# **Bedtime Stories**

Lana Čmajčanin, Adela Jušić







## Bedtime Stories | preface

Bedtime Stories is an artwork that responds to the experience of the siege of Sarajevo. Created in 2011-2013 by artists Lana Čmajčanin and Adela Jušić, the work had been exhibited globally (in Stockholm, Maribor, and Zagreb), but never in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This booklet tells the story of the adaptation of the work for the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it was installed as part of the exhibition, RE-Conciliaitons, in June-August 2018, and is now part of the Museum's permanent collection, Besieged Sarajevo.

The work was produced in response to an open call to artists to investigate the concept and practice of reconciliation, specifically, in this case, in relation to the 1992-5 Siege of Sarajevo. It was part of a larger research project, Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council under its Partnership for Conflict Crime and Security Research programme

and the Global Challenges Research Fund. The project was an interdisciplinary collaboration between King's College London (James Gow, Rachel Kerr and Milena Michalski, War Studies), the London School of Economics (Denisa Kostovicova, Government) and the University of the Arts London (Paul Lowe, London College of Communication).

Art and Reconciliation sought to fill an important gap by

producing an overarching study of reconciliation, a concept at the heart of a great deal of funded activity and linked to goals of transitional justice, peacebuilding and development, but one which was notoriously illdefined. The immediate impetus was that large amounts of money have

been spent funding 'reconciliation'

projects in the Western Balkans

(and elsewhere), but there was very little evidence of positive

outcomes. Indeed, in some case, such activities seem only to have reinforced animosities among The immediate impetus was that large amounts of money have been spent funding 'reconciliation' projects in the Western Balkans (and elsewhere), but there was very little evidence of positive outcomes.

different groups. There was therefore both a gap in knowledge about what has been done and an even larger gap in terms of what might be possible. Of particular interest were innovative projects involving the arts and artists with the potential to open up new and intriguing possibilities for reconciliation by providing alternative physical and conceptual spaces and sites of inter-group dialogue, but which also posed even more acute challenges when it comes to evaluation. Crucially, rather than impose our own, or others' definition of reconciliation, we sought to find out how the term was understood and practiced in different settings and with diverse constituent groups. Broadly, the project sought to do this in three strands,



integrating interdisciplinary work spanning the arts, humanities and social sciences: **History, Discourse** and **Practice**.

In Strand 3 (Practice), we conducted three major sets of activities: detailed mapping of reconciliation activity sponsored by major donors, and in the 'everyday' in the Western Balkans; building a database of activities involving arts practices in reconciliation and/or conflict resolution activities globally; and commissioning and evaluating a discrete set of projects to investigate the role of visual arts and community-based practices (photography, film-making, drawing, and sculpture). As part of this last effort, we worked in partnership with the History Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina to develop an open-call to artists from the region to develop and produce work in response to the archives and artefacts in the Museum's collections. This work was exhibited from 27 June-31 August 2018 at the Museum, and covered in the national media.

A fundamental question we wanted to address was how art and artists should relate and engage with the broader social, political and economic climate of the times. This question is particularly urgent and troubling in those parts of the world that have endured the scars of war, where artists and arts organisations have to deal with the complex and problematic issue of whether the past should be remembered and commemorated, or whether such attention is actually counterproductive in imagining how, in the future, further conflicts might be prevented.

In the commissions, we sought interventions that would question the role of the artist in post conflict society, and the role that creative arts practices can play in processes of reconciliation, remembering, dialogue and peace building. For the History Museum, specifically, we sought interventions that would respond to its permanent collection of objects, artifacts and archives relating to the Siege of Sarajevo.

From the artists' reflections on their process, and the responses to the work from audiences, we identified a series of key features that art can contribute to post conflict situations. Firstly, art is personal, allowing for an individual response to a complex issue. Secondly, art remembers and pays testimony to the past. Thirdly, art pays attention to things that would otherwise go unnoticed and unseen. Fourthly, art has a transformative potential, both in terms of material objects but also perceptions, and finally the arts are empathetic, enabling a shared emotional response that can bring people together.

