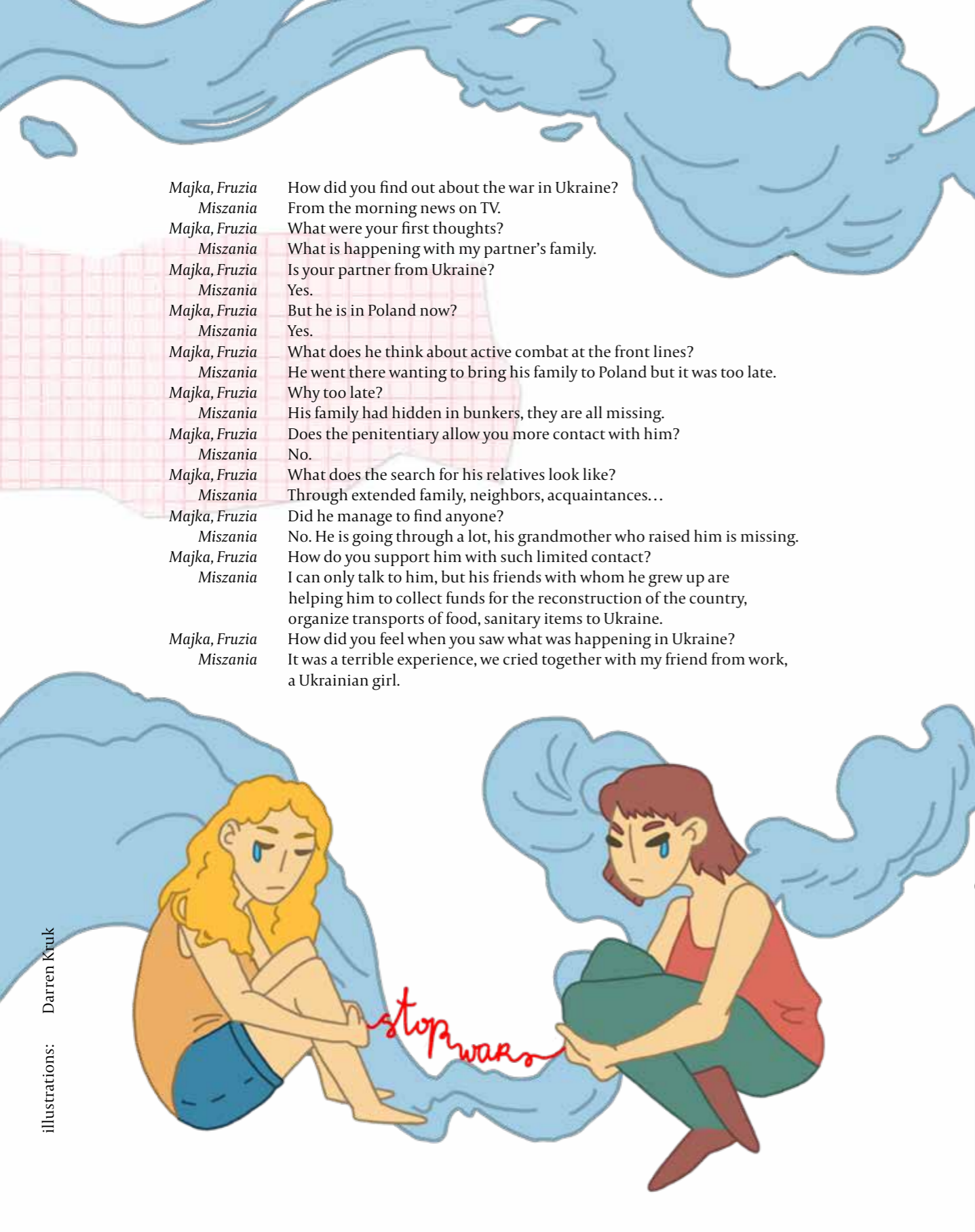
Majka, Fruzia How did you find out about the war in Ukraine?
Miszania From the morning news on TV.
Majka, Fruzia What were your first thoughts?
Miszania What is happening with my partner's family.
Majka, Fruzia Is your partner from Ukraine?
Miszania Yes.
Majka, Fruzia But he is in Poland now?
Miszania Yes.
Majka, Fruzia What does he think about active combat at the front lines?
Miszania He went there wanting to bring his family to Poland but it was too late.
Majka, Fruzia Why too late?
Miszania His family had hidden in bunkers, they are all missing.
Majka, Fruzia Does the penitentiary allow you more contact with him?
Miszania No.
Majka, Fruzia What does the search for his relatives look like?
Miszania Through extended family, neighbors, acquaintances...
Majka, Fruzia Did he manage to find anyone?
Miszania No. He is going through a lot, his grandmother who raised him is missing.
Majka, Fruzia How do you support him with such limited contact?
Miszania I can only talk to him, but his friends with whom he grew up are helping him to collect funds for the reconstruction of the country, organize transports of food, sanitary items to Ukraine.

