

KATARZYNA BONDA

A good girl who would listen to black metal A would-be pianist who tried to play volleyball. A woman who can't imagine life without cursing and smoking. A queen who likes to have everything under control. And an admirer of legs, but not necessarily her own. We talk about money and the armour she dons to confront the outside world. About vanity, hard times coping with failure, her small-town past and a potential Playboy photoshoot. We give you the seasoned storyteller – green and perfect: Bonda, Katarzyna Bonda.

TEXT Arkadiusz Bartosiak, Łukasz Klinke PHOTO Marcin Klaban / Studio MMP

PLAYBOY Do you like Hitchcock?

BONDA I love him.

PLAYBOY So your green dress has a hidden meaning...

BONDA What meaning?

PLAYBOY In Hitchcock's films, women in green are very sad and lonely.

BONDA That's me!

PLAYBOY He also used various shades of green – the deeper and darker the colour, the greater **BONDA the sadness. And you are wearing all shades of green.**

I'm all dolled up for *Playboy* (laughs). I like green. It's a very interesting colour, both sad and cheerful. Someone once saw my computer desktop – green grass – and told me I don't like people.

PLAYBOY Is it true?

BONDA No, I like people, I like to get to know them. What I'm not good at, though, is being amongst people. Receptions, parties, black tie events... My small talk skills are rather lousy. Banquet conversations are not my forte. Not so long ago I asked a man that I'd just met how old he was and who his children were. After just a couple of minutes we were talking about his wife's cancer.

PLAYBOY How about stimulants, would they be of any help?

BONDA Stimulants are inadvisable. And forbidden in the creative process. I know a few people who use them and write. Usually they suffer from serious creative blocks. When I've

had a few drinks, all I can do is go to sleep.

PLAYBOY But back to Hitchcock, has anybody offered you a part in a film?

BONDA Why?

PLAYBOY Here you are, sitting there, just like in a movie. Beautiful, fragrant, dressed up to the nines – you seem more than ready.

BONDA Some men, when they try to pick me up, ask me if I'm an actress.

PLAYBOY That's lame.

BONDA Very lame. I'd be no good as an actress. I'm a writer and this is a completely different form of expression. Before you ask – I wouldn't agree to play anybody. I might just be a passer-by, like the maestro Alfred. In a green dress, of course. For example, in a TV series about Sasza Załuska (the heroine in Bonda's books).

PLAYBOY You should put our logo on the dress.

BONDA You got it.

PLAYBOY Would you like to write screenplays?

BONDA It's not for me. Sure, it's a beautiful thing, but you have to work with people, and, as you know... I'm sad and lonely and I don't like people. Seriously though, I have tried writing scripts, but, apart from one film, it hasn't worked out. (*Katarzyna Bonda was co-author of a script for a documentary short that was in the running for an Oscar nomination*). I spent four years writing a script for Marcin Wolski. It was supposed to be his next project. Unfortunately... (*The director died in 2015*).



PLAYBOY You sold the film rights to your series of books about Hubert Meyer a long time ago. We haven't seen anything so far.

BONDA I sold them three times. For all possible formats. Luckily I didn't write the scripts. It's a very frustrating job. I couldn't do it. You have to have balls of steel to work in the film industry. I also sold the stories about Sasza Załuska. And nothing happened. There was no movie and there still isn't. Neither in cinema, or on TV. But I can't complain about the money. *(laughs)*

PLAYBOY Would Sasza agree to a Playboy photoshoot?

BONDA I'd have to force her. I think that she would eventually agree, after a lot of persuasion. Especially now she is no longer working undercover and doesn't need to hide. Her back is nice and muscular. If you photoshopped her a bit she'd actually look quite pretty. She's much better-looking than me, slimmer and younger. She'd be all right.

PLAYBOY And what's wrong with you?

BONDA I'm too old.

PLAYBOY Two years ago you appeared in our magazine wearing negligée. But that wasn't enough, we hoped this would be just the beginning.

BONDA Back then I still had the looks.

PLAYBOY In our opinion, nothing's changed. So now we officially offer you a luxury photoshoot with palm trees and anything you want. Small crew, great atmosphere, baby octopuses...

