



Tonio Schachinger

Not like you

Novel

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This book tells the story of one year in the life of the soccer star Ivo Trifunović, it is a novel for both soccer fans and those who do not like this kind of sport: This book comes with a daring language, it has depth and it is very entertaining.

Ever since, Ivo considered himself as different. He considered himself as bolder, as more talented, as more attractive than anyone else. Everyone was aware of this fact - his family, his youth coaches, his friends in the cage. Now he is one of the best paid soccer players in the world. He earns 100,000 euros a week, drives a Bugatti, has a wife and two children whom he loves more than anybody else. But suddenly his high school sweetheart shows up. Mirna. Ivo can't rely any longer on any structure of his environment. How shall he cope with an affair when he has no spare time at all? Is his performance as a player going to decline? And what does his wife do while he's away?

Once the reader has gotten immersed in Ivo's stream of thoughts, they just have to follow up to the last page of Tonio Schachinger's first novel. The reader gets captivated from the beginning - because the narrator tells his story in a daring, witty and original way. The novel gives an insight into the spectacle of the professional sport business and exposes its players as mere chess pieces

on a capitalist competition arena. Viennese slang and precise soccer metaphors add to the entertaining factor of this book.

„When Ivo was young, no one but him was in the spotlight. Everything else, such as soccer, Brügge, London, Hamburg, the clubs, cars and restaurants, were only the backdrops behind him, but he was the hub of his own life, the sun around which everything else revolves.“



Tonio Schachinger, born 1992 in New Delhi, grew up in Nicaragua and Vienna, studied German language and literature at the University of Vienna and language art at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. In 2019 he received the Start Scholarship of the Austrian Federal Chancellery. „Not like you“ is his first novel.

Sample Translation

by Gesche Ipsen

1

Unless you own a Bugatti, you can't imagine how comfortably Ivo is sitting right now. He stretches his legs and gazes out through his sunglasses at the square outside the supermarket, empty except for a phone box and an abandoned roll cage. He shouldn't have come in the Bugatti, but he's glad that he has, because a Bugatti makes everything better – the drive there, the drive back, even the waiting. Bugattis are cars for people who can't be bothered to wait, and all of them, both those who don't own a Bugatti and those who don't have time to wait in theirs, are missing out. Ivo would love to sit in his Bugatti like that for ever.

The tinted windows make the midday heat look like early evening, and although it's supposedly 33°C outside it doesn't feel like that inside the car. Ivo imagines what it looks like from the outside: a black Bugatti, all alone somewhere in the 20th district, like an alien space ship untouched by the sun; a black box everyone can look at but not into, a mirage in the hot, flickering heat. If someone were to come out of the supermarket now and see him, they'd think they were imagining things – unless it's Jessy, who'd tell Ivo that he shouldn't have come in the Bugatti. Ivo scans the square. For a moment, waves of heat run down his back like a chill, and he leans further back in his seat.

The supermarket doors open, but it isn't Jessy who comes out. It's a man, some boring sod with a canvas shopping bag, and he naturally looks this way. Not like someone in the middle of a desert who's spotted an oasis, but like someone who smells a turd. He puts a hand to his forehead, as if the gold wheel rims were blinding him, and grimaces. Was it meant to be a laugh? Ivo sits up a bit and squints in order to make him out better, but he doesn't really need to – he could have been thirty yards further away as well as cock-eyed, and still be able to tell that the bloke's a bastard, pure and simple. He can tell from the man's lop-sided smirk, from the way he laughs without making a sound. He can tell that the bloke is a fake.

The man takes out his mobile, rests his canvas bag against the wall and takes a photo, and Ivo can tell from his face that he's trying to come up with a witty caption before uploading it. 'You bastard,' Ivo says, and all his serenity has slipped away, 'you stupid, stupid bastard.' He'd love to crack the window, only

to wipe the bloke's ugly smile off his face, so that he'd realize that he's being watched and be scared of whoever's sitting in the car – who might be Ivo, but could just as well be a mafia boss – afraid of a whole world he'll never be part of.