Bedtime Stories illustrates this very well. The work seeks to reproduce and represent, through the voice of youth at the time, the experience of everyday life under siege. It is at once an intimate telling of individual stories, including the artists' own, and a political statement of resilience. The siege of Sarajevo lasted from the outbreak of war in Bosnia in April 1992 to February 1996. For 1,425 days, the city was encircled by Bosnian Serb forces, blockaded and under constant bombardment from artillery, tanks and sniper fire emanating from the hills surrounding the city, where Bosnian Serb forces were stationed. It was the longest siege in modern warfare. Just under 14,000 people were killed during the siege, including over 5,000 civilians. Life was unbearable at times, with the search for clean drinking water a daily game of roulette. Unable to remain in their homes, people retreated to their basements as relative places of safety, but these were small, confined

spaces, where families crowded together, occupying space that had previously been used to store unwanted or unused items. Some measure of justice has been achieved with convictions by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) of military commanders and political leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including Stanislav Galić, and Dragomir Milošević of the Sarajevo-Romanija Corps of the Army of Republika Srpska, and their political and military leaders, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, but while necessary, this was hardly sufficient to address the pain and suffering, particularly of children who were deeply traumatised and in some cases, brutalised, by the experience.

The work recreates the sanctuary of the basement spaces, and contrasts the apparent safety and comfort of a 'bed', which is reproduced as a 'sanctuary' with the wider context of deep insecurity. In that sense, it probes the un-reconciled nature of dissonant experiences, but also seeks to reconcile the past with the lived experience of the present. The effect is profoundly discomforting.

We are delighted to be able to share the work with audiences in London at the **Reconciliations** exhibition at King's College London, from I November to I December 2018, and we are enormously grateful to the artists, Adela and Lana, for creating this booklet and adapting the work to enable it to be exhibited in London in an alternative format. We lack the immersive experience of the beds, but the Stories are no less moving, bringing to life what might appear to be dissonant narratives of the traumatic past experience of basement life, the resilience of the people of Sarajevo who endured it, its repercussions and reverberations in the present, and aspirations for future reconciliation.

Rachel Kerr and Paul Lowe,
 London, October 2018





During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, people had to spend a lot of time sleeping and living in basements, sometimes for days and weeks at a time without leaving those spaces at all. **Sarajevo was under the siege during 1425 days**; the longest siege of one capital city in the history of modern warfare. Living in houses was almost impossible due to the constant grenade attacks.

The basements in the apartment buildings had small spaces, one for every apartment. These spaces were transformed into sleeping rooms. The size of these spaces could be as little as one-meter-wide and two meters long because their natural function was storage. These storage spaces were usually full of old things, or things that just don't belong inside apartments. They were emptied as soon as the first grenades fell on Sarajevo. Because of the size of interior spaces, only the bed could fit inside, and nothing else. Most of these spaces had wooden bars and not real doors. Sometimes as many as three people slept inside each one. It is hard to imagine this life



inside a basement. People formed a special community with its own rules and a new system of survival. They shared everything, from food to clothes, from happiness to misery.

It is hard to image.

Through written and audio interviews, we collected stories that happened in the basements during the war. The stories are written or told by our friends and family members. Without too many instructions or limitations, contributors were asked to

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describe a personal experience, an event, to tell us a story that happened in the space of basement, or possibly in some other kind of war shelter in the sieged city. As a result, we have gathered a diverse array of texts, from the more structured narratives, to the more emotional responses, or literary ones.

Focusing on individual stories around a specific set of events, we show the spectrum of very different perspectives and diverse approaches to documenting and remembering a situation of deep historical relevance.

- Lana Čmajčanin and Adela Jušić

### Credits

Sound recording: \_\_\_\_\_ Lana Čmajčanin and Adela Jušić
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Voice over: \_\_\_\_ Neda Tadić
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Special thanks to our friends for the stories: Leila Čmajčanin, Emir Kapetanović, Aida Vežić, Šemsudin Maljević, Jasenka Paralija, and special thanks to: Haris Bilalović, Dejan Vladić, Sloven Anzulović.

