

SAMPLE  
TRANSLATION

JANJA VIDMAR  
WITHOUT

PUBLISHED BY: MIŠ, 2011

TRANSLATED BY: DAVID LIMON

ORIGINAL TITLE: BREZ

NUMBER OF PAGES: 184

## Janja Vidmar: Without

### 1.

Simon hated the park. Or rather he hated the fact that by noon it was swarming with first graders. Their yelling interfered with his concentration.

“Your hair is like silk, your skin is like milk...” It sounded like a bad advertisement. The cut grass felt prickly through his jeans. The sun had come out and its warmth spread across his numb shoulders. A brat began crying nearby. On any other day, he would have shoved it off the swing. But today he had a date with Leyla. The most beautiful girl in the school was a fighter for the rights of children and animals. There was no way he would jeopardise his chances with her.

They had arranged to meet in the north-west corner of the park, left of the pavilion. Simon lacked all spatial sense. This was his excuse whenever he found himself on the wrong side of the law. Which happened frequently. But a date wasted because of him going the wrong way would feature at the very top of the list of all the mess-ups in his life. So he skived off school in order to have enough time to circle the park until he found the right place. He cracked his knuckles and waited for Leyla to turn up. Waiting didn't seem especially bothersome as he had plenty of time.

“Hey Simy,” she said as she approached from the left. Or the right, actually. She stepped over some soil scattered beside the flower beds. On the way she emptied the contents of her lunch bag into the bin, which he found romantic.

“Hey,” he waved to her. He liked watching her walk. Other girls minced, but Leyla sailed through space. Sometimes he would move back a few steps so that he could watch her for longer. Who cares about left and right, he fully mastered the two fundamental notions: front and back.

A man on the main path whistled at her.

*Oy, you, clear off or I'll get my garrotte out... She's mine!*

Looking at Leyla gave him a hard on. At night, while thinking about her, he had the most majestic ejaculations. He was worried that such a high frequency would cause him to dry up. He could not sleep because of her. It'll pass, he kept telling himself while concealing his soiled underpants into the empty sewing machine cabinet, the only usable hiding place at the moment. His mother had temporarily moved it into his room. But the problem was refusing to go away and was instead intensifying. Now he was unable to close the cabinet door.

“Hey man.”

He struggled to sound laid back.

“Oh Leyla, wassup, man?”

Leyla looked at him suspiciously.

“What's the matter with you?”

“Eh? ... With me? ... Nothing. ... What's the matter with you?”

“Why don't we do it...”

From beneath her untidy hair big, her wide eyes contemplated him.

“... on the grass...”

He said something incomprehensible in a high pitched voice.

Leyla sat beside him on the ground. She put her hands on his shoulders to push him into a prone position. They tussled. His breathing was shallow and he had goose pimples. Everything on him was erect. Only another moment of this sweet agony and he would come in his pants.

He pushed her away so that she collapsed onto the grass. His heart was beating hard against his sweaty shirt.

“Look, not a cloud in the sky,” she said, pointing upwards.

Insects buzzed around his ears. The grass was tickling the back of his neck. Below ground there was a metallic noise. The din in his chest was slowing down into a heartbeat.

*You're so cool,*

*You make me shiver.*

“What is the matter with you? Are you cold?”

He moved away slightly. “Can you stop getting at me? Why don't you tell me instead if you've got it or not.”

“Me? Haven't you?”

He sat up and reached into his pocket, then victoriously pulled out a joint. It was a miracle that it hadn't been crushed by his *tool*, which he could have used to crack walnuts with.

“Wow, finally. And you've even rolled it. Cool!” she said as she jumped up. A blade of grass protruded attractively from her hair. He wanted to take hold of it with his teeth and pull it out. But then he would get a hard-on again.

He flicked the lighter. The end of the joint glowed red. He pulled on it and held his breath. Then he handed it to Leyla.

“How many times have you skived off school?” Her eyes watered from swallowing smoke.

“No idea. I don't even know which teachers we have this year. How's your gran?”

Her moist eyes became softer.

