

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

LUCIJA STEPANČIČ
SUCH A PIG

PUBLISHED BY: ŠTUDENTSKA ZALOŽBA, 2008

TRANSLATED BY: GREGOR TIMOTHY ČEH

ORIGINAL TITLE: PRASEC PA TAK

NUMBER OF PAGES: 235

Lucija Stepančič: Such A Pig

1

Had it not been for the person in the street below unexpectedly answering in Slovene, I would never have looked, I wouldn't even have even blinked when someone's phone went off in their pocket. But this was enough to make me lean over the window sill. He was tall and dark, the guy on the phone. *"No, no darling, not this week. Impossible, oh, no way ... what ... No, you know I am in Maribor..."*

The shit we are in Maribor. This is plain old Venice. With all the Giuseppes walking past and the Luisas, the Americans and the Japanese. Newlyweds, OAPs and kids. Little do they all care that some *schiaivo* here is lying through his teeth. They are quite unaware that in fact the sheets hung out above the street should be blackening in shame. That the pigeons should be fainting and falling out of the sky. And that Casanova was nothing but an apprentice when you see and hear stuff like that. *"You will go and collect Domen from kindergarten, Urša, alright? All you need to do is heat up some baked beans for him. You'll read him his story, alright? I will be back by Thursday."*

The chambermaid coming out of the next building along of course has no opinion on the matter. She is carrying sheets. They are heavy. Her colleague, herself also a bit of grouch, is still yakking away with the woman at the kiosk. A Japanese family has just plodded into view amidst the houses. A black cat crosses their path. A schoolgirl with her hair in a plait opens a front door. Gianna Nanninni can be heard from behind one of the windows. *Bello, bello impossibile*. And Domen will have baked beans and listen to a bed time story. It makes you friggling mad. *"I'll explain it all to you, I can't over the phone, you know how expensive it is."*

Such a pig! Not only is he messing around, he is stingy with it. Blondie in sky blue has not let go of him for a second, clearly they are a right pair. I might fall over the windowsill from jealousy. The world has donned its shitty colours, though the room behind me still pretends nothing is going on. The world could just as well collapse and this hole here would still retain all its self-confidence. This might be partly due to the fact that Edo and I have been overpaying for it for three days now. A shabby sink and whatever furniture it contains. Ceramic tile flooring. I'd rather not mention the blankets and towels. And this window. Edo sprawled on the bed completes the picture. The blister on his heel completes Edo. Edo Junior, the darling son, far away at my mother-in-law's place, completes our holy matrimony. Its tenth anniversary.

Edo clearly didn't hear a thing. Edo is still rolling about the bed. Edo is in a bad mood and actually that's just as well. He is far more impossible to put up with when he is in a good mood. After all we are in Venice. We are here to have an unforgettable time. That is why we left our kid with Edo's parents. That is why we had been bribing him for over a week now and will probably have to bribe him further for at least a week after we get back. That is why he has been exempt from eating salad for over a month now and that is also why we keep buying various

rubbishy gifts for him and sending him postcards.

"I can explain all that when I get back home", I am still eavesdropping whilst the Pig out there is sweating and tormenting the entire universe with his lies. *"I'll call you in the evening, alright? I have an afternoon seminar and am in a bit of a rush..."*

The sky blue shadow attached to him is becoming impatient. When she moves a little I notice even her shoes are sky blue. And then it is too late. When he also turns round it is too late for me to quickly look away, because he is just as I had thought he would be from the very start, he looks very much like you. There.

So, sky blue stilettos and an afternoon seminar, be it with or without a condom, whilst it still might be right to at least continue to think about the son who has to put up with sweeties from grandma, a lax washing regime, watching the box until half past eleven, new toys, lazing about, cinema and maybe even chocolate filled pancakes for dinner every night. And in my mind he cocks a snook at me, saying, *hey, woman, just let me be*. In the background my mother-in-law is revelling in the fact that he doesn't look at all like me.

We'll teach him some order once we get back home, his father is probably thinking, spread out across the pillows, whilst the pair on the street are slowly disappearing from view. Whilst Edo is being delusional about life the Pig puts his arm around his Skyblueness' shoulder and they turn into a side street. Then they are out of sight, and all I'm left with is Edo. But I do have some good news for him too. I have left the balcony door at home wide open. Woe betide me should there be a storm. Like that time.

"You staring out of the window again?" he complains. It's hardly my fault that he cannot sleep during the day.

2

Edo has my mother's phone number saved under M. It comes up as *Minlaw* on the display screen. Of course she is not really called Minlaw, but Magda. Magda, like me. It's strange that he didn't write *The clumsiest clod alive*. The clumsiest clod alive is what he calls her, of course not in her presence. Apparently the second clumsiest clod alive is me. I wouldn't be at all surprised if I was soon to supersede her.

"Hi Mum", I say, *"No I'm not at home, no, no I won't, I'm in Venice."* I feel like a pig myself now. Mum knows these cheap tricks. She won't believe any shit about Venice. She'll probably think I'm in Maribor. Perhaps with some pig or other. Must say, she's always quick about stuff like that. At least when it concerns other people. All I wanted to do was ask about the weather. How things were in Ljubljana. Just briefly whilst Edo is in the shower. The gushing of water allows me this brief call, but I have to be quick or hunched up in panic like this, he might think I was calling some pig.

"The weather? That's what interests you? What the weather is like? Just let me find the paper. It has the full report..." she wastes time.

"You don't need to find the paper. All I wanted to know is what the weather is like where you are. What's it like outside?"

"What's it like outside?" Mother, who really is the clumsiest clod alive, seems genuinely astonished by my questioning. *"Hang on, let me look out of the window, I honestly forgot to do that today."*

All that's left now is for her to say that she's honestly forgotten where the window is. In fact by the looks of things she really has misplaced it. The phone gets fed up of waiting and graciously conks out. Empty battery, definitively. So I chuck the damn thing back into the bag. I'm getting used to it now. At least I don't have the feeling that it might explode in my hand.

Edo is still in a mood. When he comes out of the bathroom I will have to retreat into some corner. But until then I'm fine. Afterwards I will need to put on *that* face again. That one face that does not make things worse. Whilst he is in there I can still be me. He intends to lay about today as well. His shoe still chafes him, so he will not go out. There isn't a single comfortable chair in the room, so he will loll around on the bed all day.