Majka, Fruzia How did you feel when you saw what was happening in Ukraine?
Miszania It was a terrible experience, we cried together with my friend from work, a Ukrainian girl.



promagamy

Majka, Fruzia What do you think about Poland's position?
Miszania I am proud of how Poles behaved towards refugees, that we welcomed them with open arms.
Majka, Fruzia What do you think about the fact that Syrian children were dying in forests, denied access to our country a few months earlier?
Miszania For me, someone should be held accountable for not helping them.
Majka, Fruzia How do you deal with these emotions in this place?
Miszania I have a lot of conversations with my friends, mainly those who are also affected by war. The phone call at the end of the day soothes me when I can hear my partner's voice and know he is healthy, safe, that he is in Poland and we will see each other soon.





- Alicja* February 24th. What kind of day was it for you?
Helenka One of horror, shock. I looked with distaste at the lines of people queuing for donuts.
Malina Donuts?
Helenka It was Fat Thursday. In Poland there's this tradition...
Świeżynka Will you still observe it? This tradition?
Helenka Now I will associate it with the war. It started at 3:45...
Świeżynka Do you always remember dates? And times?
Helenka No. I will remember this one.
Alicja Why?
Helenka Because I can't remember other such shock, no war so close to Poland.
 And because of Nina, my friend. Who is also in this prison.
Malina Do you have more such friends?
Helenka From Ukraine or in general?
Alicja From Ukraine.
Helenka No, I only know her.
Alicja So Polish-Ukrainian friendship exists... Can you elaborate?
Helenka Not today...

IV.

MICKIEWICZ AND MORE

Creating a ballad together turned out to be good entertainment, Mickiewicz can be proud of us. "Prison Ballad" was a joint effort. The rest of the poems – not necessarily ballads – are individual creations and even guest appearances. Greetings from Wołów penitentiary :)

A prison ballad

On moonlit nights, behind prison bars

A mystery spectre floats between cells like a guard...

When over a sleeping inmate it lightly hangs in the air

There is a foul odour, shivers and chill on the face.

It's said to have accompanied women here for long centuries

And when the full moon flashes, it tends to play with their dreams:

When finally one – in her dreams – towards her freedom runs

The spectre has waited for this – it rubs its misty hands.



When we run around the sunny meadows of dreams, carefree

It is the reason, we get hurled into a dark hole, violently

It turns all of the colors into just blacks and grays

And with a shroud of shadow covers the sun's rays.

Some try to splash it with water from basins under the bunks,

Others pray in loud voices, still others shout out loud.

The spectre then bursts out with laughter and seeps

Through walls in order to continue its evil, gloomy practice.

There is just one inmate this spectre won't trouble at all.

Never blows cold air on her, has no key to her soul.

The question: why does the evil spirit never pay her a visit?

The answer well known and simple: the power of love, that's it.

For a long time this inmate's life has been full of this emotion

Because back home it was abundant and always out in the open.

Her parents told her fairy tales and sang her to sleep

That's why the ghost never comes close and goes past quick.

Women from the Grochów prison



Lady Midday

The scorching sun is heading south,

The sky painted turquoise.

The girl in white circles the field
gilded with corn.

Who is this girl pale and white,
What is she doing in shadeless heat?

She turns around, dances –
she stopped,
Must have gone weary
of spinning.

She throws her hair, looks ahead,
Awaits a young man with a sickle.

“Come to me,” she calls. – It’s heaven here! –
The girl’s voice demands obedience.

Young harvester marvels at the apparition,
Her beauty, slender figure.

He’s already abandoned the sickle in the tall grass,
Soon all sane thoughts will be lost.



The spectral maiden
lures him and urges,
All warnings are forgotten.

In vain did the elders put in his head,
To steer away from this path.