“Hey, my gran, she's a real treasure. She's saving up for me to go to university. She puts some of her pension away every month.”

“Cool.”

“And she'll pay for my driving lessons and test. And my dance group has been invited to a competition in London and she wants to sew a costume for me.”

He turned on his side, supporting his head with his hand.

“Still doing hip hop?”

“Dance is my life,” she beamed.

He was desperately looking for the right words.

“My mother sews, too.”

“Does she? Gran needs a new sewing machine. The old one's packing up.”

A few pigeons were strutting nearby.

“I'd like to meet her.”

“You know how it is, man. My gran believes in me. I can't introduce someone like you to her just like that.”

“And why not? The other guys who are after you are all gits,” he said, upset.

“But they’re grammar school gits and you’re from the crafts school, get it? They’re on a grant for the gifted and you’re on ganja.”

Light twinkled in her clear, moist eyes. Maybe that was why he did not notice a ball that was flying at them until it was too late.

“Watch out...your left!” he managed to say.

The ball hit her head from the right. The blow knocked her sideways and she moaned loudly.

Simon wanted to jump up, but his legs refused to work because he had been sitting for so long.

“Just wait till I get you, you little git!”

Leyla was rubbing her red cheek.

“Simy,” she said. “It’s nothing. I’m OK.”

He took no notice of her words and ran after the boy who had lost his ball. Branches scratched his back. The little boy ran across a flower bed and Simon could see him hide behind a bush. The boy was in front of him and Simon held his breath while he noiselessly approached him from behind. He grabbed the boy’s collar.

“Ha ...” gasped the boy.

First, Simon slapped his cheek. That was the least he owed Leyla. The boy cried.

“Not a sound! I’ll give you smashing people on the head with your ball,” he hissed at him. “Show me your pockets!”

“Simon, where are you?” he could hear Leyla shouting. But the opportunity to take it out on someone weaker than him was very attractive. So he gave him another slap. Then he reached into the boy’s pocket and pulled out a mobile phone.

“No...” said the boy, sobbing. Fat tears ran down his cheeks.

“If you tell anyone, I’ll ...” he waved his fist in the boy’s face. “Now get lost!” The little boy staggered towards the playground. Simon saw that Leyla was looking around nervously, but she did not spot them. He pushed the child’s phone into his pocket and hurried back to her. He stopped a few metres away from the bench she was standing next to.

“Hey, Leyla, let’s walk towards the town,” he said quietly, inviting her to follow him.

“The town is in the opposite direction,” she said. “Tell me I just imagined it and you didn’t really do anything to that kid?”

“The odd educational slap doesn’t do any harm.” He slunk into the shelter of some huge beech trees.

“Have you totally lost it?” She came after him, furious.

“My head isn’t a goal he should be aiming his ball at and neither is yours,” he said, playing the protector. “Next time I’ll make a hole in it, the little shit, playing football here!” They were making their way through the bushes.

“Don’t you understand that there’s no excuse for violence? Where are you going now? The centre is that way. I can’t believe you went and slapped him...” she kept repeating in shock. She deliberately let go of a low branch so that it hit him in the face.

“Ow!”

“Oh, did it hurt?” she pretended to be concerned.

He rubbed his cheek, feeling offended. That brat gets an Ericsson worth a few hundred bob and him a Nokia worth a packet of condoms. And then it’s him Leyla gets at. It was the world that was crazy, not him.

They pushed their way through the bushes and found themselves in front of the new fence of the sports ground. They managed to squeeze through the gap between the metal gate poles.

Leyla wiped her eyes with her hand as if trying to erase an ugly scene from her head.

“You’re a total bloody idiot sometimes,” she said, pushing him off her path with her elbow, and moved off.

“Wait, where are you going?” he shouted after her. “There’s a bit of the joint left, one drag for each of us.”

“It’s too weak anyway,” she shouted without looking back.

“Oh come on, have a drag,” he said as he caught up with her and knocked the ash off the joint. “You’ve only just come.”

“Leave me alone!”