I deserve it for not knowing how to travel alone. For being afraid of the locals – they all look the same to me and this makes them terrifying. For dreading those railway stations of theirs, all those names. Passports, money and all that. Edo, or Eddy Teddy as I sometimes call him, protects me from all this evil, though it's just as well he is unaware of this. That is why he has to put up with the vulgar superiority of this town, that is why he has to look like a dork every day, unable to distinguish between Gothic and Baroque. Edo has just turned off the shower. Taking long showers with suspect freebie soap helps to avoid Art. Later on pizza, sold relatively cheaply by the piece, also comes in handy. The sandwiches we brought from home might also have helped, but there are none left. All that we do have left is an odd assortment of tinned pâté and tuna that are likely in a day or two to have just the right level of corniness for the job. Maybe sometimes whistling at the hotel maids, neither of which is exactly a paradigm of beauty, also does the trick. So we are stuck in this dump of a hotel with Edo just stepping out of the shower, the window looking onto a squalid backstreet, and beyond the door the corridor, stuffy as is, and made even worse with the choice of wallpaper and carpet. Everywhere the joyless glances of the staff. And far away, back in Ljubljana, a French balcony left wide open. All we need is a storm, like the one last year when we went round to mother-in-law's for an afternoon and in the meanwhile half our living room was ransacked. Shattered glass, destroyed parquet flooring and, of course, in the end it was all my fault. And there is likely to be a repeat of this? At least Edo will have a real reason to give me a hard time.

3

I met him! We spoke! I had thought that the Pig would disappear forever into the crowds. But he suddenly appeared in front of me (well, rather, they both appeared, the bird was with him of course): “*Scusi, signorina*”, he started off in Italian, unable to hide his heavy Škofja Loka accent. Well, maybe even a Grosuplje one. “*Where is the boss here? Signorina...!*”

They caught me in the corridor. Now I know they have a room right next to us. It was all the fault of the two maids who came ploughing along the corridor with all their trolleys full of cleaning stuff, rubbish and laundry bags, leaving you little choice but to squeeze right against the wall to allow them to get past. I had just miraculously managed to avoid them mowing me down and probably still appeared fazed by the whole thing, when they came plodding along, the Pig and his Skyblueness, noisy and loaded with bags and stuff. Apparently they had just arrived since they were both still holding their suitcases and were complaining about the keys – it seems they were given the wrong ones. There was no way they could know that I understood their animated babble in Slovene, so I came up with this fabulous idea: what if I pretended not to understand Slovene at all? Of course I didn’t have to do very much else than reply in broken English.

Now, after a whole day of suffering, a relieved Edo is getting ready for bed. One day less in this terrible town which with its preposterous beauty makes everyone feel like an idiot. One day less, at least that. Of course he will still suffer. Life is suffering. He will have to endure the rest of the week until we finally set off for home again. Then he will ooh and aah about how wonderful it was and bore everyone with a load of photos or, even worse, slides. He will have totally forgotten how he nagged on at me about what I was doing in museums all day long, why I kept staring at those fatsos with wings when they all look the same...

The door to the next room opens and cheesy love phrases in Slovene can be heard. The Pig has a very pleasant voice. Do all liars have this warm velvety hue to their voice? It seems he and the bird are about to go out, to get some fresh air, to go on a romantic stroll; Venice is made for sweet talk and lies. Well, at least he spoke the truth to me this afternoon when I asked him, in English of course, where he was from. “*I’m from Slovenia, signorina*”, he answered politely. *Signorina!*

4

Signorina, that’s a good one! I’m hardly a signorina and look anything but Italian. I am thirty six and depressingly pale; the guy is of course just taking the piss by calling me *signorina*. I can forget the black curls and silky eye lashes, my childhood was nothing like Amarcord; all I can remember is a great deal of pointless suffering, a great deal of pointless cramming at school and that it rained all the time. Arguments at home were never funny, mother and my stepfather

argued all the time, though I suppose their arguments did reverberate a bit like those in Fellini's film... "*For God's sake, buy me some other shoes, I haven't come here to rot away in this room all day*", rather than simply saying *goodnight* Edo starts nagging again. I can barely hear what he is saying. I was just thinking about how ugly I was in primary school. I looked much like a plucked sparrow with greasy hair and grey eyes.

The Pig has just appeared in the street holding his Skyblueness (no longer wearing sky blue but black), over the shoulder and disappearing into the night. They probably won't be back for a while now and in the meanwhile the Earth could well, without any reason but very definitively, spin out of its orbit. Maybe Venice itself will suddenly, with a big sigh, collapse into the sea... Venice could sink and the fact that we had all died during the night would not even register anywhere in all the black skies of the universe. And I left the balcony window wide open back home.

By eleven Edo is fast asleep. He is probably dreaming that we are on the island of Cres, far from any Baroque that he is expected to admire. Instead there are a number of gawpers around that he can have a drink with and brag and waffle on at. He is now dreaming away happily about far away places without phantom lovers that through their dead centuries scorn the withered tourists. *My fault for not having what it takes to travel alone*, I say to myself for the umpteenth time without any success. The only reasons the locals all look the same is so they make me stand out more. And they probably just make up their place names that to me sound like outbursts of a talking parrot. And I'm supposed to make sense of all this. And my passport which I mainly have so I can keep forgetting it at home. And money that gets stolen from me. And the train stop I sleep through. And the phone that conks out. Edo, my saviour, snores away pitilessly, blissfully unaware how he is saving me from a sleepless night in a strange town which I have managed to reach with the last of the small change that was not taken from me. Where I would be scrutinized under neon lighting by evil and curious locals. A place you couldn't find anywhere on the greasy map. The last stop on a wrong turn, the last train that goes nowhere, midnight in the draughty waiting room. Edo has a good sleeping pattern and good digestion. When he finds out I left the balcony door open he will kill me. Just like that time.

If I see the Pig again tomorrow, I'll start piling it on. How Slovenia is *so beautiful*. How people there are *so nice*. How swimming in Lake Bohinj is *so good*. Even if it is only *eleven* degrees. How Ljubljana is *so interesting*, and *a real surprise*. He'll burst from all the splendour.

5

“Slovenia is so beautiful. People are so kind. Swimming is so good”, I start on him with heavy artillery. Serves him right, the Pig. For taking Urša for a fool. For neglecting Domen. And, how dare he, for looking a bit like you. *“Mountains are incredible. My favourite place to climb. And most of all I like the lakes...”* All the Pig can do is whine, *Oh, yes, and I know, and even glad to live there,* until his smile dwindles and all he manages is a *signorina* in greeting.

Venice of course did not sink in the night, nor did Earth spin out of orbit, no galaxy collided with the Milky Way, or at least we haven’t noticed it yet. Instead we have another bright day with the lions on Saint Mark’s absorbed in thought as always, respectfully waiting to be seen and the winged fartsos in the museums taking a run before being launched upon a new consignment of mortals who pay the entry fee to see them, and Edo needs new shoes, *“size eleven, not anything faggoty.”*

The last time I was here was half my life ago, and now, as I see, everything is still like it was then, eighteen years ago. I have been going on about Venice to Edo ever since we have been together, though he never asked me who I came with then. And I have no intention of going into details of my own accord. I have long stopped caring myself. We broke up, Gregor and I, as soon as he was accepted to the Academy and I was not. It was terrible how all the painter and artist business went to his head, we were all supposed to fall about in awe of him. Today he is of course, appropriately, a drunkard, and when I last saw him he still took me to be the plain old bore who went on to teacher training college and is now some dull teacher at some fucking primary school.