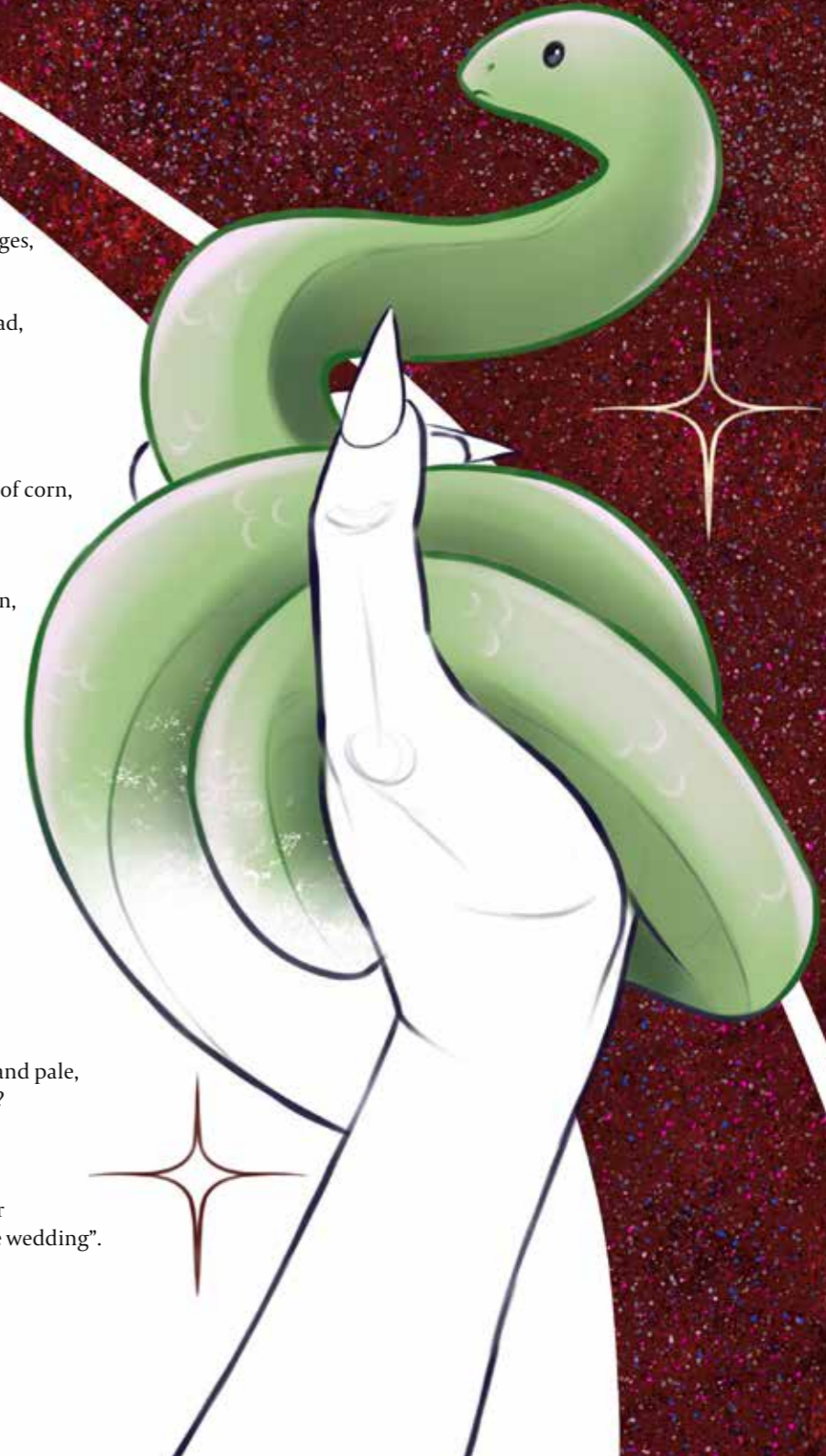
“Don’t pass the path through fields of corn,
When the Sun is at its zenith”

They said – “Even if a robust maiden,
wants to sweeten your life,

It’s just an illusion, a mirage,
not a real thing,
Unless one welcomes living
in poverty.
Such adventures attract the evil,
Curiosity leads to hell.

Where there’s no shadow
she walks white and pale,
You think you are her bridegroom?

She is a corpse, dead in the grave,
She went out along with her flower
crown before the wedding”.