“I swear I won’t do it again. Alright? Please, let’s go and sit on the wall for just a little bit longer,” he said as he tried to stop her.

Leyla shrugged, looking at him searchingly, as if she was watching him through a peep hole in the door.

“I have to go home, I’m late, before I met you I went to town with Peter ...” she admitted reluctantly.

Peter was the boy she was seeing at the moment. Simon felt a stab in his heart. Did his future really reach no further than the name of her next guy?

“But you can walk me to the bus stop,” she said with a sigh. Then she slapped him across the chest, saying: “And stop torturing little children. Moron!”

Together they crossed the green verge of the road. The grass beneath their feet rustled. The air was hot and humid.

“How’s your dad?” Leyla broke the silence. While they were walking her hand brushed against his a few times. He felt an electric shock each time.

“Still ruling the joint.”

“When does he get out?”

“Soon, I hope, so that he can get things sorted.”

Silence again as they both sank deep into their own thoughts. Litter was scattered under the arcades of the museum.

“What about your new dad? Is that working out?”

The question disrupted the rhythm of his walking.

“Can we please not talk about that geriatric yuppie?”

He could feel the veins in his neck swelling and a lump in his throat. His mum had married an old man. There was a special name for such women in movies. He didn't want his mum to be called that name.

They walked around a van illegally parked on the pavement.

“It's a shame that you're so without...” Leyla said suddenly.

“What? A sense of direction?”

“I don't know ... without any goals and ... I don't know ... just without anything...”

“You mean without money, expensive toys and designer stuff and the right genes,” he said with a bitter smile.

“I don't mean material things,” she said defensively, “but look, we've known each other for nearly a year and I still don't really know you.”

*But I know you ...*

“Simy?”

*Tell her, tell her ...*

“Ehm ... actually, I wanted to say ...”

A stupid tune could be heard from her handbag. David Guetta. He covered his ears. Her taste in music was the only flaw in her perfection.

“Hey, wait, it's Peter ...” She pulled her mobile out excitedly. It gleamed coldly in her hand like a gun. “Where are you, sweetheart?” Her laughter echoed around the street, even under the cars and in doorways.

“Hey, see you, man!” she shouted faintly from another world.

*... I wrote you a poem actually ...*

## 2.

Obviously, he was late for his meeting with Marky. He had to walk past the old folks' home and the bank. He kept to the familiar route past the post office and along the main street. No way was he going to stray into the labyrinth of narrow streets in the old town. In about a hundred years archaeologists would dig out his rotting bones in some lonely hallway.

On the steps in front of the bar there were a few people gaping at the world. The walls were covered in graffiti and the corners marked with piss stains. Marky was sitting on the ground among crushed cans, surrounded by emptiness. His arms around his knees, he was swaying gently to and fro.

"Hey, mate," Simy said as he nudged him.

Marky got up with difficulty.

"Where have you been?"

"I walked Leyla to the bus stop."

"And got lost, I assume."

"What's that smell, Marky?" Simon nudged him again. "You haven't shat yourself, have you?"

Marky's messy locks fell over his eyes.

"Don't you understand that Tyson is looking for us?" he said with a tinge of hysteria.

They had got involved in doing business with the dodgy Tyson by chance. In the winter they were getting bored in the disco under the castle. Their smiles were bouncing off girls and their empty pockets meant the evening would be another miserable one. Until they caught the attention of a man with thin orange hair, wearing an elegant black suit. He invited them for a drink.

"You look like guys people have given up on," he said in a friendly manner.

"And you look like agent Smith from The Matrix," Marky said briskly.

"You can call me Tyson," the man said.

"And you can call us Simy and Marky," Marky replied confidently.

The man gestured to the waiter behind the bar: "Two large beers for these guys."

They toasted each other in a more relaxed atmosphere.

"Do you have any friends?" said the guy.

"Heaps," said Marky with a wave. He gulped down his beer and the man ordered another.

"What do you do in your free time?"

"Loads of things," Simon said mysteriously.

"At your age that probably includes school, revision and wanking," said the man trying to be witty.