The eighteen or twenty year old print in my old Baedeker is trying its best to waffle on about the Doge’s Palace. This is the spot where we stood, Gregor and I, half a lifetime ago, in front of the Porta della Carta. At that point the future in Ljubljana suddenly felt somewhat unreal, smothered by the Gothic tracery. The winged lion above the doorway solemnly stepped in front of all that would inevitably happen. And all those figurines, each standing under their own elaborate canopy, serenely gesticulating about some better life. That was a day when stuff like this could still be believed. Thanks to some marble drapery, smiles and contrapposti. Sadly, it is now crystal clear to me that this stone restlessness has stood motionless for over half a millennium, and that even now, eighteen years later they are all still stuck together in the same place, angels, saints, gods and all sorts of patrons; none of whom moved an eyelid when I was having a forceps delivery and later two miscarriages.

“What is it with you lately?” Edo is surprised when I get back in the evening. *“You’re so strange, keep getting all mental, noticing everything, sticking your nose into everything.”* He smiles in a friendly way. As if the best the world can offer is a woman losing her rag.

“The hell I stick my nose in things”, I bark back. Sometimes I think my tongue can fire faster than a machine gun. *“You’re one to talk! I can’t walk ten yards down the road with you without you asking me whether those two over there are gay and stuff like that.”*

6

“Hey look, do you think those four guys across there are gay?” Edo nudges me. I bought him his new shoes – of course he still said they were faggoty, but at least he wore them. He didn’t come to Venice to rot away in a hotel room. Maybe I do him wrong when I pull a face; ever since he commented on me getting all mental yesterday, he has really been very kind. Today, out here on the promenade, I could even say sweet. And all this that is going on is no longer just a coincidence. Obviously he is now amused by the stuff that previously annoyed him.

You might even say there was nothing nicer than walking around with a wicked bitch, and wearing a daft pair of shoes – perhaps the dork has fallen in love with me again. He forgets that Venice is a city of love and he is likely to be well out of his depths here with this lovesick behaviour. He no longer cares about not knowing the difference between Gothic and Baroque. Even my mother doesn’t get on his nerves any more. She phoned today, and they even talked about the weather for quite some time. Of course it is one of the world’s more exciting conversations, talking about the weather in Ljubljana with someone for half an hour and in the end still not knowing what it’s like. Edo is behaving as if he is madly in love, he seems rejuvenated, as if we were not a pair of Slavs who have to drag their traumas with them wherever in the world they go and as irritatingly as possible display them at every opportunity, *I am from Slovenia, signor, We are Slovene, signorina*, Edo was a changed man; instead of exasperating him, the water in the canals that has begun to stink again, inspires him; he makes allowances for the fact that gondola rides are overpriced, and instead of being a blatant example that preaches out loud about overcrowding and the pointlessness of existence, the crammed vaporetos actually enthrall him. He is not even bothered that I am the worst mother in the world who is, instead of thinking about our son, engrossed with some pig and his sky blue entourage. No vampires are likely to invite us to dance in the moonlight, we are not likely to attend any masquerade ball, and we will not be boated along in a gondola at dawn or have breakfast in a garden with fountains, stone lions and palm trees, but Edo doesn’t care.

And when we get back home, Edo Junior won’t even look at us for over a week, I’m certain of this. He was the same every time (both times) we went somewhere without him; he knows his rights well enough – he finds staying at grandma’s much more exciting, but principles are principles. Not that Edo Senior cares about any of this. And my mother-in-law will again revel in the fact that he doesn’t look at all like me, that he is all big, fat and beautiful like everyone on their side of the family.

Oh, I quite forgot! What if I meet the Pig again? What if he asks me where I am from? It’s a good job I thought of it now; I can’t pretend I am from Austria or Germany. What if he speaks German? I’m clueless when it comes to German, so I’d be finished instantly. No, I’ll say I am Dutch or something. Dutch girl.

Signorina... here we go again. *Signorina olandese*. That doesn't sound that bad does it? If you think about it, I'm not that awful really and we all know that all the ones who were too cute at school now look terrible. I'm one of those who never change, slightly ugly perhaps, but not getting uglier, one of those who look the same from the age of about twelve until they are sixty, I haven't put on weight since fourth grade and if you think about it, my childhood wasn't that bad at all. My cousin and I made chocolate liqueur and kept supplying all the other kids with it. We all had a great time, cool.

There must be some private flats in the house opposite; you can hear their TV through the shutters. The evening news; news at this moment seems like it was coming at least from Mars if not from another dimension entirely, that is how unreal it feels here. The winged fatsos with their veils would soon sweep away any stuff that might seem like it still could be happening here. But in reality it is probably not quite like that, voices are all piteous, the terrible locals listen to items about accidents, murders and strikes, but to me it all sounds like shades of marble vowels in a rhythm of finely polished drapery.

Today Edo was truly in form and when he sets off it is hard to keep up with him; he rushed on round town and I am still out of breath. I never knew Venice could be consumed in a single day. The Rialto, the Correr, St Mark's of course, the full lot. He'd have drunk all the water from the canals if it wasn't that filthy, but it'd still be too little to quench his thirst.

The evening news has just finished and greasy dark blokes in vests have appeared at the windows, lighting their cigarettes. After gorging on the suffering of the World, all that is need now is a nice plateful of pasta for dinner. What is it with the Italian language anyway? It brushes over everything, strokes things, but it is as if it never really touches anything and pretty soon just as softly abandons everything. It never stops, sentences flow like running water, sometimes undulating lightly, avoiding the sharpness of corners, never leaving a trace. English is bland by comparison, or we have made it sound so. German hammers away straight at your brain. What about Slovene? Words break around countless corners, roam up and down endless staircases, like a wish, desperately looking for something, without the slightest feeling that anything will ever be found.