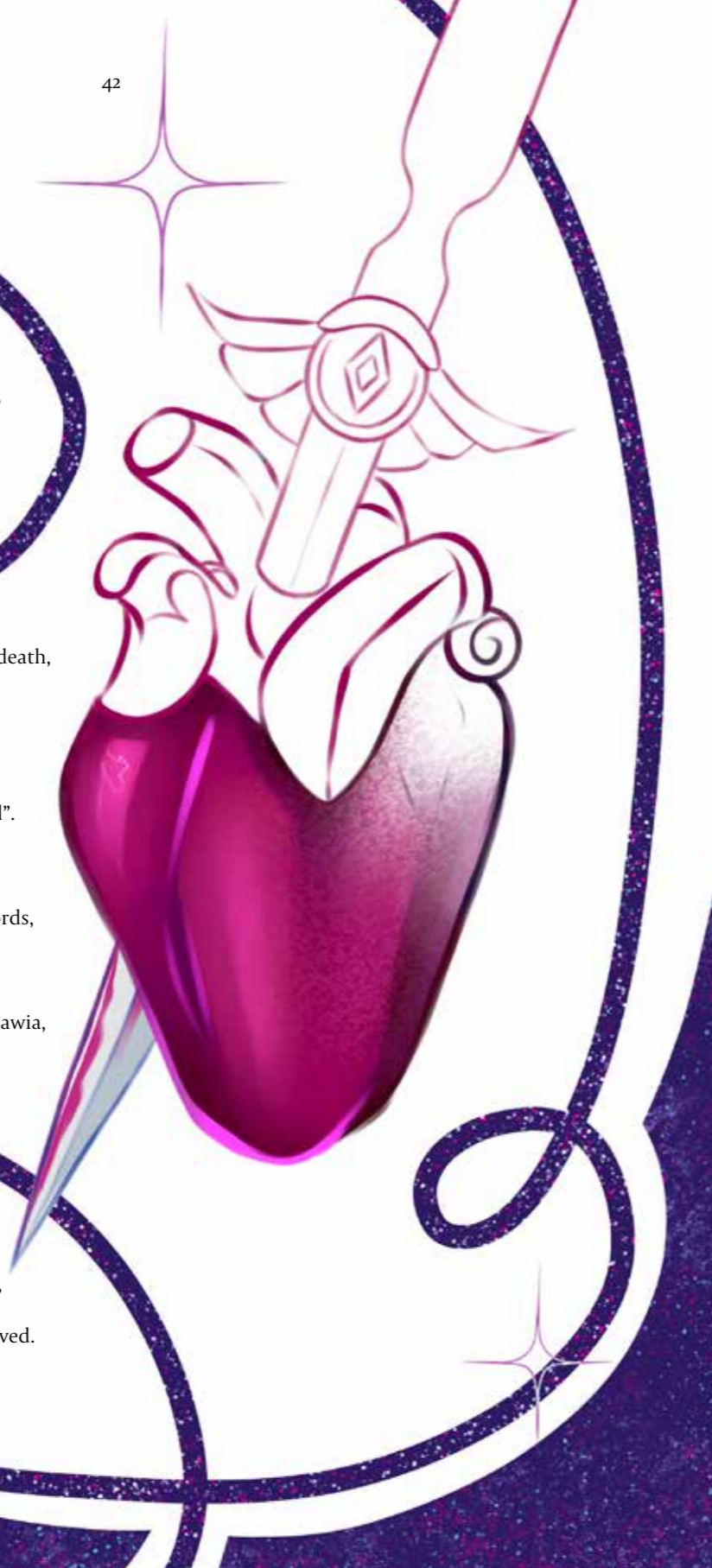


“Poor thing, an old grandfather said,
Death tied her to a wreath.
She now lurks in fields
in summer heat
As phantom awaiting a reaper.

Burns with jealousy, tormented by death,
has neither breath nor husband,
She desires your blood, your soul,
She wants to lead you underground”.

The young man heard the elders’ words,
Sees their honesty towards him.
Seems he might harbour a fear of Nawia,
But really, he doesn’t believe it.

To heart and body hardened
by youth,
Old people’s fears are nothing.
The youth burning with secret love,
Is searching for the path to his beloved.



And so he enters a cornfield,
delirious,
The girl is calling him, calling.
Grave darkness cools in her eyes,
Spreads terror all around.

The young man sees no death in her,
The phantom lures him with mirage.
He quickly runs towards his chosen one,
The only thing on his mind.