## **Stories**

When the war started, our house came to be on the front line. It was hit by shells very early, and right after we escaped from it, it was robbed and finally burned.

We were running away at the last moment and didn't bring almost anything with us. My mother didn't even bring her ID with her. We didn't even consider taking clothes or shoes with us.

Then we moved into a Serb apartment. Actually we figured out it was a Chetnik's apartment, because it was full of weapons. Even his basement was full of weapons.

Us kids soon organized ourselves a common room that we called "The Club", where we used to play.

I did not have clothes or shoes to wear, and neither did other kids. So there became a custom to exchange them. For example, when one child outgrows sneakers size 31, they are given to a child with the smaller feet and so on. We all exchanged shoes, all kids from 1st to 14th floor.







Once, my mom brought me sandals, black ones in a quite good condition, well kept, and I remember being so happy, like: "Yeeeah! I have new shoes!"

The next day we played some game in our room, in the basement, "The Club"...

I had an argument with the friend from I4th floor, her name was Asja and at one point, when she didn't know what to tell me, or which way to hurt me, or insult me, she said: "Take off those shoes of mine!"

I remember, I was nine or ten years old and I was so ashamed that she made me take off her shoes in the front of all the children. So I took them off and I remember throwing one of them at her and then climbed to the eighth floor, barefoot, in tears, and I told my mother: "Please, don't you ever give me anyone else's shoes again!"

#### Adela Jušić



It was war and it was a hot night, rock and roll played from a radio that was powered by the car battery and we were in a shelter on Džemal Bijedić Street. It was in 1993 and I was I3, lucky I3.

My crew sat on beer containers and played cards by the candlelight. That night I did not like cards, they were somehow foreseeable whether I lost or won; I didn't care. I went out on the street. I sat down on a small wall and breathed in an unpolluted, war-filled, Sarajevo air. UN transporters frequently passed through that street, sometimes throwing out cans, or other small stuff to us kids, who managed to appease soldiers by waving them.

I was sitting and I was not waiting. It seemed just perfect for me to be out there completely alone, watching stars and wondering about the silence.





The moonlight was so strong that one could see everything as if it was daylight, except everything appeared now in bluish-silvery tones. It seemed to me that I could sit there forever...

Then they appeared, so I jumped and waved... I did not miss the award as the grass rustled beneath my feet. I watch them drive away, two helmets peeking out of the transporter. They waved and disappeared, and I picked up the chocolate.

That good soldier was probably about to eat that chocolate when he spotted a small boy on the street, so he instinctively threw out the chocolate. Surely he was not thinking this was going to change my life, but it might make this moment special for me. That was nice, it touched me. I felt somehow sorry for that soldier.

I felt sorry because he didn't know that he should not feel sorry for me, because he did not know anything about me and because he will never know.

He did not know that I was I3 and that I could already bake bread, cook beans, steal electricity and that I could also draw. He did not know that at the time I was living layers of experience that I will carry with me for the rest of my life, experiences that will keep me straight and awake. Nothing will surprise me in my life anymore, nothing will knock me out of my shoes. He did not know that I will become an artist and that I will do the job that I love and that I will try to make a world a better place and that I will feel free.

He did not know that I will travel the world, watching people, cities, mountains, experiencing them with all my senses. He did not know that I will fall in love and that I will love with my whole being, that I will love without expectations, that I will totally surrender to my feelings and that I will give and take, watch the love, soak in it...



He did not know that I was already old with 13 but that at the same time, I will remain that boy for the rest of my life... I felt sorry for that soldier because he was good and he did not know.

I went back to the shelter to sleep. I gave the chocolate to little Kemo. I knew that it was not going to change his life, but I knew that at least it would make that moment a little bit special for him.

- Emir Kapetanović



For me, a basement maybe does not signify the safest place in terms of shelling, taking in consideration that basement in our building had two windows, so we were always in a fear of something that we called "podbačaj"\*, in which case the grenade would fall in through one of those windows. But for me, as an 8 year old girl, that basement represented safest place for a "business start-up".