Evidently there is little point in drawing any conclusions about men from all this. Let's just not get into that, shall we. Where was I? Edo? Or did I mention my cousin? Yes, there was a time when we were both very much *au fait* with the scene, had it all under control until one fine day she said she had met a *real moron*, who was *real funny*, and had a *real load of dosh*. She suggested I came along so we could poke fun at him together. He was called Edo. Watch it! I spotted him right away in the crowd, she had described him well. "*Pudgy*", she said, "*repulsive. He eats all the time.*" What I couldn't have known is that he would look at me in that way. How could I describe it? Curiously. Rudely, but at the same time kindly. No moron had ever looked at me like that before, in fact, to be precise, no one had ever looked at me like that. Fall about laughing, but still seem a little sad. Be such a good guy, yet still a little wicked. Not take things

seriously. It seems strange that I now can now no longer remember whether it was the first or the second time we met that he sang *I put a spell on you* just for me. He certainly knew his Screamin'. Of course he screamed that song at me a number of times after that. Loud enough for me to fall pregnant. Everyone at home was livid, for the first five minutes mother kept jumping out of her skin and then she disappeared. It later emerged she had gone to the shops and bought some tights and a dummy for the baby. We got married soon after and my cousin who had of course been eying him up herself, was left empty handed. And Edo is no moron with bags of dosh, it soon emerged he was quite clever and poor.

8

Today of course large sections of the film have been lost. There is darkness of quite a few years where nothing can be remembered. All I know is that nothing happens any more. Apart from me asking Edo five times a day whether I have put on any weight with him answering that I have not and me still not believing him. The pigs who played at our wedding are today all either snobby suits or total losers. Wow, those were the times, music wasn't a problem, Creedence Clearwater Revival, everyone was so ugly and so kind, like some wonderful beasts. They immediately accepted baby Edo Junior into the gang. All these years later few of them ever turn up. Should I regret this? Some have become high flying suits, others are total down and outs, but thinking about it, they are all as boring as each other. And they all whinge.

A whole load of things are gone forever. As if a whole row of doors has been definitively locked and sealed. And what are we left with, Edo and me? The Venetian lions in all their wingedness graciously allow us to stay until we will run out of money. And that is all. Apart from the fact that apparently it is true that you only live once.

"Now why don't you tell me about that great idea you had again", Edo suggests after waiting for me to stop staring out of the window. I immediately know what he is on about. I had explained it all to him ten years ago. The idea that one should come to Venice blindly, without any maps, guides and all that. One should travel like some medieval troubadour, unaware that Venice even exists, wandering around aimlessly, until one fine day you suddenly find yourself here. It all just appears in front of you. You are and you aren't prepared for all you are about to face. This is the only way of seeing things here in the way they should be seen.

"Hmm, well, one should come to Venice blindly, without any maps, guides and shit like that. Travel like some medieval troubadour, unaware it even exists, wandering around aimlessly, until one fine day you suddenly come across it. It all just appears in front of you. You are and you aren't prepared for all you are about to face. This is the only way of seeing things here in the way they should be seen."

"It's not quite the same," Edo establishes, *"last time you said it differently."*

I overwhelm the Pig with superlatives flying left right and centre; everything was the nicest, the most beautiful, not to say quite incredible. What was it he said? He'd be back on Thursday? Thursday? But today is Sunday. *Slovenia is my favourite country*. Edo is making sardonic remarks about the annoying hotel maids.

The girl with the plait seems a bit down. She is the schoolgirl in the house opposite that I see whenever I look out. A dreamy creature. She's there under the window again today. People crowd past but nobody notices her sadness. In the same way she doesn't notice the idiot that comes along on his bike, the moron making a load of noise with his bell and laughing loudly making everyone flee his path. Then he is gone, leaving behind only the appalled stern locals. For god's sake, *mamma mia*, should someone not have tried to stop him? The girl is oblivious to the whole scene and it looks like she can't hear anything. And from the depths of our room Edo is fawning over me, laughing at all my ideas and deliberations such as why are there never any Japanese and Americans under our window on the estate we live on back home.

Our estate, oh yes. With all its artistic worth. It would be quite a thing if tourists were to come and admire the socialist period architecture, take photos of the green in front of the blocks of flats and the washing hanging out on the balconies, stroll past the garages listening to a guide elaborating on the post war expansion of working class suburbs. The rubbish bins and overcrowded parking lots, the local kindergarten, school, shop and that grotty café all provide a backdrop for their promenade. Yes, of course. Just like all of Venice being just a backdrop, an effect that I need to make Ljubljana feel somewhere far, far away. That's also the only reason they went to all this trouble with all this marble and all these palaces, so that at some point around the year two thousand a gal from Ljubljana would finally realize how ridiculously funny her own mistakes are. How limited, geographically. Yes, this is Venice's only mission and it manages to mask it very well, perhaps too well.

Oh my god, and the Pig of course, what a case. I suddenly remember how frivolous I am being. What if he finds out? What if he clicks that I pronounce Slovene place names with a far too Slovene accent. What was it I said last time? *Radovljica*? Or was it *Tržič*? He'll straight away realize that no foreigner could pronounce any of this stuff. Or *Bohinj*..., even just *Bled* is pronounced quite differently by foreigners and locals ... I can of course comfort myself with one fact. No one in this world would be fucking a blonde and at the same time thinking about how the name *Šobec* is pronounced.

The Pig is in his room with Blondie. Bled and Bohinj can wait.

"I was quite shocked, you know, when I realized that you are in fact quite dumb", Edo said gently. In bed. After sex. Before sleep. "It was like being hit across the head with a plank of wood," he elaborated, "when I saw that you were just as foolish as your mother if not worse. When we met I thought it was cool that you were a bit scatty, that for some reason you pretended to be like that, perhaps because you liked Woody Allen, that you had seen too many of his films and were imitating his style. Then, after the wedding, I thought about your mother and I realized that you will be much worse than her when you're her age. That even then, you outdid her sometimes."

Edo. I never asked him to start confessing to me or admitting stuff. Why couldn't he just have kept quiet and be satisfied with the round? It has been half a year. Or fallen asleep, or whatever? *"Really", he started off once again after I didn't know how to respond. "The truth is that I suffered the consequences for years. Every single day I kept asking myself whether I should waste my life with such a nitwit. You can't even dream of what I was going through. I kept thinking about divorce. But there was always Edo Junior to think about, bills to pay, the flat to furnish. Everyday I kept putting off that right moment. I kept saying to myself how things would sort themselves out, though I never believed myself."*

Edo. God damn him. He didn't stop. As he continued he got all excited, explaining how satisfied he is now and how he never expected such a thing to be possible in this world. *"Now I can see that all this suits you just right, this being slightly nuts and not quite normal, and in fact now I even hope that you won't ever improve. It's quite a luxury you being so barmy and not giving a toss about anything."*

Edo. He more or less congratulated me. Really. You don't need balls to be clever, but to be stupid you need more than most even just to survive. And you're doing fine. Now, as he said, he would not change the way I am for all the tea in China. *"What are brains anyway", he philosophized even when his eyelids were getting unbearably heavy. Brains are fucking easy as pie."*

I was about to say he shouldn't use such words in front of the kid. It came to me almost automatically. Half asleep, he still elaborated how brains are chickenshit. And then he eventually fell asleep. No Edo Junior around to suck in his every word and stick them all on a pedestal as he goes along. Edo is now fast asleep as is Edo Junior, his true copy, back at my mother-in-law's place. You can't even imagine the shit that awaits us both with Junior. He is like Edo and worse, bigmouthed and huge; once he really starts blurting out stuff, shaking mountains along the way, we are both likely to stay transfixed. *The both of you have totally fucked up your shitty lives no end*, he'll say. Hopefully that day is quite some way ahead in the future, but you never know. For tonight at least I can leave all those future times far behind. At an hour when even the vampires have long fallen asleep and only the gondolas without any thoughts are left nodding away on the waves of the lagoon. Even their mooring poles don't have to move at all. Some time yet till dawn. In the meanwhile the world could collapse and no one would even notice. Tomorrow will be another big day with tourists all over the place.