"I'm not a goody goody school boy," Simon said indignantly. "My old man is in prison and I take after him."

"What do you take?" said the guy sarcastically.

He listened indifferently to their bragging about alcohol, the bending of car aerials and knocking rubbish bins over. There was a calm smile on Tyson's face. No one would have thought that he offered protection to bar owners in exchange for money. No one would have thought that he was selling cheap Chinese technical gadgets. And certainly no one would have taken him for a ruthless bastard. He looked like a post-office clerk.

"I'm impressed," he said flatteringly when they were finished. "Would you be interested in a professional career?"

And so they enthusiastically sailed into professional waters.

"Have you got anything on you by any chance?"

Marky lost his rag: "STOP FARTING AROUND."

"Hey, keep it down," Simon said.

A van drove into the inner courtyard. The driver jumped out, opened the back door and began unloading crates of drinks.

Simon knocked a cigarette packet against the fence. A filter peeped out. Simon caught the cigarette with his mouth and lit it. Marky knocked it out of his hand.

"Do you really want the guy to shoot us?" he hissed into Simon's ear. "Have you forgotten he's given us an advance on three mobile phones that we haven't sold yet?"

Simon pushed him away. "You're getting carried away, mate. I don't give a shit about any of it."

"Except Leyla," said Marky jealously.

"I get a hard-on with her," Simon said sarcastically. What did Marky know about the pain inflicted by unrequited love? The only thing he had ever held in his arms was a bucket to throw up in. Simon had got a little further with girls. He had put his hand in the back pocket of Maja's jeans. He had finished off Melisa's pizza, the edges of which were stained with her saliva and lipstick, which counted almost as kissing. While they were wrestling, he had restrained Leyla's arms, which could technically be considered an embrace. He pulled his t-shirt out of his jeans and pushed his hands deep into his pockets. The mere thought of her made him hard. Hard-ons and spots were his alpha and omega.

Marky tapped the side of his head with his index finger: "I mean, man, we really are dicing with death here. Tyson also gave us an advance on a Dell laptop. And we don't have anyone interested in it at all."

"Don't be such a drama queen."

"We're really sticking our necks out ..." said Marky, shaking his head and nervously biting his thumbnail. The smell of fear spread from him.

"Not enough ends up in our pockets from Tyson." Simon turned decisively and set off for the stairs.

"Hang on a minute, what about our Nokia?"

"That's for a present."

"Where are you going?" Marky shouted after him.

“Home,” Simon shouted back without turning. “And you find a buyer for an Ericsson S500. I found it in the park today.”

“Found it? And what about Tyson?” Marky said very unhappily.

“Who?” Simon said sarcastically and disappeared round the corner.

### 3.

There was a smell of exotic spices in the hall. The old fart had made Simon’s mum very enthusiastic about buckwheat and barley stews, cheeses made from nuts and salads. Meat and potatoes had vanished from the menu. Simon tried to convince her that he needed protein for his development and she bought him whey powder.

He could see his mother through the half-closed living room door. She was sitting motionless on an exercise bike, staring ahead. Simon shuddered. Had she hit the bottom again? Did this mean a return to the times of sedatives and her staring into empty space whilst Mexican soaps played on the TV?

He did not want to find out and tiptoed into his room. A musty smell hit his nose. He would have to do something about the dirty clothes that he had been stuffing under his bed for a month now. His mother grumbled if he changed his clothes too frequently. But he sweated profusely because of Leyla. He was hiding his underpants in the sewing machine cabinet. Now he had nothing clean left to put on. A smell of mouldy cheese was spreading from beneath his bed. In addition he had lost the Nokia 930. Usually he hid the mobile phones among his comics, but now the Nokia was gone. If mum had found it, he was for it. She was terrified that he would turn out to be like his dad. By marrying again she wanted to present him with a better role model. But he was not the type to walk towards the light. Although... The sewing machine cabinet held not only his soiled underpants but also most of his poems. Writing poetry could also be seen as a search for light.

Suddenly he closed his eyes and swayed in horror. In his imagination he spotted the Nokia sitting on the sideboard in the living room. When had he put it there? How could he have made such a stupid mistake?