BONDA How many girls have you managed to convince to do those things during an interview?

PLAYBOY So far - none. But we've still got the belief.

BONDA *(laughs)* And what, I'd run around completely naked?

PLAYBOY With a book, of course.

BONDA No. I expose myself enough in my books. And why would I do this, anyway? Is it supposed to be cool?

PLAYBOY This is a rhetorical question.

BONDA Just take off my clothes and that's it? You know what? I'll wait until I'm very old. When nobody wants to buy my books, then I'll

strip. For now I can recommend my colleague, Joanna Jodełka. I'm sure she'd look great. She has the best legs in Polish crime literature. I love her, but those legs of hers piss me off! *(laughs)*

PLAYBOY Anybody else?

BONDA Magda Boczarska. Sasza looks more or less like her. I saw Magda once in the theatre. I was standing behind her in the queue for the cloakroom. She was telling the cloakroom attendant off. She gave the most icy look imaginable, said a few words and that was that. I was looking at her, absolutely fascinated and I thought: this is Sasza. She has this delicate face of an angel and suddenly - wham! I just appointed her to the role of Załuska, if the film ever happens...

PLAYBOY We don't think we'll call Magda. We're afraid of arguments and cold looks.

BONDA Exactly! We live in a world where men have problems dealing with confident women. And when a girl is pretty, friendly and intelligent, it's the worst. Men are afraid of them and that's why they try to control them... I experience this myself and get punished a lot for being so self-confident. They tell me I'm a cocky, nervy smartass. And if I were a man, they'd congratulate me. This is why some smart girls I know pretend they don't have brains and are incapable of thinking on their own. This game makes their sweethearts feel better and safer.

PLAYBOY Do men play games in relationships too?

BONDA They often pretend they're stronger than they really are, they're ashamed of their weaknesses. While in fact girls love those weaknesses and the dark places they can explore.

PLAYBOY So you don't like men in big cars?

BONDA I have a big car myself.

PLAYBOY We don't. We came here by bike and by tram. Losers.

BONDA I might consider getting on a bike, but it would ruin my dress.

PLAYBOY How about a scooter? An electric scooter.

BONDA *(laughs)* It seems we're a bit off topic. To sum up our deliberations about relationships, I'd really like to let someone

dominate me and become my guru. But you still lack the mental strength. And experience.

PLAYBOY Who could be THE ONE?

BONDA I haven't really thought about it. I like wiry tall guys. They don't have to be handsome, it's enough that I'm pretty. They can be a bit sad, with some stains on their character. I don't like men who laugh a lot. Sorry, guys. *(laughs)* Maybe Clint Eastwood or Paul Newman? Or even better – Håkan Nesser. A very wise man. And I love his books. I even told him once that I loved him. He was glad, hugged me and promised to read my books in English and write a blurb for me. But I think that being with another writer would be the worst thing that could happen to me. It's hard to find someone wiry, tall and... quite wise. I say "quite", because living with someone very wise must be pretty difficult. What would we talk about? *(laughs)*

PLAYBOY Then maybe Jagger?

BONDA He's a freak. And sleeps around. I have to respect the person I'm with. And he'd have to adore me and only me.

PLAYBOY So, would you like to be with a playboy or an anti-playboy?

BONDA The former. A playboy is a charming man who makes a woman feel like a woman. A man who knows how to talk to her. It's not even flirting, it's a space where a woman is able to stand tall, feel comfortable and appreciated.

PLAYBOY As a journalist you worked with policemen. Did they create this kind of space?

BONDA No way! At first all they saw in me was a sexual object. Back then I could have been a playmate *(laughs)*. I was forced to hide and distort my reality. I wore bover boots and dreadlocks – only to allow me to function professionally. I was running away from my femininity. I spoke in a lower voice – I forged an armour, which still binds me today.

PLAYBOY This armour makes it even more visible that you're defending yourself – by attacking.