He falls into the dead girl’s arms,
Lays his face on the pale bosom.
“O foolish boy, woe is you!”
A whisper in the corn before
he disappears.

A day passed, then another, hot season,
The sun sends heat from the sky.
The girl in white dances
in the field again,
Looking for a new victim.



In response to the gauntlet thrown down

Although locked within four walls and physically imprisoned

I am free in my thoughts and unfulfilled dreams

Every day confirms my plans – what is it that I want?

I really want to be free, I hope you do too.

Today I write this little poem for you, today I pick up the gauntlet,

I would like to charm everyone and show my face

There is no shortage of imagination and many ideas in my head

Decide for yourself if I met my goals.

I think up plans every day, I have a lot of time here

What will I do when I leave the gates
remembering what horror this was...

Now the time is ticking like a clock, it keeps getting closer...

I console myself that I have won, I can't fall any lower...

I get up, I draw conclusions, there is a new challenge every day

What will I be doing after leaving here
I don't know, I'll just see what's next

I miss the touch of another person,
the distance just like during the pandemic

I'll take off my mask when I leave the gate,
I'll hide the bad times in my pocket.

I will be happy, appreciate the moment and catch those little things

Though the heart is hidden
and the soul full of thirst freedom will cure everything...

Dawid

What about yourself...

What after all those years

might one want to say

while behind these bars

life's wasting away.

My day:

sleep, a movie, grub,

and the family I see

when i take a nap.

I would like to say

I'm a good guy, no faults,

but that the readers

heard... how many times?

So I'm not the one to judge

compliment or praise

I may be a murderer

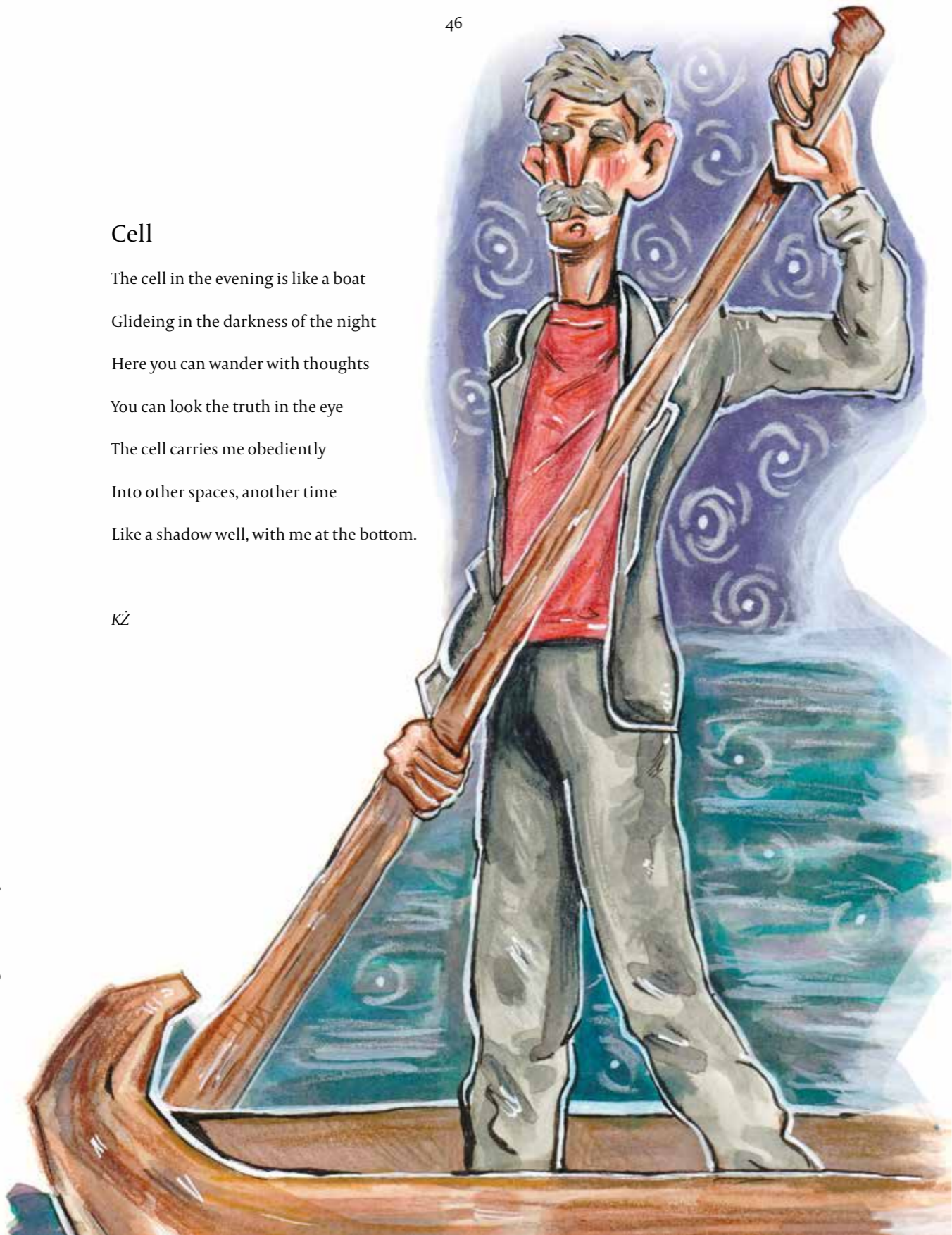
ut definitely not an idler.