*You’re stealing? You’re throwing your life away!*

All he wanted was to throw himself on top of Leyla.

He sneaked behind his mother’s back. Sitting motionless on the bike looking at the television. Simon’s eyes rapidly travelled along the sideboard. No sign of the Nokia. Panic overcame him.

“Why are you sneaking behind my back?” mum said suddenly.

“I’m not,” he said.

She looked around and gave him an accusatory look.

“Have they cancelled your classes or are you skiving again?”

“It’s half-past three.”

“Already?” she said, looking around in confusion.

“Are you alright?” Simon asked her cautiously.

“Of course.”

He studied her. “Why aren’t you pedalling if you’re sitting on the bike?”

“Because I was going downhill,” she said with a wink.

He felt relief. He did not want to be coming home with a heavy heart, wondering what state he would find her in.

“Have you eaten anything? You’re as thin as a rake.”

Simon shuffled from foot to foot. He found a bit of paper in his pocket and crumpled it into a ball.

“I’ve come to get something.”

His mother got off the bike.

“Oh, you’ll never believe what I found in the cellar,” she said excitedly. “Some old video cassettes.”

He noticed that her hair was lively and glossy and her cheeks flushed. Suddenly he regretted she had recovered. As if she had finished grieving after his dad. His eyes darted nervously around. He was going to be late again.

“Let’s sit down and watch a video together,” his mum suggested, sitting on the couch. “You’ll see what a sweetie you were.”

He sat down reluctantly.

“I’m on the tapes?”

Mum switched on the video recorder and he saw himself when he was six or seven. He was running around the garden chasing a leather football. He was wearing an ugly red swimming costume that he had hated. He felt as if he was returning to something remote and hazy. To a hallucination.

“Look how much you loved me,” his mum said tenderly.

“I forgot you were filming,” he said. These recordings from his childhood were like something sticky that stayed on his behind and left traces everywhere.

*Dad, catch the ball... dad, dad, dad!*

He shuffled restlessly. His family existed only as a memory to him. Now he drank, smoked and shagged girls in his imagination, taking responsibility for his own decisions. Like a grown up, really.

He tried to avoid his mother’s eyes, ashamed of the emptiness in his own. But sometimes a moment like this made him feel sorry for her, perhaps even some tenderness. Which was something he was also ashamed of. His dad had told him that tenderness was only for women and philosophers. Real men believed in lust. And he was lusty, so very lusty. All his school friends had already slept with a girl. Some of them even with a boy. If he didn’t soon get himself a girl, it would drop off.

*Leave your dad alone, son, he’s sleeping. Let’s get some lemonade instead.*

His mum laughed out loud. How could that be, she was never happy.

*Dad, dad, I'm going to shoot!*

"Do I really have to watch this crap?" he said brusquely.

"Look how you fall on your little bottom," his mum said. "Ooops."

*Can't you see I'm sleeping? Am I a goal? Is my head a goal, I ask you? Is it? Say something. I'll put a hole in that ball of yours, you little brat, I'll teach you to play football here.*

Even ten years ago his dad looked bad. He used to come and go like an occasional visitor. Simon and his mother gradually stopped paying any attention to his absences. Maybe his dad had left his mum a long time before his friend had seduced her. Maybe he had to leave his wife in order to find his son. Because now Simon and his father were the best of friends.

Simon pulled the remote control from his mother's hand and turned off the television.

"Why did you turn it off? Give me the remote!" said his mum angrily.

"No!"

"Perhaps this is what you're looking for?" his mum said, victoriously pulling the Nokia out of her pocket.

Simon jumped up nervously.

"That belongs to a guy at school. Give it back."

"Which guy at school?"

"You don't know any of them."

She gave him a stern look.

"Well ... it's Chill's," Simon gave in before she began dissecting his social life. Which, incidentally, was clinically dead. He knew she would feel his confession like a blow. The hand in which she was holding the phone fell. The ribbon on her track suit had come undone.

"Why are you like this?" she said. "You know I love you."