BONDA Because I still have to prove that I'm not a camel. For many years, I had to fight adversity. Right to the bitter end. I had to fall to my knees so many times that I became tough and now I have problems with showing any weakness, and this is supposed to be a very feminine thing. Finally I recreated myself as a

brand or firm and, as a result, I have to have everything under control. I have never dreamt of being a writer, of seeing my face on billboards and wearing green dresses. I've always wanted to have a normal life. Cook soup, have children and a normal husband. But everything turned out fucking different. It's just that I don't know whether I'd be a writer if I had a normal happy life.

PLAYBOY So if you stop writing you'll be happy at last?

BONDA And Dirty Harry will caress my face every day *(laughs)*. In fact, I'm very happy. I have a group of loyal fans and I make my living as a writer. I've sold over a million books. There was a time when someone would buy a copy of *Lampiony* [Lanterns] every minute in Empik [Polish chain selling books, press and media products – translator's note]. So my vanity is being regularly satisfied, even though my ego is as big as the sea. Who could ask for anything more?

PLAYBOY "Modesty is the right of an artist, vanity is his duty".

BONDA My readers are all I have. And everybody reads my books: from secondary school students to people who have experienced a lot in their lives. Everyone will find something for themselves.

PLAYBOY Men or women?

BONDA Usually women. Women generally read more. Although I can't complain that men don't read my books. They like hard data: forensics and facts. Mean people say that every man who reads my books does so because I doll myself up and wear dresses. And that's why I'll doll myself up even more! If I wear a tracksuit, nobody notices me. When I first saw my readers, I was very surprised. And now they come in swarms, they are whole families or lone butchers. A butcher once came to a book signing and you could tell at once he was different from the other guests. He stood out, had a moustache and rough hands. He came up to me and said: "It's been 30 years since I last bought a book. This is the first one. I was just passing by, I saw you, I came inside and... It was so interesting, what you were talking about, that now I'm going to read this book". He really did read the book and wrote to me afterwards. He still remains a loyal reader. He reports back to me after reading every new book. This is how I know that my books live on. Maybe this

is not important to great writers, but for me it is.

PLAYBOY Do you judge writers?

BONDA Of course. I feel I'm more of a storyteller myself. Although principally I'm a writer – that's what you call people who write novels. I'm not pretentious that way. There are great writers and there are writers who write popular literature, for example, crime novels.

PLAYBOY And you?

BONDA I don't write crime stories, I write novels where the primary plot involves a crime. In fact, I don't care who the killer is. I just can't write in a different way and 'thoroughbred' crime stories bore me.

PLAYBOY And that's why you're a "half-breed"?

BONDA Of course. I'm impure. I'm mixed-blood. A mongrel. And I represent popular literature and entertainment. Everything's wrong!

PLAYBOY Who could be called a great Polish writer today?

BONDA You put me in a difficult situation, because I know all of them personally (*laughs*). We meet on various occasions and we usually read each other's books. Contrary to what you might expect, I'm not just interested in crime novels. Quite the opposite. I try to read as much fine literature as possible. But please don't test me on Twardoch, Bator, Tokarczuk or Rylski.

PLAYBOY In that particular order?

BONDA (*laughs*) I should add a couple more names. Michał Witkowski, for example. Even if he does all that nonsense with fashion, this does not play down his talent as a writer. And I really don't care that in his books the story sometimes gets lost between the chapters.

PLAYBOY Do people recognise writers?

BONDA I can only speak for myself, but they have even found me in London. I was studying the city map, standing in front of the flagship Waterstones bookshop, where I was supposed to have a book signing the next day. Two young people approached me. At first I thought they wanted to help me find my way. Instead, I heard: "Is it really you?". I thought: "Am I dreaming?". Later I went out to eat and the waitress, who was Polish of course, recognised me as well. In the evening I went to the theatre

and during the interval I went out for a smoke on the terrace. Suddenly I hear a voice behind my back: "So, you really smoke?". (*laughs*)

PLAYBOY Maybe you're only popular in London?

BONDA You're being cheeky. When I was working on *Lanterns*, I was looking for someone who would share their knowledge of demolition with me. One day I was on a train, reading a book. A man sat down opposite me and after a minute he asked whether it was really me. Naturally, I said it wasn't. "No, but it's really you....", he took out my book and asked for an autograph. I was sure that was it, but it turned out he was an engineer specialising in robotics. We talked the whole way about various types of transmitters and bomb construction. I still have my notes on train tickets. I had this guy's contact information, but of course I lost it. I hope he reads "Playboy" and that we meet again someday.