The doors open again, and a child comes out to join the man. It yelps as soon as it sees the car and sets off to take a closer look, but its father pulls it back, his face full of contempt and plastered with that stupid lop-sided grin. The father points at the supermarket and Ivo's body tenses up, he has an urge to floor the man – in front of his son, but in a way also for the sake of his son – to knock him out with a single, precisely placed punch; but then a smiling woman emerges from the supermarket and joins the man and the child, and even before Ivo has recognized her he's lifted out of his seat, by that singular feeling that can seem so utterly new every time it shows up. He looks at Mirna, and it's just like in the old days, on the Admiral Tower ride in the Prater, that moment when you've been shot right up to the top and there's plenty of energy left for you to keep going, even though the platform has already snapped into place, that moment when the whole panorama of the city briefly comes to rest and all that prevents you from flying on up is the restraints at your shoulders. Why is it that you stop flying upwards? Ivo watches Mirna smile, watches her move; she looks in his direction, but their eyes don't meet. Ivo leaves his body and his car, and skids into a flashback of Mirna's pursed lips in one of the alleys behind the New Danube, more than ten years ago, through a series of images that races past him, and he briefly thinks he's getting a hard-on, as suddenly as they used to come on in those days – but it isn't his dick that's getting hard, it's his chest or his heart.

When the passenger door opens and the car is invaded all at once by the heat, the light and his wife, screaming furiously, he flinches.

'I told you not to come in the Bugatti!'

The Bugatti has no boot and no back seat, so Jessy has to squeeze herself into the passenger seat with the twenty garlic baguettes and Lena, and Ivo isn't allowed to drive a single mph over the speed limit on the short drive from the Nordbrücke to Floridsdorf. Jessy rants about his thoughtlessness and the fact that there's no car seat, and Ivo replies to her, because he doesn't want to antagonize her further; he asks her a couple of questions, but then falls silent.

She's talking, and he watches her out of the corner of his eyes while the car spreads its low-rev growl across the Danube. He sees her perfect breasts, her eyebrows, her long, platinum-blonde hair and the tattoo of a garter peeping out from her skirt. He feels nothing.

2

Ivo had a weird dream: he was walking along a street, one that he'd walked along countless times before. His legs felt light and, although he wasn't running, the slope almost made him fly, made his steps long and slow like an astronaut's, down, down the slope towards the Gürtel, underneath a broad, pink sky. The city below lay spread out in all directions with its bridges and chasms, and down there someone was waiting for him, someone as familiar to him as the street he was on. Ivo had chucked away his sports bag and started running, flying, wanting to get down there as quickly as possible. He ran into someone and kissed them, someone with big, brown eyes who tasted of Juicy Fruit, who somehow wasn't a human being but a human deer.

Ivo is lying naked in bed, soaked in sweat, the bedsheets are bunched up around his body, he has one hand on his erection and is trying to pin down that sweet feeling which lasts all too briefly, before it turns into something ugly.

Suddenly Jessy is in the room, standing there in her low-cut turquoise dress and a yellow apron. Wasn't she, too, in Ivo's dream, on top of him, bouncing up and down like a high diver? She'd fallen, thrown herself from the ten-metre board, and Ivo had been like the surface of the water, smooth as concrete. Did that happen too, just now?

Jessy notices the shape he's in, smiles, and straddles him, with the self-confidence of those who know that they can make the other come in two minutes flat. 'Now get dressed, quickly, and come downstairs. Everyone's already waiting for you,' she says when she's done, and Ivo's eyes twitch.

He has a wash, and looks at himself in the mirror. Yeah, whatever, they're all waiting for him downstairs. But while they're waiting, they're stuffing themselves with his steaks and ribs, and probably haven't even noticed that he hasn't come down yet. Ivo can't be bothered to talk to anyone or see anyone. He would like to go and sit in the Bugatti again and wait, though not for Jessy – for nothing at all.

[...]

Excluding his sponsorship deal, Ivo earns €100k a week, so his time's extremely valuable. If he worked forty hours, that would make – how many euros a minute? ... A lot. Definitely a lot more than Sido in his heyday, who reported in *Golden Boy*: 'I'll earn four cents a second today.' But even before that, when Ivo's time was worth nothing, when he spent all day doing whatever he fancied, he could have thought of a million things he'd rather do than explain his background to some ignorant *Švabos*.