"I know."

"I've always loved you."

"I know."

"Do you know how difficult it is to love you?"

"I know. Thank you."

Suddenly she handed him the phone.

"There, do what you like," she said drily. "Do you think I don't know it's stolen and you'll sell it on?"

There was no point denying it. His story was full of holes anyway. His mum and stepfather tried to fill them the best they could. They tried to create the impression that they were a normal, decent, loving family. But since Simon had himself, two years ago, got his mum a lawyer – his dad's acquaintance – for the divorce, his mother had been following his progress with cautious respect.

"I give up," she said, lifting her arms. "Wash your hands, we're going to eat."

"I don't have the time, I'm off to the prison," he said, knocking a cup of shelled pistachios off the table. His mum munched on them between meals.

"To visit your dad? But there are no visits today."

He clenched his jaw and stared at the new lino on the floor. In their previous flat, the lino had been all curled up at the edges.

“The visiting hours on Thursdays are between four and six. If you ever visited him, you’d know.”

She ruffled his hair. He hoped that in her imagination she was not turning his hair into a halo.

“I don’t think it’s wise you going there,” she said.

He wriggled out of her reach. He blamed her for being unfaithful to his dad with his dad’s friend. And his mum blamed him for still believing in his dad.

In his mind, his departure was accompanied by the ever louder sound of Time Reaction, his favourite Slovene band.

“Are you afraid I’ll get too used to my second home?” he said as he was going out the door.

At least he knew how to leave home without a compass.

#### 4.

It was getting dark. A few couples and pensioners were walking in the park. Crickets chirped in the bushes. The smell of burning wood floated in the air.

Simon and Marky were hiding behind a hawthorn bush. The young shoots were tickling their necks. No one paid any attention to them.

“What if he doesn’t turn up?” Marky burnt his fingers with his cigarette lighter and said: “Fuck!”

“I’ve been following him for days. The brat walks home from his music lesson at this time,” said Simon. The green twigs bowed to him. A bee buzzed lazily above him. Going on all fours, he moved deeper into the bushes. Marky followed on his elbows and knees.

“I don’t quite get why he has music lessons this late. Are you sure?”

“Hey, I’m not his mum. Maybe he’s doing overtime...”

Simon closed his eyes. It would be easier for him to concentrate under clear skies. In the bushes it was humid and smelt of rotting leaves. Simon put his heart and soul into determining the kid’s direction.

“Will he pass right by here?”

“Aha.”

“And the booty?”

“iPod touch, silver. The way the little louse plays with it makes you sick.” He could smell dog shit somewhere nearby.

“Where were you earlier? I called.”

“With my dad.”

“When does he get out?”

“Soon, I hope, so that he can sort things.”

Marky looked at him with curiosity.

“What did he say about the present? The Nokia?”

Simon flexed his bicep and felt it. His firm, flexible body gave him a feeling of safety.

“How do you know I didn’t give the Nokia to Leyla?” Simon said challengingly.

“Because she’d never take it.”

Simon felt discomfort deep inside.

“Are you telling me that my dad is a louse?”

“I’m saying that my old man wouldn’t take a stolen mobile phone from me either.”

Simon’s fist sprang up and struck Marky’s head.

“Ow, you idiot.” Marky’s eyes bulged.

“Do you really think that my dad is so low?” Simon hissed. “Don’t say another word about him.”

Marky was stroking his head, grimacing.

“Chill out, man. Why are you so pissed off?”

“My dad loves me, he’d do anything for me,” Simon said to himself rather than to Marky.

Behind the bush there was a memorial plaque on a plinth, bearing the names of Partisans killed in World War Two. Simon tried to kick it. “He’s under a lot of pressure right now, doesn’t have the time, they’re trying to pin another case of forgery on him.”

“Oh yeah,” said Marky with a shrug.

“That’s the only reason he accepted Chill’s Nokia. He’ll sell it on.”

“Obviously.” Marky was trying hard not to show he was upset.

“He needs money for a lawyer.”