PLAYBOY Real stars receive letters from fans who are in love with them. And you?

BONDA It happens. Once I even went to the police about it. An obsessive type and a sexual deviant – it was disgusting. Of course in Poland you can't do anything, as long as there is no "real threat", as they call it. So I called my friends to find this guy's encrypted IP address. Obviously, it turned out it was registered somewhere in the Cayman Islands and he was sending his emails from the Darknet from an Onion domain. When they found him they wrote him a message in my name using the appropriate language and letting him know who they were and what might happen to him. Problem solved.

PLAYBOY As the "Queen of Polish crime literature", you can be seen on billboards. People know your face, even though you don't advertise anything aside from your books!

BONDA It makes no sense, right? I'm still waiting to sell myself to the advertising industry (*laughs*). Under the influence of one writer, I even bought a car (*That writer is Szczepan Twardoch, ambassador of a certain automotive company*). In fact the only companies that have contacted me make yoghurt or tights. I'd prefer diamond jewellery or perfume. Luxury items.

PLAYBOY Do you know the company 'Bonda'?

BONDA There is one?

PLAYBOY They manufacture security systems and their slogan is: "Everything under control".

BONDA Suits me. They never called. Amateurs! (laughs)

PLAYBOY They say that it is not right for a writer to be in advertisements.

BONDA I never understood the hate directed towards Twardoch. He's a good writer and a handsome guy and deserves nothing but respect. Literary circles are very small and full of envious people. I was criticised too, when I was the first one to sell books in the Biedronka supermarket chain. I received minimal royalties. I think books are too expensive in Poland. The prices are the same as in England. It caused great uproar: "Bonda ruins the market, she's gone batshit crazy!" Now those whose voices were the loudest sell their own books in Biedronka, 8.99 PLN apiece...

All right, now that you've appeased me and we're so cosy, what's next?

PLAYBOY We wanted to ask politely whether you still play the piano.

BONDA No! I decided never to play again. I kept my resolution and it won't change. It was my trauma. Piano literally cut me in half. I was so sure my life would be different. I had a plan – I wanted to be a professional pianist. I couldn't imagine life without music. I worked like a horse from the age of five until the end of secondary school. My teacher would always peel tangerines and smoke fags and I would play Chopin's *Raindrop Prelude* in a cloud of smoke. My father had to take a second job just to pay for my lessons. When other kids went to parties, I played during the "Christmas Carol Day" or in the philharmonic. I thought only the very best played there, and so would I! I had no friends. Unfortunately, throughout that whole period, nobody ever told me the most important thing – that I simply didn't have the talent. I wasn't made for concerts – they stressed me out, I got tense and lost all my flair and inspiration. For me, playing an instrument was something very intimate, not public. And what kind of pianist is unable to perform in front of an audience? Today nobody will force me to do things I don't excel at!



PLAYBOY When was the last time you sat at a piano?

BONDA During a conversation with my teacher – she was like our local Beata Tyszkiewicz [a popular Polish actress from an aristocratic family – translator's note]. She was a very interesting character. After my lessons I would often walk her back home. We had to stop every ten minutes, because she had to smoke. She would say: "Remember, a real lady can smoke only whilst standing. You can't smoke while walking". I still smoke only when I'm standing (laughs). But back to that final meeting. I told her what my plans were and what I was going to do with my life and she said: "Kasia, there so are many fields of art, maybe you should take up photography?". I was intelligent enough to realise what she meant. I thought it was time to die. I felt like an idiot. I was 18, I wore T-shirts with Kurt Cobain, gothic skirts and bover boots, so you can imagine what this did to me. I burst out crying and decided that I would never play again. I also stopped giving a shit about anything. I couldn't handle failure and still can't, but today I know that my teacher saved my life.

PLAYBOY And you became a journalist.

BONDA My father was devastated because he knew he couldn't help me. And that taking another job wouldn't be enough. That man was used to handling everything. He was a man of few words, he only grumbled, but when you came to him, he'd always solve the problem. Maybe that's why I am such a conservative feminist?