1993 was the most intensive year for me, since the siege of Sarajevo was toughest that year, I would say. So we, the kids from building, had to spend a lot of our time in the basement. It was a very dark place and it didn't have a lot of space for children's games, so the only logical solution was to read.

Unfortunately, at that moment there were not many children's books around. There were approximately 15 books we had to share. So, by the May 1993 Amir and I had read all the books and then we met a kid's worst enemy – being bored.

At this moment I don't recall who had that idea first, but in one moment Amir and I, infected by boredom, started collecting





comics. We took them from friends, and from our parents, we found some in a nearby garbage, and we saved a few of them from neighbours trying to make a fire and so on.

In a few months we had great collection and we were ready for a next step.

On the right side of the basement were few basement cells. I asked my father to give me a key and let me use it. Amir,

whose father was a woodworker, brought self-standing cabinet (with enough space for approximately 40 comics) and one piece of wood that was suppose to function as a desk.

We managed to find a stamp shaped like a bear (I think Amir exchanged it with his sister for lunch pack candy), we stamped all of our comics, found a notebook to write down member names and that was it, we were ready: we opened a first basement comic shop!

You would not believe how many interested members showed up in our "member book". It was not only kids that were renting comics, there was a lot of grown ups, too. Since we all had to spend six or seven hours in the basement, everybody wanted to "shorten" their time somehow.

And for Amir and me, the basement comic shop represented a great source for any type of trade. Since it was war and there was no money, one can rent a comic for almost anything. Our comic shop even attracted kids from other buildings to our basement.

The Comic shop was operating until the end of 1994. In the city I live in, there are no comic shops, but whenever I see one on the TV or in some other city I always want to call Amir and ask him if he remembers our first basement business.

I wrote his number somewhere but just can't find it...

Jasenka Paralija

<sup>\*</sup>When a grenade falls shorter than coordinates it was aimed at.

In the beginning, it was all interesting to me at least, I was 14.

As we moved from Dobrinja to Breka, a safer part of the city, I thought that a weekend (that lasted for two months) will be nothing more than fun, since two families will stay together, we kids will play and the parents will probably have their own good time.

As we came in to our relatives flat it was more than obvious that it will not be two families but 4. Altogether around 13-14 people in a 3 room flat.

It was still calm during the day but at night, as if it was the vampire's ball, the fighting would start and one could see it all through the window, as the city was surrounded by hills. Soon we will start looking for a safer part of the flat so it would be 10 people sitting in the hallway for hours.

In the beginning it was like a party but as the nights passed, the pressure, the fear, the confusion grew. After 3 nights, as the whole building started looking for a shelter in the basement, we did also.



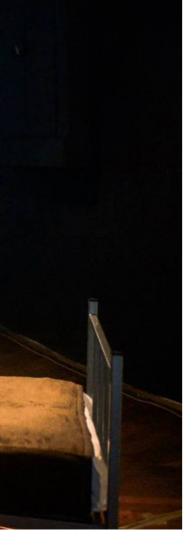
As we walked downstairs, we looked like a big family going to a picnic with all the blankets, food, radio... and all the neighbours came too. Some people would take it as some kind of an event and would dress up nicely, that was funny. It was a crowded 20 square meters for who knows how many people. A lot of dust in the air, lack of air, smoke, all the smells...

Some were quiet, some laughing, cheering up the people. The panicked ones were the worse, I think if I ever get in to something dangerous again, I will first shut the mouth of the panic freaks. They were always the ones who knew what was going on, as they imagined all the possibilities, all negative ones off course, some people would start reacting as these



ones do. Shouting, loudly praying, cursing etc. Most of the people were calm though, luckily.

That's when I found out about my relatives in first place, whom we were staying with, I found out all about our neighbours, whom were they, how they talk etc. Some of them had never met, and some only a few times. The building had a lot of rich people and it was funny to see them feeling uncomfortable among the poor, and even average people in the same room,



being treated the same way by the vampires from the hills. We were all the same, sharing the same feelings, same danger, and same basement.

