

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

LUCIJA STEPANČIČ
THURSDAY AT SIX

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TRANSLATED BY: GREGOR TIMOTHY ČEH

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Lucija Stepančič: Thursday At Six

*Ignacio goes up the tiers
with all his death on his shoulders*

Federico García Lorca, The Spilled Blood, Cante Jondo

1

Today I will meet Davor. He will give me AIDS, but of course I don't know that yet. How come? It is 1998. For now there is no real cure for it. This doesn't trouble me, not yet anyway. I go out for a while in the afternoon. There's plenty of time to catch the virus, hours. Actually I don't really fancy anyone. I still pretend that you are the only one I am capable of thinking of. Particularly when I called you today. Phone booths are already a rarity and I had to walk all the way to the centre of town. The streets were full of people. On a messed up summer's day drawing to its close people are still rushing around. The town centre is chock-a-block with traffic. Other things in this world, like holidays and going to the seaside for example, don't feature on any of these people's minds. Miserable sods.

At least I have one advantage here. No one cares tuppence about me. I am virtually incognito. Surrounded by working madmen hurrying along. What would they think if they knew I still call you every Thursday at six? From a phone booth. Like today. I was particularly careful to be on time, despite knowing in advance that, yet again, you won't be at home. You never are anyway. I always get Magda answering the phone telling me you went to play tennis.

Tennis! That's a good one! The shit you tell her, convinced she believes you! It's what you kept telling her when we were together. For two whole years you fed her the same story. It seems you still do, but no longer because of me. Magda is always equally polite and correct though she must have realised some time ago that something was dodgy here. How come she's never lost it? After all, she could at least be interested in who you are with now. Unless of course she is totally dumb. But I don't think she is. Quite the opposite.

It's the same old story this time. Again Magda picks up the phone and is utterly polite. Again she tells me where you have gone and doesn't let on that she remembers me from last week or show any impatience. She doesn't even lose enough of her temper to put the phone down too quickly. I ask myself whether it's not just a kind of perversion. The only sound coming from the phone is the signal that the conversation has ended. The universe is reduced to the size of the receiver in a public phone booth. To sticky plastic and dirty glass. A second later to the phone card that pops out of the slot. Two seconds later to Tjaša's face. When I step aside the cosmos breathes in some air again, increasing to the size of the entire square, claiming back its

houses and people, driving and rushing around as if they'll never stop. The flat on the other end of the receiver recedes into the background again. Somewhere far away. To the north northeast. And there is Tjaša in the foreground, waiting for me to get out of the booth. As if right now all I need to attain total happiness is her hysterical smile. Heck, where did she come from?

You know, Tjaša, you remember her? I told you about her, she's the one in the room next to mine. Tjaša, the sex bomb about to explode as the guys see her. In front of old ladies she pretends to be some kind of goody two-shoes. And now she has decided that I'm up for it. Right here on the spot. It seems to please her immensely. At least judging by her grin. So we go. Of course she would never guess I am a perv, calling from the public phone booth just so my number cannot be traced. And how I harass the poor woman who has done nothing wrong and has on top of it all, been cheated on. Tjaša doesn't know any of this. That's a good thing since she might like the whole thing too much. You won't believe it, but she suddenly knows all there is to know about cool dudes. Ever since she hitched up with Škis last month she has mastered the entire cosmos from the basics upwards. Tiny but juicy, like a curly little devil. A fairly plain face with some acne even, but still quite a catch. I suppose she uses Edo as a finance minister, or what?

By now we're well beyond the square, down the next road as well. We walk and walk, but it feels like a miracle. This bird is obviously serious and I, as if I have no choice in the matter, follow her blindly. Does Edo even know what he's in for, what a dimwit he's getting involved with? He'll probably blame me in the end. Poor devil, now he can't expect me to act as some kind of chaperone here. Using a broom to turn away the various Rumpelstiltskins that approach her. As if they can't see that in fact Tjaša too has really short legs. Does he think I'm some kind of guarantee for fidelity and honesty? He is obviously unaware that with his wimpy fuck which the bird suddenly has such a desire to describe to anyone and everyone he has already been designated to the rubbish dump of history. The guy goes on smiling, day and night. He just doesn't want to notice that she's been in the final stages of flipping out for some time now, probably for the past six months, ever since she completely dropped out of uni and got herself a job as a shop assistant. Edo still sees her as some kind of goddess. How can someone so clever at college be so dumb about women at home? As an economics graduate he'll come in useful. The guy can start dreaming about the times she won't be selling pots and pans to get by. He will be her sole provider, and they'll have a whole load of brats running around too. Should I still be feeling sorry for him? That's Edo for you, always taking notes and ready to lend them as well. So this is how kindness is repaid in this world.