PLAYBOY You don't see men like him anymore?

BONDA Don't be so pessimistic! I'm an optimistic pessimist. We simply haven't crossed paths, yet. But I'd recognise such a dependable man right away.

PLAYBOY What poster did you put up in your room in the times of Kurt Cobain?

BONDA Everything in his style: "Better to burn quickly than to smoulder slowly". I made T-shirts with quotes from Dostoyevsky, Norwid and Rilke. Everything had to be very deep and *noir*. Positive messages were out of the question. My boyfriend was a metal-head. We listened to Vader, Kat [Polish death metal bands – translator's note] and My Dying Bride. We hated disco polo and *Dirty Dancing*. I read two horror books a day. My mother was convinced I had become a Satanist, especially when she found out I threw an apple core at a priest. But I had to, he talked absolute bollocks. But in fact I was a good girl. I only learned how to smoke when I was 25.

PLAYBOY And to curse and scream?

BONDA At the same time, more or less – in police stations. Today I can't imagine life without cigarettes and cursing. And when I scream, it's only at myself and when there's nobody around to hear it. I don't scream at people because this is a sign of weakness and, as we have already established, I'm not good at showing weakness. When I'm mad, because someone wants to use me or doesn't respect my rights, I tend to be very vulgar. So vulgar that even the pages of *Playboy* couldn't handle it.

PLAYBOY Is there anything left of that delicate and sensitive pianist?

BONDA Perfectionism. Perfecting my renditions of musical pieces was the best part.

PLAYBOY Did it work out?

BONDA Always. I was able to play in the dark, but only for myself. During concerts I failed miserably.

PLAYBOY Were you also a perfectionist as a volleyball player?

BONDA First of all, I was too short. But what I didn't have in height, I made up for in character, though from the very beginning I was bound to fail. Still, I did quite well as a

quarterback. My problem was mental in nature. I had to win all the time. When I lost I behaved "inappropriately", and blamed my team mates. Eventually I realised that sport, especially team sport, is not for me. Since then my physical side is rather non-existent. I don't do anything at all.

PLAYBOY We encourage you all the more to take part in a naked photoshoot. You'd have the opportunity to warm up and stretch. We'll put a piano on a beach volleyball court...

BONDA You wish! (*laughs*) Although I'd look good on a piano. Just on a piano.

PLAYBOY Where does your urge to win come from?

BONDA Unless you're a woman from Hajnówka, you wouldn't understand. Being rather pretty, I had only one task – just like the other girls – to get married quickly and have seven children. Then I would spend my days baking korovais (*a type of bread*) and my life "at my husband's side" would be a string of blessings. I would only be able to wear my green dresses to church, because dressing up every day would be committing the sin of vanity. I could go to university, but only under one condition – that I would go back to Hajnówka and live there. But on the other hand, why the heck would a pretty girl need to go to university? It's a waste of money and there's the risk that she'd meet someone and wouldn't be faithful to her future husband, chosen by her family and neighbours a long time before. That's how life ends at 25. And it was only at that age I realised putting on a push-up bra made my eyes seem more blue... I didn't want to only be able to let my hair down during holidays and public performances, otherwise it's not the right thing to do. That's why I'm so ambitious and implacable. Do you know what my father's first reaction was, when he found out I wanted to be a journalist?

PLAYBOY We're not women from Hajnówka.

BONDA "But why? You're pretty!" he said. I lashed out at him and it took my mum several days to make him talk to me again. Our personalities were very similar. When he was dying from cancer, he confessed that, before they got married, they had agreed all the big, important decisions, would be made by him because he was a man. His wife would make decisions about the less significant things. He

then said: "It turned out that Ninka decided everything in my life, because in life there are no big decisions". I was already a journalist back then and was trying to start my own life in Warsaw.

PLAYBOY ...changing newspapers like gloves.

BONDA I had to earn money. I couldn't go to *Gazeta Wyborcza* and do an unpaid internship. That's why I chose *Express Wieczorny* and then *Super Express*. What I needed was independence, and that meant a good salary. I realised quite early on that it made no sense to study journalism. I wanted to have adventures – go to parliament or go to war, instead of learning about the history of the Polish press. So I resigned from full-time studies in favour of extramural studies, for which I had to pay myself.