I want to be a stone at the bottom of the sea, but the sea in some far away place.

11

Edo has finally found a definition for my kind of stupidity. “*You feel everything, but know nothing,*” he explains, all excited. As if he had been looking for the words all night, thought I know how loudly he snored. “*Oh, what I’d give to see the world through your eyes for a day. That’d be interesting. I really haven’t got a clue how someone like you actually feels. Lots of images and never a single thought.*” Edo is still deeply moved and if nothing else this is at least a conversation that is just made for having with a coffee on the Piazza San Marco. For the pigeons. “*Oh, if only I knew how boring it was to be me. It seems there are times when I am blind to everything going on around me. Right now, for example, I don’t even know what the waitress who brought us our coffee looks like. Not even whether she was young or old. I forget to notice what you are wearing, I can never remember faces, I can’t even remember what kind of furniture my parents have. All that whizzes around my head are numbers, how much money we have, what we will have to eat, but I’m quite colour-blind really. A day or two after I read a book I can never remember what it was about. Same stuff with films. Even music... well, I know how to shout along, but that’s it.*”

As I said, I want to be a stone at the bottom of the ocean, the ocean furthest away from here where only fish would greet me, *buon giorno, signorina, good morning, you have not changed at all in all these years, you’ve keep well, you have kept your figure.* That’s what they would be saying with their stupid mouths. And I would never even know that there were shores in this world and that in some far far away lagoon some Edo and some other me, on a waterfront that has been built up for over a thousand years, are buying straw hats with *Venezia* written on them, and T-shirts with *Venezia by night*, mugs with *Venezia by day*, and, oh my, a black plastic gondola with a whole load of garish gold plastic decorations all over it, “*my mother will love this, and we have to get her a little something for being so kind and looking after Junior.*”

It serves us right. Why did Venice not just sing during the night or why did Earth not spin out of its orbit or why did some galaxy not just collide with the Milky Way.

12

Edo, again, without anyone asking him anything. I should just have pretended to have fallen asleep after another round of sex, louder than the neighbours this time. I should just have turned over, said goodnight and curled up, but I just had to go and notice he was still awake and had to flinch when he stared at me through the darkness and kept winking. Winking happily. “*Have you ever cheated on me?*” he asked. And I had to lie and say I hadn’t.

“*I have cheated on you*”, he said.

Could he have known I would not say anything, or even think about anything?

“But that was ages ago and only with one woman, now it’s all been calm on that front for quite a while,” he went on, somehow knowing I would not start shouting, crying or throw a fit, or even reproach him for it. *“The girl was shattered when I left her,”* he added in his uniquely considerate manner as he was sinking into sleep. All the beauty of Venice remained quite unscathed at this statement. The moonlight, as if deliberately, wrapped it all in its silvery hue. Of course it would be totally pointless to now suddenly wake him up and tell him the truth, *the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.* He’d probably just have a go at me for waking him up when he wants to sleep. How could I then explain to him that the guy next door, the Pig, reminds me of you? That he looks just like you? And that I’ll go crazy if they go on fucking like this for much longer with his sky blue crumpet?

I’ll just go to sleep. I know very well I will wake up well before Edo in the morning and, as usual, go out alone to have my first coffee of the day. And I will meet the Pig again.

“Good morning, signorina,” the Pig will say as I rush right past him. First thing in the morning. *“Are you all right? You not sleep well?”*

“Leave me alone, idiot!” I’ll shout back. *“None of your fucking business!”*

“What’s she on about?” the Skyblueness will make her voice heard in the background.

“What?” Sky blue high heels, holding a dark brown suitcase.

“Leave her alone. None of your business,” the Pig will growl. In Slovene. Just before I crash into the annoying maid, just before I manage to escape out into the open.

“Che cosa?” the maid will moan as she picks up the towels and sheets from the floor. *“Che cosa?”*

13

Che cosa, che cosa, “what the hell is she on about, more to the point what is this Dutch woman on about?”, Sky Blue Blondie really does seem to be leaving. I keep staring at the suitcase by her side. Maddalena the maid gathers up her stuff quickly and moves on. The Pig is still listening to the abuse coming from his woman, *“it’s this Dutch woman of yours who is nuts, not me, and she’s not Dutch, but she’s surely nuts, leave the suitcase, I can manage, do you think I am incapable of carrying a bag to the station? Now at least you can stop worrying that your wife might see us coming back on the same train! Go ahead with the Dutch bird now, her turn to see what a pig you really are.”* She spits out stuff like that at him, right there in front of me, without giving a shit. In the meantime Edo appears. Well, well, what a gentleman; he picks up her case and carries it down the stairs for her. The Pig grins and blows kisses after us *ciao amore, ciao my love, it was short but sweet.* Only out in the street does the woman remember that she has some pride left, briefly thanks us and trots off towards the railway station.

Edo, cool guy, puts his hand over my shoulders. All of a sudden Edo knows how nice it

is to get up early, *“well before anyone else, allowing you to have some peace and quiet for a while”*, Edo will join me early today, *“good job that you get woken up by the occasional nutters sometimes, isn’t it?”* So we both sit in the coffee shop that has only just opened. The waiter who knows me well by now, serves the first *espresso* in silence, but is far too sleepy to be amazed to see me accompanied by a man for the first time. Edo loudly commends the silence. Outside, behind the dirty shop windows, a hot day is brewing.