Then the people started disappearing. Of course, the rich ones would run out of the city first, as they were able to pay for it. It was the same people we laughed about because they would always have an extra, old style, shiny ladies bags with them. As we were kids we had no idea what was the purpose of holding them as a little baby against their breasts.

We would only wait for them to fall to sleep and then, as the bag would start falling down, some of them would jump and start yelling: "who touched me, what do you want, who turned the light off" and similar stupidities.

All the kids would laugh and our parents would stay silent, knowing it was money and the jewellery in those bags, the necessity for them and their children to get out of that

hell. Necessities we didn't have, but no one cared, it was all supposed to be over in a week or so. It lasted for the next three and a half years.

– Šemsudin Maljević

When there is a war, there is nothing. No food, no electricity, no gas and no water. When there is no water, you can not do the laundry until the water is pumping again or when you carry it back home from a public water pump.

At thirteen years old, you should already know the rule: "you don't air your dirty laundry". For this reason, you will place dirty laundry in a big pillowcase, carry it down into the basement, and leave it to rest among other dirty pillowcases, containing other dirty laundry, which will sit there for days, months, years, rotting and waiting to be washed. At thirteen years old, you cannot carry a lot of water or do a lot of laundry. For this reason, you will wash only the bare necessities, those that you cannot do without. You can do without your favourite white summer dress. And you must.

At twenty-three years old, you can carry a lot of water and do a lot of laundry. But you will not. Because there is electricity and water and you can turn on the washing machine whenever you want to. If you want to, you can even turn it on just for the sake of washing the one shirt you feel like wearing to a friend's house tomorrow to do a test describing your perfect dream



house. Your house will be big, white, and in it, there will not be one single wall without a big window or a terrace.

Later, you will describe the basement of the house. It will be small, dark and full of dirty pillowcases containing dirty laundry. Results of the test will state that the house is you, and the basement is your subconscious.

At thirty years old, you do not remember your favourite white summer dress because you never had one. Except in your small, dark basement where, under weak candle light, you would press the dirty dress against you, and dream of the day when you would wear it again.

Leila Čmajčanin

I cannot tell a basement story since the building that I lived in during the aggression on B&H and the siege of Sarajevo, did not have a basement. That time I would have spent in the basement, I spent on the chair in the corridor of the building, in the front of the door numbered 99, on the 6th floor. It was an atypical and architecturally different space. However, the coldness of the bricks and roughness of the walls were still typical for an apartment building in Sarajevo.

I cannot tell a story because one does not exist and I am not able to make a plot with the beginning, the middle, or morals at the end, with characters who are sad or likable. I don't have anecdotes to tell.

Only fragments exist. And traumas accumulated during more than one thousand days of the Sarajevo siege. I am trying to remember the beginning and the end of some interesting event, but I only have a murky mass of feelings. Or the lack of feelings. Numbness. The fragment, the trauma. Like sudden sound. Coldness. Waiting. Confusion, anger, hate, misanthropy, and all the rest. I don't have pretty memories from the corridor. I envy those who tell the stories of friendship during the war, stories about romantic love, and neighbors' solidarity. I was neither a child, nor the grown up. Confused teenage girl, 14 to 18 years old.



I remember, for example, how I hated them because they didn't allow me to sleep. It is 3 a.m., and I angrily put on the trousers over my naked legs, and under the night gown, which I try to tuck in the trousers. But this old, blue, velvet night gown, makes wrinkles and bumps because of its length and creates discomfort around my waist. I am too lazy to take it off, so I put some old, woolen sweater over it, and I grumble and protest, wanting to sleep. I am quarrelsome and I bite.

In the middle of the night when your sleep is dearest than ever, they start to throw shells on me. I am not afraid but my mom is, and because of that, because of her, I dress up and I leave the flat. I sit in the front of its entrance, in the corridor, only 2-3 meters away from my bed. Apparently, this spot is safer, though this is not proven fact, but the result of our newly gained knowledge of ballistics and military tactics.

I hate them, but have nowhere to release the feelings. I just feel angry and powerless, and I listen to the detonations of the biggest caliber tank grenades, and I know their goal is not simply to kill, but to torture with insomnia, restlessness and fear.