PLAYBOY Do you remember the title of your master's thesis?

BONDA "Female Murders in Selected Press Publications". You could see immediately what turned me on (*laughs*). I also worked at *Naj* and *Zdrowie* [weekly women's magazines – translator's note]. I went wherever the salary was good. Later I worked at *Newsweek* and got a mortgage... I envied my friends from Warsaw who didn't have to work as hard as me, because they lived with their parents. On the other hand, I'm glad I don't have seven children and I don't live on Reja Street in Hajnówka. I'm sure many people back home were watching me and secretly hoping I'd fail. I was absolutely convinced of my own greatness. I don't know why. If I had become a writer back then and had the same support from my publisher as I have now, it would have been a disaster. The success would have gone to my head and that would be the end of it.

PLAYBOY Were you fulfilled as a journalist?

BONDA Yes, very much. I treated it as my mission, I was ambitious and often worked overtime. It's *Express Wieczorny* that I remember most fondly, but the greatest work environment was in *Newsweek*, when Tomek Wróblewski was editor-in-chief. I basically slept there. I believed in what I did. When I resigned, my mum cried: "How will you cope now? You've gone so far... What are you doing, my child?"

PLAYBOY If it were not for the accident where you hit a pedestrian, would you still be a

journalist?

BONDA I don't think so. The accident was a catalyst. My ideas were often dropped, because celebrity gossip and cheap crime was more important. When I left, what I most regretted losing was that feeling of freedom and power, when you are working on a subject you chose yourself and nobody's interfering in your work. Also, I was spoilt by my high salary. Money gives you independence.

PLAYBOY Handbags, boots?

BONDA Hopefully not white. You know me well by now (*laughs*). But it all came in handy later, when the hard times came. I remember it very well, I was sitting at a small table at the book fair and nobody came. It was an awful feeling. What made it worse was knowing that I had no money. I sold all my clothes from the better times to pay my mortgage.

PLAYBOY But before that you faced time in prison.

BONDA The vision of being locked up wasn't the worst – it was the guilt. Forgiving yourself is very difficult. I didn't want to live. The only thing I was able to do was write books, a very weird activity. It guarantees that for most of the day you are alone. It makes me feel safe.

PLAYBOY And only that?

BONDA There are many factors that determine my sense of insecurity. First of all, I'm from Hajnówka and I have nobody who could help me here in Warsaw. Secondly, I'm a woman. And thirdly, I don't have a decent husband who would guarantee my safety and the safety of my kids. Writing makes me feel I have my life under control. A writer may be an eccentric grouch who doesn't have to be nice to everyone. In a word, a writer can do anything she wants.

PLAYBOY Here you go again: this potential, wiry, tall...

BONDA Come on! I'm fine and I'm not looking for a husband, OK?

PLAYBOY Don't you want to settle down and start a family?

BONDA I do have a plan that involves it. Somewhere deep inside me. Very far. So far that I've forgotten where it is.

PLAYBOY In Hajnówka?

BONDA (*laughs*)

PLAYBOY Are you going back there in your books? In *Okularnik* [The White Mercedes] you write about the pogrom of Belarusian people, carried out by the battalion commanded by Romuald "Bury" Rajs. (In the years 1945–46 a battalion of Doomed Soldiers, led by Romuald "Bury" Rajs committed several crimes against the members of the Orthodox community in the Podlasie region).

BONDA As you know, it's very personal for me, because my grandmother died in one of those pogroms. It's a very difficult subject. I need to get back on my feet after I finish *Czerwony pajak* [The Red Spider], the last of the four-part series about Sasza Załuska. I need to recover and then I can start digging into my family's past. To be honest, now I'm not sure whether I'll ever be able to do this. *The Red Spider* comes out in 2018. I still have a lot of time.

PLAYBOY And the book about Kazakhstan? We've heard you were successfully discouraged from working on that subject...