Siemion

Cell

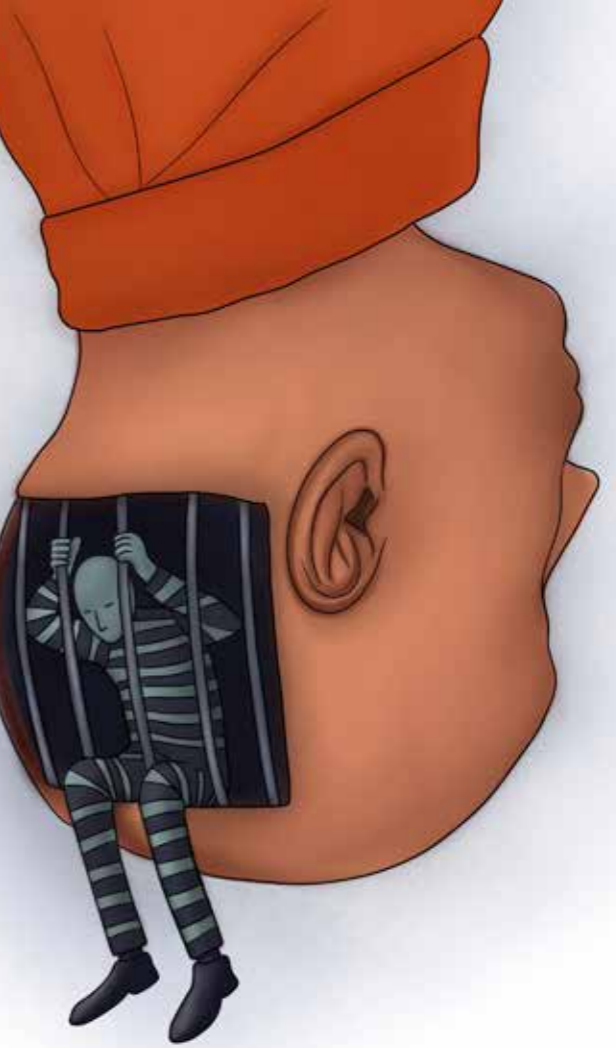
The cell in the evening is like a boat
 Gliding in the darkness of the night
 Here you can wander with thoughts
 You can look the truth in the eye
 The cell carries me obediently
 Into other spaces, another time
 Like a shadow well, with me at the bottom.

KŻ



Thoughts of steel

I touch time carefully
 To cause no suffering
 I live this way so that I don't
 waste life too soon
 And when I'm in need
 I end my prayer with these words
 ... and let it happen just like that
 May my life go on in harmony
 The thoughts of steel inside my soul
 I can't convey to you
 I'm all alone with them.
 Solitude with thoughts of steel
 Feels cruel
 Behind thick bars
 What should I do about it?
 Should I accept my fate?
 No, no, one mustn't do that
 You have to melt the steel



Let those thoughts loose
 Then all things in life will fall into place
 Strive for freedom
 Get rid of steel thoughts
 To live a normal life.

KŻ



I'm chilling with a cup of tea
the "In a Grid" magazine with me
I read, think, analyze what you girls wrote.
And feel that just like me
you have your goals and your own world.

You chase away bad thoughts
with writing, it also helps me.
So remember freedom awaits us,
it will not go anywhere!

Bebe



Illustrations on the cover:
Agnieszka Semaniszyn-Konat