Maybe it's because of Mirna, and because she talked to him in Bosnian yesterday while they were having sex, or maybe it's something else altogether – but for the first time in ages, as he sits there listening to Günther, he considers making an exception for once. He imagines putting the communications manager into a headlock while someone else twists his arm behind his back, and explaining the basics to him, so that he'll maybe learn the difference between Bosnian Serbs like Mirna, a Bosnian-Croatian Bosnian like Zlatko, a Serbo-Croatian Montenegrin like Bojan, a Bosnian like Edin Džeko, and Ivo, who's a quarter Bosnian Croatian and a quarter Bosnian Serb; get him to understand the significance of the fact that Ivo's best friend is Albanian, and that, when he plays an away match, he goes out for dinner with the opposition players in Pristina and Skopje just like he does after matches in Zagreb or Novi Sad. That Ivo and his friends are finally living his grandfather's dream of the oneness of all Yugos, that dream which the men of his father's generation have shot to pieces.

Ivo would be happy to give up half an hour of his valuable time to enlighten Günther, though it annoys him that none of the Austrians in the team have to have this meeting. They don't have to do anything other than play FIFA, listen to bad music, and be called Julian or Lukas or Oliver, without those doodles over the letters.

In any case, the meeting doesn't make Ivo think about Bosnia more than usual. He thinks about it all the time anyway. Since the moment the fixtures were announced, Ivo's mobile has been vibrating non-stop

with messages from every single Bosnian he knows. 'I'll support you and Bosnia', 'I hope it's a 2-2 draw and you and Edin score the goals', 'Haha, *jebo te*, don't shit on our country, bro!'

What can this prick Günther tell him, for fuck's sake? The whole thing isn't really about Bosnia at all; that much becomes clear when the others – the non-Bosnians and the non-Austrians, David, Rajko, Veli, Bojan, Deniz and Tori – announce that they have an appointment with Günther, too, so that they can be told what to say when someone asks them whether they've ever considered playing for their other home country, or whether they think of themselves as Austrian or something else. And that's why Ivo no longer feels like a Bosnian the evening before a match, only like a foreigner.

Ivo doesn't care about words; he knows that they mean nothing. That's why he doesn't care whether someone calls him 'foreigner', 'Turk' or 'person with an immigrant background', though if anyone called him a Turk he'd obviously punch their lights out. New words exist only to express old things. And it's always the others who need those words. Ivo doesn't need to know whether he and his friends are foreigners or neo-Austrians, migrants, Turks or Yugos. Ivo grew up in Vienna, so he only knows the one big 'we' to which, in principle, anyone can belong, regardless whether they're Croatian, Bosnian, Serb, Turk or Persian, regardless whether they went to the International School in Vienna or a local state school, regardless whether their parents are ambassadors, like Ismael Tajouri's, or nurses, like Marko's. You can even belong to it if you're Austrian, so long as you're cool. Or you can simply choose not to have any foreign friends, miss out on everything that's great about Vienna, and swear about those damned Turks in the pub.

But if someone means 'Turk' they should say 'Turk', instead of meaning 'Turk' but saying 'person with an immigrant background'. Ivo hates this new, irritating, pseudo-friendly way the *Švabos* have of talking. A Colombian cabbie doesn't say: 'I hope you don't mind my asking... because, well, you look so... exotic, what, originally... is your immigrant background?' What he does do, is look at him and ask: 'Where are you from, then?' And Ivo answers: 'From Bosnia. And you?' 'From Colombia.' 'Ah, cool.' And then maybe he tells him about how he once played croquet with Radamel Falcao, at a birthday party for a mutual acquaintance. But even if he doesn't, it's sorted. He doesn't add that half of him is from Austria, or explain in what regard he thinks of himself as what, because the cabbie knows it's not about that at all, and that the question 'Do you think of yourself as Austrian, or...?' is only asked by people who themselves don't

have the freedom to choose. It's as if you'd asked Toni Polster: 'Listen, Toni, would you prefer a cigarette or a beer?' Because he wouldn't want to say no to either.

When the cabbie asks 'Where are you from, then?' he doesn't doubt that Ivo is Austrian, he just wants to know what the other bit is. Austrian plus X.

But if some Austrian bloke starts up with this 'I hope you don't mind', Ivo makes him suffer a bit for asking dumb questions. 'I'm originally from Vienna.' And when, five minutes later, the Austrian finally has the information he's after (i.e. what species of foreigner is standing in front of him), most of the time he manages to say something far more antisocial than the Colombian ever would. 'Ah, yes, I did hear... a bit of an accent. Well, that's lovely, they say the Balkans are stunning. Part of Austria once, back in the day. And how do you like it here?' Then Ivo walks away, and wishes he'd done that after the first question.

