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The Hilt

A man who has never known suffering cannot be self-reliant, nor can he recognize his own value. —Joseph de Maistre

We who passed through the siege of Sarajevo shall, of course, gain nothing. An experience that will serve no purpose: as if you lost your arms and won a violin, as Rasko would say. You can't even tell others about it. Can you reconstruct an ancient jug from the lonely handle that made it to our time? We should lock it all up in the soul and forget. But at least we shall, from now on have a touch more self-respect, I hope, like the fighter who takes a billion blows but stays on his feet and his mangled face in the mirror tells him who he really is. We experienced our own limits. For to know who you are, has always been the victim's privilege. To know how much you can bear, without exploding—that is the only property that you shall, if you survive, bring from this war, endless like the handkerchief a magician pulls out of his hat. This knowledge—a saber which we shall not draw very often from the scabbard. But at least I will keep my hand on its hilt.

Translated from the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian/Montenegrin by Zvonimir Radeljković

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