Edo, who says that he knows how to delight in cleverness. Edo who also knows how to delight in being a plain old nitwit and provincial bumpkin. Lines of nosy onlookers walk past the café, smiles hidden behind their sunglasses, baked in the July sun; all you need to do is poke one of them and the expressions that could well be painted onto their faces would come unstuck and fall into the canal. And then, who knows, they might even themselves all fall over like a row of dominoes, down to the last one. Bright T-shirts and all. And those silly straw hats. They can’t know of course, that I once more gave in. That I backed out again, dissembled and that all this just makes things worse for me. Whilst Edo explains that he has finally come to see the true Venice, that he only now realizes *“what this fucking place is all about.”* That this is like diving. Lost galleys and coral reefs. You see it all and know nothing about any of it. You can’t buy anything. You can’t take anything away with you. All you can do is look. *“It’s all as if I was floating”*, he tells me with great enthusiasm.

And now I cannot just tell him that we were together for two years and that I am still all messed up about it.

14

And now I also cannot tell him that we still work together, you and I, that I still see you every day and that it’s hell. *“I am Eddy Teddy, large and fat and yummy”*, my sweet husband dances around when we come back in the evening. You’d think he might have had a heat stroke after all the hours of traipsing around in the sun, but no, no chance. *“This fucking place, it’s not that bad really, being clueless when you come here, just think of the expression on the faces of all these Columbines of theirs when a dickhead like me steps on the scene!”* Should I also tell him that I was with you for two years and then you started to fancy yourself, you became quite impossible, probably thinking all women were mad about you in the way I was? That was the beginning of the end. You then also soon started to wish for a little freedom, giving me a hard time, telling me to stop being jealous and that the last thing you needed was a second one like your wife. *Be your own master*, you said. Without someone nagging away at you, just someone who would be fun. I fear little ever became of this freedom of yours, and you ended up regularly joining your wife on trips to the local cash and carry and visits to her friends and family.

I am still quiet and say nothing. Edo is mucking about in the room, getting some grub

ready, true Doge style. Once he was over his monologue on dickheads he started on banquets, definitely a subject he knows all there is to know about. As if we should all be interested. Towards the evening it became bearable outside and right now something to eat would not go amiss, so as he had promised, Edo will knock some dinner up from the liver pâté and tuna that's all we have left over from the stuff we brought from home. Out of this world. So I can't just go and tell him that I will soon start screaming, right in the middle of the staff common room, if you will continue to wink at me whenever I happen to catch your eye, in that *that's life, fuck it, c'est la vie, no offence, you're not that stupid to not know that it could not have lasted* kind of way.

You and your friendships, that are supposed to hold good memories forever, and Edo with his tin cans that only need to be mixed in a certain way to achieve tastes to die for. And mother with her calls, *Minlaw* flashing on the display screen. Edo, busy laying out our remaining tins on the bed, nicely asks me to answer it, since he is just about to turn the grubby blanket into damask, pocket knives into silverware, an entire show with the sweaty rags from our suitcase draping the scene in velvety tones. Just a while longer, and in the meantime mother is bellowing down the phone how she jolly well knows why I keep answering from here, and how it's always like this when Edo is pissing me off, "*you are totally exhausted, hysterical as hell, Edo has drained every last thing out of you, and I did tell you when you first started going out with him that he is nothing but a brute, that he is just like your father*"...

So I hang up. I'm not going to listen to all this stuff about father. Not from her I am not.

Edo, in the meantime has discovered that there is one key thing missing in the preparations for the Doge's feast – a tin opener, so he sets off. He'll find one he can borrow somewhere.

He boldly knocks on the Pig's door.

15

Edo has been with the Pig for some time. As usual, when he starts to waffle he waffles on forever. And it seems he has found his match. It seems they have started a real manly debate. If they haven't yet, they will probably soon start on the alcohol. So I can reckon on him being a while yet.

I wait in vain. I should call Mum back and tell her the usual about how happy we are with Edo and how she shouldn't worry, that we are having a *super time*, but that we are, as usual a *touch tired*, and she knows how it is. But I can't. As if it's some big deal to say that Edo is *fine* and Venice is *great*. That Edo is *being nice*, and Venice is *beautiful*, it's not too big a deal to tell a slight lie, it wouldn't be the first or the last time. But the words just won't come.

Just as well. I can't be bothered with all that now, and just thinking about all those hypocrites from the staff common room I totally give up. I shudder at the first thought of all

those bats, sniffing for blood and eagerly sucking on it. Lydia was the worst of all; she clearly had it in for me and her life's mission seemed to be checking up on me at every opportunity. People like her have no problem determining where, or rather whom, I am looking at. So that is how it started. Soon after you left me. Constant updates. I knew from before that you were some sort of family friends, your family and hers. That your families visit each other. That was no news. And that you knew her for far longer than you had known me, so what? But this bitch used every last detail she had on you and always knew when and how to bring you up again and again. How last time you had a couple of drinks together and stuff like that. Non stop. And all the stuff she heard about me, you had even, it seems, told her how afraid I was of driving, because I had a fixed idea that I would run over a child and how I never do over fifty five on the motorway ever since I supposedly saw some kids jumping over the protective fencing. That I count windows on buildings, trees lining the road, apparently even leaves on branches. That I never even move on until everything is counted. That that was also why I am so often late in the morning, checking just in case, God forbid, a new window appeared somewhere along the route during the night.

Lydia. Who knew exactly when she should smile sweetly and when she should conspiratorially lower her voice, what to say quietly, what to say loudly, when to pat me on the shoulder and when to swiftly retreat from the wreck she just incidentally happened to cause. She knew everything. Apart from one thing.

Shit, Edo is still not back. Shit, once I start warming up all this stuff about Lydia I can't stop. I'll start rolling back the film, a hundred times if necessary. Singing can be heard coming from the Pig's room. They are obviously both pissed. That's all I need now.

16

Lydia had it coming. She was blatantly provocative. And she had become unbearable, the damn bitch knew how to suck up so you wanted to puke. The more she screwed you the more she smiled, oozing pure sweetness. *And his wife, and our garden. And our dog and their swimming pool. And my husband and their piano. Picnics here and picnics there, mountains, the seaside, birthday and new year, blah, blah, blah. PCs, CDs, DVDs. Weekends. Paper plates and plastic cutlery. Mothers-in-law and melted ice cream, withered cherries and kids from the neighbourhood. Puking up and heat stroke. Photos.* Until one day I had definitely had enough. Once more she had begun telling all about this, that and the other you had said. Apparently it was always a good laugh when you started to talk about me, though you have probably told everyone in Ljubljana how mad I am. She quite openly told me how you know how to entertain the entire company with stories about me and that you also do a brilliant impression of me. So they all laugh every time, for three years, even her sister-in-law who has never even met me. So I cut her short, that Lydia, the venomous bitch, once and for all. *"He can say what he wants"*, I finally managed to

spit out. *“But he’s still a good fuck.”* Smile. *Cut.*

In an instant she turns pale. Starts shaking. There Lydia, now you have it. *Greetings to your sister-in-law.* Lydia, the bell is about to go. Lydia, we have to get back to our classrooms. Lydia, now isn’t the time for crying. The kids are still running about in the corridor, though they won’t be for long, for it’s well known there is no mercy in your class. Physics is Physics. Another minute and they will all be at their desks, because there is no excuse with the Physics teacher, no arguing, the Physics teacher, what a battleaxe, the Physics teacher, Satan himself. Lydia, where are all the picnics now, where are the mothers-in-law? Just the kids wondering why the old cow has forgotten all about the orals and is just sitting there at her desk, looking weird; but that’s scientists for you, of course.

