

KRESNIK

14 years old

Ruin the magic. Fairy tales are just that, the others should grow up already.

White band on your arm, like a good soldier.

Brother, things here are the same as always. How I envy your adventures in the capital! When you write to me you tell tales of the Dragon, of your fight for all Vendevidians, while I... Well, I'm still here, at the Maw, at the border everyone forgets. I know you don't like it when I talk about him, but if it weren't for my Polabian friend, Tawals, the days would never pass. Here people are so gross, nobody ever cares about our future. They only look at the present, at the little things. I didn't want to complain to you, you have too many important thoughts to think, but I don't think the other boys in school like me much. I'm not a leader like you. Not yet at least. Tawals is the only one who makes me laugh. Even you say Polabians are smooth talkers, don't you? He would never trick me, though. I would notice. He's a good friend to me. If it weren't for him, I doubt someone would invite me to play with Ziva. I know you told me her mother's an important person and we shouldn't make her angry, but that poor girl is always alone in her own house. She doesn't even come to school. She has tutors. I'm sure Borevit, the kid who won the violin competition, doesn't like me. But he's half mad, everyone knows that. I've followed your advice, however: I think I'll make friends with Svetovit. We just need some time, because everyone in school wants his company. He's really the best. I must confess something: I haven't told mum and dad, they would worry too much, but I think you'll like this story. Yesterday, while I was with Tawals and the others, a new boy came along. He said his name was Jarilo, and that he's travelled a lot. He told us about the Fingers of Dawn, showing us a fallen star he'd found up there. You should have seen how shiny it was! Then Tawals said we could return the token from Polabo to Vendevid, we just needed to throw it into the bottomless well that goes to the other end of the world and sends stuff into the sky. Ziva had never been that far out, but we were protecting her. It was... Not the usual boredom. After we threw the star, another boy I didn't know warned us that Ziva's guardians were coming. We fled in a hurry, everyone but the two new kids. But we ended up right into a guardian's arms. Do you think those two played a trick on us? I found out their names: Veles and Jarilo. They're brothers. Maybe they're Polabian, I'm not sure yet. If they tricked us, I'll help Svetovit make them pay. Today at school he was limping from his father's belt.

KRESNIK

21 years old

*Draw everyone into the scene.
You don't want anyone to be left out.*

White band over your shoulders, like a towel.

Brother, I already have a train ticket in my pocket. We'll finally see each other again. Today is a day of celebrations! We're all meeting together at the town inn. Even Ziva, can you believe it? She's not ill anymore and she's old enough to do what she wants. She'll go abroad soon I think, to study. Svetovit planned this party for her above all else. The whole band will be there. Tawals, naturally, and Borevit as well. When I think that a madman like him is the only one of us to have travelled the world, I understand how strange life is. But now the Capital is waiting for me and I feel no envy for anyone. Not even for you, brother. Pay attention, because my ascent in the Dragon will be so fast everyone will forget about you! Come on, I know I'll have to pay my dues, but you said that now that things are starting to pick up there's plenty of need for eager youths. I will never thank you enough for having me called in. I haven't told the others that I'm leaving for more than just a visit to you, yet. I don't know why. Or maybe I do. Tawals wouldn't understand. It's hard to explain to Polabians that it's not the Dragon's fault that so many of them are criminals. He's a good fellow, a hard worker, always smiling, but surely he has heard about the Polabian Brothers, hasn't he? Hell, those two tricksters got their start with us! Jarilo and Veles, two-bit scoundrels sullyng the good name of our country! Once I read on a newspaper that Borevit, after a concert, wandered the halls of his hotel pantsless, screaming his throat out from the windows. But at least when he got back home he was suspended from the Philharmonic for months, and he had to write an apology letter! Who are those two to escape punishment? Whoever saw them again after that time? Maybe it would have been better if you hadn't sent me a copy of the reports from your contacts abroad. At least I'd have forgotten them entirely. Instead I still think about them from time to time and blood starts going to my head! Still, tonight I don't want to think of anything but celebrating, and emptying every mug I can find.

P.s. I haven't forgotten. I'll keep asking Svetovit to join us in the capital. I doubt he would come with me now, because he's become the new groundskeeper of Ziva's mansion. But her departure will serve us well. He is very fond of her, and I feel this friendship is what's holding him back. Leave me some time and you'll see. I'll write to him if that's what it takes. I'll send him pictures. I'll make him see that the Dragon needs men like him. True Vendevids, pure and strong-hearted.

KRESNIK

28 years old

You are worried. Infect everyone with your tension, close the scene at the right moment.

White band in your pocket, like a handkerchief.

Brother, I beg of you. Don't let anything happen to my friends. And to me.