BONDA It was the only time when I was really terrified. I was genuinely afraid something might happen to me or my daughter. I wanted to write an adventure story combining Polish and Kazakh plots. I went to Kazakhstan to do research and I made friends with people from human rights organisations. I was stupid and ignored their warnings – and everybody was warning me, including the Polish consul. I naively submerged myself in the Kazakh underworld and found very tasty morsels there. Kazakhstan is a very rich country, they have all the natural resources you can imagine, so there are many big businesses that clash. And I, this blonde woman from Poland, trod on someone's toes. I came back home and was sure everything was all right. And then suddenly my hard drive stopped working. And then my computer broke down.

PLAYBOY What happened next?

BONDA The thing is, nothing happened. I was so naïve, I still didn't connect the dots. I bought a new computer and plugged in my external hard drive, where I had backup copies from the destroyed drive. Two hours later, that external drive was destroyed as well. And after that, the new computer crashed. That's why I have no photos of my daughter from before she was five. I went fucking crazy. I called my friends from the Kazakh NGOs and they started telling me stories that sounded like they were taken

straight out of James Bond movies. "You have to hang up. We're coming right away. You have to destroy all your SIM cards...". I laughed at them, but they really came to my house and told me that the Kazakh intelligence agency was gathering information about me. I was still laughing, but I called my friend at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He laughed too, but promised to check out what was going on. In the meantime I received a message from a mysterious guy who claimed he wanted to make sure I get my data back and that he was on my side. He suggested we meet in a place of his choosing. The million dollar question: what did Kasia do?

PLAYBOY She didn't go?

BONDA Of course she did. (*laughs*) I'd taken my daughter to her grandma earlier. So I'm sitting there and waiting, but no one came. Finally, my phone rings. Some guy tells me in Russian that at certain time I took my daughter to a certain address and that granny's phone number is as follows... I told him to fuck off. I ran to get my daughter and called the friend at the Ministry again. This time he didn't laugh. He told me point-blank that I should forget about the subject I was working on once and for all, because as long as nothing happens to me or my family, he can't even take a statement from me. When I asked what it was all about, he started yelling at me. Then I started receiving dead calls, spy e-mails and someone started putting dead flowers under the wiper blades of my car. It was only then that I started to be really afraid, for the first time in my life. I wrote to my publisher and told him I wanted to meet, but I that I couldn't tell him what the meeting would be about. Like an idiot, I pulled an all-nighter writing about the treatment I had received and to show them that I had worked really hard, and that I wasn't lying. I told them that I couldn't write the book and that I would give back the advance payment in several instalments. To my surprise, they not only believed me, but also told me that the advance payment would be for something else, but that I would have to come up with a new idea fast. So I sat down, and four hours later the synopsis for the whole "tetralogy of elements", starring Sasza Załuska, was ready.

PLAYBOY And the – nomen omen – Bondesque problems were over?

BONDA Not all at once. But when I wrote an official e-mail to my publisher that I had

resigned from writing the book, everything calmed down. Can we change the subject?

PLAYBOY We've done scary, so maybe now let's do poetic? Has anyone ever written a poem for you?

BONDA Why, you want to try?

PLAYBOY That would be too much of a challenge.

BONDA Come on. I've received letters from guys

who don't even ride bikes or use public transport (*laughs*). Some of them weren't even that bad. Especially those from my time in Hajnówka, they melted my ice-cold heart. I brought them here with me, so that nobody would see them, and I burned them. Here in Warsaw, suitors only send me limericks. They may be smart and funny, but in fact they're dumb. Pretentious shit.

KATARZYNA BONDA

Author of crime novels born in 1977 in Hajnówka. Journalist and screenwriter by profession, but what brought her to popular acclaim were her crime novels, all of which have become best-sellers. She is also the author of two criminal non-fiction books *Polskie morderczynie* [Polish murderesses] and *Zbrodnia niedoskonała* [An imperfect crime] as well as a textbook titled *Maszyna do pisania* [The writing machine]. In 2014 she was voted the sexiest Polish writer, according to *Playboy*. She has received many prestigious awards for the series starring female profiler Sasza Załuska: *Girl at Midnight* (2014 – Polish premiere), *Okularnik* [The White Mercedes] (2015) and *Lampiony* [Lanterns] (2016). The last part of the tetralogy, *Czerwony pająk* [The red spider], will be published in 2018.