It’s getting really noisy round at the Pig’s place. Edo, from the sound of it, is the star of the night, and is unlikely to come back any time soon. A couple of Italians appeared asking for some peace and quiet; I heard them clearly, speaking in Italian first and then trying in English. When nothing worked they eventually joined them and now, right now at this moment, they are teaching them *O sole mio*. And the other one, how does it go? *Volare... Cantare...*

17

So things with Lydia were just as I thought. She didn’t know. She thought my sighs were just ones of barren longing. *Great isn’t it to take the piss out of one in that situation?* Great, I agree, providing she doesn’t start taking the piss out of you. And now I can, late into the night if I wish, listen to the deepest sighs of her heart. If I wish they can even be heard this far. As far as Venice. Straight from Ljubljana, direct link. *How could he?* She still sighs and cries, even now, two years later. *How could he have gone with someone like you? Someone so stupid to the core? Someone that hasn’t even got the looks? How could he? And not wanted me?*

I listen to all this until I have had enough. I even get bored of it. All that Lydia, so obviously out to catch him, had ever achieved was for him to visit her with the wife and kids. I even feel sorry for her, the poor bitch, particularly because his wife is quite a terror in her own right.

It has gone totally dark outside in the meanwhile. The menagerie of Venetian art has been locked into the darkness. At a level above eight feet illuminated buildings turn in for the night. The nightmares of the day are over for now. At ground level the world is still in the mood for discussions accompanied with various Mediterranean specialities, it’s all translatable with a dose of nodding and polite smiles: *Slovenian women are extremely sensitive, oh yes, really, in literature too?*

18

Melancholic patriotic songs, yodelling, *Mein Vater ist ein Appenzeller*, three Germans came to ask for some peace and quiet, they first tried politely in English, then, when no one paid any attention to them they shouted in German like some *obersturmführers*, but are now partying along more than the Slovenes and the Italians combined, *Jolly polkas by schöne Gitti*, and the lyrics are slowly being changed, the lot of them becoming more and more vulgar, *Lili Marlen with tits to her shin*. Not only have the two Teutons joined the party, they fetched their accordion. If Edo doesn't return soon, I'll get back to all this again, though this stuff with Lydia is plain misery. Particularly since we also see each other every day, unavoidably we talk, at least when I am trying to get all those from her class to their art lessons. Lydia is pale and somewhat silent. Rain and fog. No more stuff about picnics or mothers-in-law. Antidepressants and splitting headaches. And the kids are lazy and conceited. And Lydia is obliged to listen to me. School stuff at least. Mark books, disciplinary notes, coffee and cigarettes. The kids are just like I was at their age, blind to the world. But I at least have been known to get them to move on; anyone who I put any effort into manages to pass the entry exams for art school. Lately Lydia shakes more and more whilst aspiring young artists await to be discovered.

It's late now. I stopped calling mum, and I know what she would say anyway. She would go on and on about Edo who she would say is always like this, all sweet and wonderful for three days and then it's all back to the same, hadn't I learnt my lesson? Venetian facades inspect their reflections in the water and dream of times when mankind will be extinct, leaving no one to stare at them during the day and impertinently light them up at night. When they will be beautiful simply for their own sake and for the sake of their reflections. All those millennia later when all this that is happening now will have passed like a bad nightmare.

19

Sind Sie von Slowenien? Slawonia? Slowakia? Edo didn't even know he was speaking to a German, and still admitted what a pig he was, not only that he cheated on his wife, meaning me, but that he then told his lover that I go to a psychiatrist, not that I am in therapy or anything, but that I visit one occasionally, just for consultation, but still, that's not something to spread about, is it? The Kraut listened to him and put up with him, even smiling patiently until he had had enough.

Then the chambermaids stormed in. They broke up the party and sent them all packing. It's quite unbelievable how quickly they all disappeared. And all was suddenly quiet again. Edo, who has barely noticed that the place has been cleared, continues to tell the Pig what a pig he has been, not only that he talked to his lover about how totally up the wall I was but he said that he is only with me out of pity, because women like me just should not be left out on a limb just

like that. And how all this was only the beginning of his woes. The Pig happily nods along, indeed, he himself is of the opinion that it's only worth coming to Venice once in your life and making it special with champagne and beautiful girls. In the end you compose yourself for long enough to send the bill to the wife and shoot yourself.

The terrible maids are now fast asleep and snoring. All the locals are settled, all those I am so afraid of. And their terrible railway stations also. And here is Edo, slowly but surely intensifying the suspense, at any moment now the Pig will find out just how much of a victim I am, not just how I was cheated on, but how there were rumours spread about me that were no one's business. Edo will keep on telling him how he really loved this woman and this is, as he now sees it, the worst thing that could ever happen to an earnest wife. That her man falls madly in love with someone else. The Pig agrees with him, how could he not, and adds how this stuff with the champagne and suicide should really be repeated on a monthly basis.

So they stand at the door for ages and seem unable to stop, Edo, in amazement that he could ever have loved someone more than me, and the Pig deliberating whether it maybe is not enough that you just blow your brains out, but that you should destroy everything you ever did, totally fuck up the entire lot. Right down to the frigging foundations.

They are both so very satisfied with themselves and each other.

20

You can talk with your enemy all night long, but forget about doing it with a friend. You can go anywhere you want, but once she, still lamenting back in Ljubljana, gets wind about it, she'll be happy to lend an ear. As long as she hates you badly enough. Lydia hates me enough to listen all night about that real passion of yours that surprised me so much. How is it possible that something like that disappears forever, such a deadly force? And all that is left in its place is a load of babble and manoeuvrings, with perhaps just the occasional polite smile. *That's just so pathetic, Lydia, until you could still pretend that you were a true cow, it was somehow possible, but now I can no longer pretend that I am even more stupid than I am, Lydia, if we continue to be open like this about the truth, we might still see him for what he is worth, and what else is there left for us, now that we can see what a cretin he has become? All those comments about the students, how all the girls are in love with him? Did you never suspect? And what if he has in fact been just like that since birth? What if we both just fell for a pile of crap?*

In the meantime Edo comes back. He stealthily creeps up to me and sings *I put a spell on you* into my ear. I really don't know how it is possible to sing this piece whispering, I heard all the drums and everything, this piece really wouldn't be worth anything without the drums. Creedence Clearwater Survival, tutto completo, *signorina*, but this is also the *consumatio matrimonii* of my opponent in Ljubljana. Everyone is waking up, that's how loud Edo and I are;

you see, Lydia, I must regretfully tell you that you are not alone, there are more phantoms that you could ever imagine; there was my father's wife, then two children that didn't want to be born, my mother and my therapist, of course, and now Edo's ex. All listening out into the night.