Anyway, if there's one country that should be grateful to its foreigners, it's Austria. You just have to look at Germany, to see how Austria would have turned out if there'd been no Czechs, Yugos and Hungarians living all around it, only other kinds of potatoes. There'd be no decent dumplings, no beautiful people, no good music. Austria without migrants would be as dull as Germany.

It's not just that there isn't a single beautiful German person without an immigrant background, but that Germans don't understand what beauty is in the first place. They can win the World Cup, because they define success as not making any mistakes, and because they have Özil, Boateng and Khedira; but they don't understand beauty, because they think that beauty is merely a lack of ugliness. Beauty's like a joke: you can't explain it, only sense it.

That's why there are good-looking Germans, but no beautiful Germans, and even the good-looking ones are dull. Nobody knows better than they do how to be good-looking in such a boring way. All that a German needs to be good-looking is not to be disfigured. To have nothing that's too big or too small, for everything to be roughly the same – then you say: 'Wow, he's beautiful.' But you don't say it because of their beautiful eyes or their beautiful hair, or because half the country can't help but focus on one specific body part, a beautiful nose or an awesome earlobe. For instance, there isn't a single beautiful German with a distinctive nose like Francesco Totti. Good-looking Germans look like Joko from 'Joko and Klaas', or like Klaas from 'Joko and Klaas', and no one knows which is which. Good-looking Germans look like that actor Til Schweiger, and it's just as well that there are poorer countries with more beautiful people who come to live in Germany – otherwise the Germans would have become extinct from boredom. Even Helene Fischer,

that singer who's always made up like a 45-year-old, has Russian roots. That's why she's on TV and not watching it from her couch like a German.

[...]

Ivo hates it when one of his colleagues says things in interviews like, 'To become really good, you have to love football' – because it isn't true and it's a retarded thing to say. After all, what is it that you love, when you love football? The feeling when 50,000 people cheer for you because you've scored a goal, or the injuries, the endless training sessions? That you stop being in charge of your own life and your own body, that every moron has an opinion about you? To become a good player you don't have to love football, you have to endure it! Any child, any fat old fan loves football more than the players, because they don't know how dirty it really is, how stupid, all of it, and how much work is put into it. How much of it is in vain. And what distinguishes Ronaldo and Messi from all the other players has nothing whatsoever to do with love, either. Whoever thinks that they're the best because they love football more than others hasn't a clue. In order to be really good, you don't need the right prerequisites, the talent, the luck not to get injured too often, the luck to be in the right place at the right time, to have a trainer who backs you, a family who supports you. Lots of them have that. The point is that you have to be a boring person. The more boring you are, the fewer interests you have away from the pitch, the better. Messi, for example, hasn't had his arm tattooed because he loves tattoos or really likes the idea of wearing meaningful images on his body, but because his marketing consultants told him to do it. They've thought it all out very carefully: when's the best time for him to restyle himself, when to grow his beard without people noticing that it's getting longer, where to have what tattooed on his skin and how big it should be, so that as much of the media as possible is taken by surprise and writes about 'the new Messi', so that he doesn't lose fans to other players because it's only the fat, speccy kids who still buy his shirt. He doesn't care anyhow, because he's never had anything other than football in his head, no friendships, no style, no love, no music, no fun. That's why Messi and Ronaldo are such perfect players, not because they're that good, but because they only have the one thing on their mind, and don't give a shit about everything else that makes the world cool. Ronaldo's probably not as bad as Messi; if nothing else, at least he's got his son alongside football, at least he lives out his arseholeness – while Messi, that rat, always plays the perfect son-in-law, though he'd be the first to tell his kit supplier to pile on the pressure and get someone bullied out of Barça.

So the question isn't whether you love football, but whether you need it, and if you do need it, why you need it. Do you only need it because otherwise there's nothing else, because football happens to be the thing you're best at, or do you need it because it gives you something you can't get anywhere else, because you're the best version of yourself when you're playing it?

On some days, Ivo thinks that he doesn't need football at all, that he can live without it. Shoot a few hoops at home with Dušan, eat lunch at home and watch TV, play with the kids. On other days, he's frustrated even before he's got out of bed, because he can sense all the energy going into him and none coming out, and it's breaking something inside him. On Christmas Eve, Ivo wakes up feeling like punching someone's lights out.