A dog without a collar approached them and stuck his wet nose into Marky’s elbow. The dog was nothing but skin and bone. Simon stroked its matted coat.

“Nice to animals, nasty to people,” said Marky.

The dog moved into the nearby undergrowth. The smell of his wet fur stayed with them.

“I hope that brat has his iPod with him,” Marky said after a while.

“If it was mine I’d even take it to bed with me.”

Simon leaned on his elbow and stretched out his legs. The branches around them swayed. Marky’s armpits reeked of dead meat.

“Have you ever thought of having your glands sterilized?” Simon said sharply.

“When you can tell the difference between your left and right testicle,” Marky returned the insult.

Suddenly Simon froze. A boy with a violin case was approaching along the path.

“Watch out, he’s coming,” Simon said to Marky and tensed. For a moment the guilt inside him felt like a patch of ugly, cracked lichen. He knew he would regret this. Or more likely, when the news spread, Leyla would hate him till the end of time. How could he botch everything up so badly?

“Now’s the time,” he could hear Marky whisper in his ear.

He stumbled out of the bushes like a crazed wild man of the woods.

The boy stopped breathing when a pair of strong arms grabbed him. Behind the bushes, he and his attacker rolled on the ground, wrestling. Dark brown spots appeared on the boy's jeans from the soil. Marky sat on the boy's knees and pinned down his arms. Simon put one hand on the boy's mouth and with the other searched his pockets. He found the metal casing.

Simon and Marky exchanged silent looks. Simon moved his hand from the boy's mouth, but before the boy managed to shout for help, they stuffed a fistful of soil and grass into his mouth. And then another fistful.

"Time Reaction, man!" Simon said with a hiss.

And then they ran.

Simon in the wrong direction, of course.

## 5.

Everything was quiet at home. He had expected them to be in bed by now. The smell of spices had been replaced by the smell of roast coffee. The hall was clean and shiny. His mum was a model of tidiness and cleanliness. He thought of his underpants in the sewing machine cabinet, stiff from his wet dreams. He thought of the poems also stored in the cabinet. They contained everything that was good and pure in him. No one must ever get their hands on them. Simon nearly suffocated at the thought of his mum separating the white underpants from the coloured ones. Or reading his poetry. Perhaps he should look for another hiding place.

He sneaked to the kitchen to get a slice of bread.

He stopped dead on the threshold.

His step father and his mum were sitting at the table. The light under the extractor hood above the cooker was throwing shapes like Olympic circles onto the kitchen top. A few plates were drying on the rack. It was clear he had just interrupted the frantic hissing of an argument, involving only a few words. His mum was leaning over a cup of coffee, inhaling the strong, thick aroma as if his arrival had nothing to do with her. His step father's steel cold eyes drilled into him.

"With all those stolen mobiles you could at least ring us," he said drily.

"I got lost," Simon admitted.

"Where have you been?" his mum asked vacantly without lifting her eyes from the cup.

"I don't know," he said honestly. "Is there anything to eat?" He searched the table.

"That girl Leyla called," his mum said. "You didn't answer your mobile."

"I was busy," he said. Leyla. He could feel a hardening between his legs. He thought about how varnish should be applied to wood and the procedures necessary for drying it. Peace returned to his trousers. It always worked. Simon was not achieving the minimum standards in the subject of wood finishing.

"What's happening to you?" His step father's voice was vigilant and thoughtful.

“Would you really like to know?” Simon said, cracking the joints on his fingers. He did this in order to derail his step father, but it only had an effect on his mum.

“Can you please stop that,” she said in a raised voice.

“I’ll have to reduce your pocket money,” his step father said calmly.

Simon covered his face with his hands and pretended to be upset. “Please, don’t...” He dropped his hands and went on in a monotonous voice: “Haven’t you heard what mum said? Mobile phones are selling very well.”

“There’s no need to talk to your mum like that,” said his step father.

“I wasn’t talking to her, but to you. I’m not talking to her at all.”

“Don’t talk to me like that,” his mum suddenly came alive.

“It’s late,” said the step father. “Let’s postpone this conversation until tomorrow.”