Nothing and no one can dissuade Ziva from burying her mother in the Polabian graveyard:

She's given up on her own dreams to stay by that old woman's side through the whole course of the disease, and now she wants it to end this way.

I will be with her, and if bombers treat the place like a shooting gallery again, I'll blow up too.

You know this kind of action is despicable, it puts us in a bad light in the eyes of the world.

An excess of zeal is no excuse: The Dragon's wings should stand up to what its head says.

It is imperative to go back to the spirit of the first year of the revolution.

We need to be surgeons, not butchers, and only remove the notorious Polabians that brought our country to its knees with greed and corruption in the first place. Among the Polabians are good people as well as bad, like my friend Tawals: You saw him as a boy, foolish and carefree, but now he's a pillar for everyone in the Maw of Dusk. He keeps his people united, with no riotous intent. Would you rather believe me, who has known him for a lifetime, or the reports of some undercover agent who likes to beat Polabians when he drinks too much?

As for this funeral, it was me who told Ziva that her mother's mother was actually Polabian.

Her family had kept it secret, and it emerged from our archives recently. If she wants to bury her there now, it's only my fault. There will be nobody else, just the three of us and private Svetovit.

Or should I say "frontier hero" Svetovit? He got leave, and we're not even sure Borevit will come.

He's just a madman: Let Polabians make a legend out of him when he risks death playing under airstrikes, but don't allow Vendevidians to do the same. If we call him mad, it is because our people are rational by nature, and you must agree with me that official action would be disproportionate in relation to the private ceremony it's interrupting. So let a warning circulate in the army and tell off everyone else. After all, I will be there as a Dragon representative already, won't I?

We should focus on the criminals that sully the reputation of Vendevidians in the eyes of the world.

No matter if Veles and Jarilo are known as the "Polabian Brothers": Common people abroad ignore the distinction between Polabians and Vendevidians, while intellectuals paint them as the poor victims and us as the bloodthirsty oppressors. You know it's true. Or we would not be pushing back foreign forces at the border ever since last year. Yes, they're using aid to the Polabians as a cover for their own interests, but the end of the war and the fulfilment of the Revolution still elude us no matter the excuse. I bid you farewell, for now. I am off to bury an old lady.

KRESNIK

35 years old

*Mediate between Vidovin and Svetovit.
Take them aside, talk to them eye to eye.*

White band on your arm, like a real soldier.

Brother, this is my resignation letter.

You will read it after I have helped you catch the Polabian Brothers: In place of the honourable mentions and promotions you promised me, I just want you to accept my decision.

You will think me a coward, everyone in the party will, but you know as well as I do that our country is doomed to fall into enemy hands, down to the last inch of land. And all those who have ever had anything to do with the Dragon will be persecuted. I have no illusions about being an exception.

We have shared a great dream and I loathe having to wake up, but the truth is that ever since Tawals was deported, I cannot sleep at night. I am sorry.

You love to say that the Polabians are worms. Well, the face of one of them haunts me and wears at the pillar of my conviction. He was my best friend and now I can't even find his name in my precious registries, to learn what fate befell him. I feel like I betrayed him.

You have always been my hero, brother. Even as they made you the supervisor of the deportation camps, I just uncorked a bottle to celebrate. Back then I believed you were the right man to undo every mistake and save good people like Tawals. But now it's easier to imagine you smiling as you watch him die. The truth, Vidovin, is I have learnt to fear you.

Hearing you speak of the Polabian Brothers is like seeing a hunter polish his rifle.

For this reason, at the cost of undermining your resolve, official Kresnik (I know this is what you call me in front of your superiors) must report one last time. Jarilo is no Polabian.

He is not Veles's blood brother, they found each other in the orphanage. I have no idea whether they know, this is the last revelation from my damn archives. What I do know are your intentions, brother. You will destroy the myth of the Polabian Brothers, make an example out of them for daring to toy with us. I share your purpose entirely, but were Jarilo's Vendevian blood to come to light, would it not jeopardise our people's integrity in the eyes of the world?

Should we not let them go and forget about them? In any case, it is too late for my own faith.

I will always love you, brother, but now I see something in your eyes that disgusts me.

Perhaps it is my own reflection, and I loathe you because I loathe my own self, my own blood, by own people. Yet seeing Svetovit I cannot help but think I would have wanted him for a brother.

When I remember Ziva, I call her a sister. Maybe I could have even get used to Borevit.

I don't know what I'm writing anymore. They were my family and I thought the Dragon would watch over all our futures. And where are we now, instead? Nine years of war.

It's too much, at least for me. One last task and I'll pour some wine. To wait for the end.