I don't remember how long did the torture last that night, that one night of many nights with the same scenario. For some reason, that night in particular is imprinted strongly in my memory.

I can still feel the anger, unable to act, confused, and I can feel a physical sensation of the crumpled cloth under the layers of my clothes. I feel I have no voice while everything in me screams angrily.

The second fragment of my experience is the detonation of the shell, my first close experience with the heat of the explosion. It was a hot summer day and we are sitting in the same spot

in the front of the apartment door, in the same corridor, and we are waiting for hours. We can hear sporadic detonations, but they are distanced. Not close to us.

My building had 8 floors, and a glass ceiling on the top. It looked like a little glass house. Because of its position, the building is almost imprinted into the hill. The stairs connect two streets, and the building has two entrances, on two street levels. I have no clue what the subject of the conversation was, on that day and on that hour... Some time around early afternoon. Or maybe we were silent.

The thing I cannot forget is the deafening explosion. The sound of breaking glass, tumbling down, and the terrible heat of detonation on my bare hands and on my skin. The shell fell on the street and the glass was broken. No one was hurt, but I was in shock. In shock over terrifying strength of the detonation that caused everything in me to vibrate and buzz. I hear nothing. Understand nothing, and have no clue where did the grenade fell. Too much dust, and smoke.

The neighbor lady is screaming, some children crying... Oh... That was my closest explosion so far. As if the death has touched me with the rim of its cloak and I froze feeling its power. The swift of its sickle can touch anyone of us, at any moment.

They say you never hear your own shell, and you are still alive if you are aware of the explosion. There are so many of such moments in my memory.

They often come to the surface by themselves. In fragments.

Aida Vežić



## Lana Čmajčanin www.lanacmajcanin.com

Lana Čmajčanin was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1983, and has finished her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo (MFA). Currently, she is a PhD candidate student at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her cross-disciplinary practice encompasses installations, video works, photography, performances and sound installations.

She has exhibited in numerous galleries and museums across the world and her latest projects were shown at Zhejiang Art Museum, Hanzhou, China; Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China; Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana Slovenia; Pera Museum, Istanbul, Turkey; Kunstraum Niederoesterreich, Vienna, Austria; Good Children Gallery, New Orleans, US; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Netherlands; Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia; Gabrielle Senn Galerie, Vienna, Austria; Galerie du Jour agnès b, Paris, France; Künstlerhaus Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz, Austria; < rotor > association for contemporary art, Graz, Austria; Centre for contemporary Art, Architecture, Society, Stockholm, Sweden; NGBK - Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, Germany; CCA - The Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Israel, to name a few.

Lana Čmajčanin has won several awards and scholarships, including the Special Award of the 54th October Salon, and has participated in several Artists-in-Residence Programmes. She was twice nominated for the Keith Haring Fellowship in Art and Activism at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson. New York.

Her works are part of numerous private and public collections.



Adela Jušić www.adelajusic.wordpress.com

Adela Jušić was born on 1982 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts, Department of Printmaking, University of Sarajevo in 2007 [MA], and holds an MA in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe from Sarajevo and Bologna Universities, 2013.

Jušić has exhibited in more than 100 international exhibitions (Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain; Videonale, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany; Image Counter Image, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany, Balkan Insight, Pompidou Center, Paris). She has participated in many artists in residence programs (ISCP, New York; Kulturkontakt, Vienna; i.a.a.b. Basel, Museums Quartier, Vienna) and in numerous panels, workshops and conferences. She won Young Visual Artist Award for the best young Bosnian artist in 2010, Henkel Young Artist Price CEE in 2011, and Special award of Belgrade October Salon in 2013.

Her works are part of many private and public collections. She is one of the creators of Online archive of Antifascist struggle of women of B&H and Yugoslavia.

### Photography credits

Cover: Jasenko Rasol - **Bedtime Stories**, Gallery 90-60-90/Pogon Jedinstvo, Zagreb, Croatia, 2013

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p.36: Portrait photo of Lana Čmajčanin by Ervin Prašljivić

p.37: Portrait photo of Adela Jušić by Joakim Hansson

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