My therapist for example, would really like to butt in from behind her desk in her consultation office back in Ljubljana, but she manages to keep silent, waiting for Edo to finish fucking me whilst she drums her fingers on the laminated surface, one of her favourite hobbies. My mother is capable of patting Edo on the shoulder to make him stop and listen to her, but Edo would never pay any attention and both ladies will just have to offendedly stand there, arms folded, nodding suggestively in our direction. They wouldn't be happy with the well-intentioned competition, they would even go and tell on us to the Venetian lions. Mother never stops being appalled by me, since I am always worried I might leave something switched on or open, and I check everything five times, still not trusting myself. She's no star in that area either, but according to her I am still young enough and ought to be able to deal with it. *Symptoms of forced neurosis*, my therapist nods, looking over at the same time to see what kind of an impression her diagnosis has on the lions in Saint Mark's Square, their marble eyes filled with eternity: "Insecurity," she says, "anxiety and in the background perhaps also a subconscious desire to cause a real catastrophe and then start over anew." The two children that didn't want to be born listen without a comment, they will never learn how to speak, life, that had almost begun for them is now just a dream further and further away by the day, a crazy mirage with their parents and brother.

The marble lions yawn, open one eye each, really wanting to go to sleep, and angrily grumble: "Come on, she isn't as daft as she looks, it has been pretty clear to her all along that such a thing cannot last forever, now all she really wants to know is that she managed to leave a trace of her with him, but it is all too obvious that she hasn't." And they fall back to sleep.

Of all the mirages, the first one to fall asleep is the mother-in-law back in Ljubljana. Especially tonight. Edo Junior, *bambino*, has tired her to death and the woman soon nods off. She's so fast asleep she can't even revel in the fact that little Edo is just like all of them and nothing like as stupid as me and all my relatives.

Delayed reactions, echoes across sleeping piazzas, though very quietly. *Hopeless situations*, howls amidst the houses like the wind. *Frustrations not dealt with*, reflects on the water in the canals. In the end all that remains is a page out of a newspaper being blown about in the light night breeze.

"And resorting to aesthetics" mother screeches, but no living soul is listening to her any longer. "What was it he had said? He floats? Yes, sure, he's one to float. I'd like to see that!"

“The guy called his wife and couldn’t reach her, you know, that shit about the number you have dialled being unavailable, but the shit is that this message was in Italian”, Edo told me. “So it was instantly clear that she was not in Maribor as she claimed to be, but somewhere in Italy, so it was all immediately clear to the husband.”

The hotel maid, Maddalena, or whatever her name is, is already cleaning the Pig’s room. She has opened the window wide and will soon get rid of the smell of cigarettes. Edo also noticed her carrying the sheets out of the room. It’s Thursday, of course, it’s Thursday. Edo remembered the tin opener that he was supposed to be bringing – but he bumped into the maid and her invincibly large Hoover. For a moment I also noticed the pitiful silhouette waving her hands about over the havoc. Maddalena (or is it Manuela) swiftly tidies up while we eat. Breakfast in bed whilst the poor woman is slogging away. In fact we soon discovered that we hadn’t even needed the tin opener since the pâté and the tuna had ring-pulls. *“Her fault for not keeping an eye on that mobile of hers, woman and technology, I’ve always said the two don’t go together”,* Edo laughs with his mouth full. He has totally forgotten he is supposed to have a hangover.

He made a good breakfast. At least I can admit that. Of course the Doge’s banquet had come to nothing, but this way there was at least something left for his empty stomach in the morning. Now he can at least enthuse over crappy tins that he mops clean with stale bread: according to Edo this is just the right kind of meal to have on the tail of a whole chain of tremendous episodes of sex. Edo, such a romantic soul. Then there are also the Pig’s recollections that the poor guy doesn’t even know where to start reflecting upon. Edo likes talking most whilst he eats, perhaps that accounts for his size.

“And the thing is that I don’t get this whole thing. The wife, clearly at fault, instantly packs up her bags in panic, just imagine, just grabs everything and packs her bags to return to her husband. Just think about it. As if she could hardly wait to get caught. She had a good time, she played around, and now she suddenly turns round, cursing her Latin lover and calling him an idiot. She curses all she had experienced, everything that had been nice, and rushes back to Ljubljana to collect her penance. Alright, I can say I don’t get it, but in a way it is logical in its own way. At least slightly.”

The vacuum cleaner in the room next door has stopped. The sound of the squeaky trolley with all the cleaning stuff fades as it moves further down the corridor. Edo pretends to be indifferent, but I catch him trying to listen in. I was too. What he has yet to tell me is that the only thing worth it in this *fucking life*, is to visit Venice. There you mess about with whores and champagne, sent the bill back home to the wife, and shoot yourself. Of course you leave all the doors and windows wide open at home. Or even better, you leave the electricity and gas turned on. Something like that. *“So then the whole thing is blown up, and if it coincides with the end of the world, even better.”* I know it all already. Then those bills for the champagne and the whores orbit in space amidst rocky debris. Through weightlessness. The Pig is no fool. The Pig knows how to fantasize. Well, now, as he drives towards home probably less so, but otherwise...

Then there's Mother, far away in Ljubljana, calling us right at this moment and getting a recorded message in Italian that the number is unavailable, *Il cliente non e disponibile* it keeps telling her. Now she will know for sure I am not in Maribor, now she will know I really am in Venice. It'll be a shock! Just as she wanted to have a real go at Edo and sort things out once and forever. Now she can forget it. She'll just have to moan about him for now and then craftily interrogate him when we return. She was always good at that kind of stuff, at least where other people were concerned. But there is one thing she is not counting on. That this time Edo will know how to charm the pants off her with his newfound patience. The lessons taught by Venice are no small matter. Edo has discovered his real assets, his charming phlegmatic disposition, for example. He will totally confuse her with his presence and disarm her with his lack of resistance. He will patiently listen to her messed up monologues that are messed up even when she herself is not messed up. He will just smile his saintly smile. And wait for her to leave. Then he will whisper to me with a grin on his face: "*Do you know what that Pig came up with? He thought you were Dutch. He didn't have a clue that we were married. He said to me, quite a bird, this Dutch girl. Screw her for me, will you!?*"