Six forty. Tjaša is still pulling me along. We have been walking for ages. The place we arrive at is no drug store. It was of course a pub, the place where Štrikec works, and the guy who is so happy to see her isn't Edo. It's Škis I guess. Who else! He snogs her and pats her on the arse. Well, I have to say he very politely does also turn towards me. Tjaša introduces me to the crowd, shouting with great enthusiasm, "This here is Katarina, my room-mate. I've brought her along to air her out a little, just so she doesn't start rotting alive". Five to seven. The guys all laugh out loud. No end of toasts follow. To the Boss, to her health and her beauty, ha, ha, ha.

By then it's eight. Eight, created by the clock hands, spurred on by the devil. Our dates every Thursday lasted until eight. In the summer we had no problem in finding secret places to

meet. It all worked well. Every other nut in this world plays tennis, so your excuse was good. I couldn't smuggle you into my rented room (sneaking around rented rooms disgusted you anyway) and you also believed that you can have it off with someone more or less anywhere. Then we would sit around various cafés. It seemed like it would never end. And now I'm supposed to believe that you really are attending classes at that stupid sports club? Does Magda believe you? Or is she just playing dumb with me?

Still better than all these guys here, Škis, Štrikec and so on. Just so you know, Tjaša has obviously blabbed all about us. All that I probably shouldn't have told her, but obviously have. That I'm involved with you, that the whole thing has been dragging on, that you can't make your mind up and stuff like that. And they seem to be so enthusiastic. About you, though they've never seen you in their life, about me, who they already seem to be seeing double, about both of us together. All that talking about you. How this was what you've long needed, how you are married to a freak anyway. Just so you know. Now they are raising their glasses to your courage, to your luck. To you finally losing your cherry. That's what they said. You would die if you knew that without knowing you these dorks here know everything about you. Couldn't I just have kept my trap shut in front of Tjaša? Now it seems the whole world knows what she knows. As you can imagine, I can't wait to get out of there. It's around ten when I say I'm going to leave. The guys are too pissed anyway. They keep patting me on the shoulder. At least they don't know you've already dumped me. Or anything about that Thursday that was our final one. Irrevocably our last. Nevermore. Not that they would care, Tjaša laughs, Škis kisses me goodbye. I wipe my cheek discretely when they both look away. And we're off. Yes, with Tjaša. She insisted on coming. This vivaciousness of hers. How can I stand it? I was then declared to be a first-rate discovery. Tjaša, what a cow. She could easily have stayed there and continued snogging with Škis if she thought she should. Perhaps even get wasted if she believes that in doing so she will become a true woman. Whatever. Rather than tagging along with me. But she comes.

Will Magda ever get sick of this? Will she ever fly off the handle with me? I wonder. What could she say anyway? Call me a bitch and tell me to stop pestering her husband? She could make my life as bitter as hell if she wanted to. How come she doesn't think of this?

I know. I should have stopped all this phone call stuff ages ago. It's quite bonkers. Thursdays at six. Up until that Thursday in January when you didn't turn up. You called me and said you wouldn't be coming. Not that day, nor any other day. Never again. I should calm down and forget about you. You're not worthy of me. Some consolation! I thought I was about to lose it. Until a week later I had this idea. Thursday, six o'clock again. I thought of calling you. At home. To see how you spend your time now. With a devilish joy I really did call you to hear what I knew I would, that you are not at home, that you are playing tennis. Magda explained all this to me very politely and obligingly. And I just can't, I still cannot not call you. Every week, right on time. I torture myself like this by thinking all the time about who you are with now, still giving the same excuses at home. All I have left is Magda's voice every week. After all we are both in the same shit.

This Thursday is drawing to a close. It's still the start of summer. 1998. Not only am I unaware that I am about to be infected, I don't even know that research into AIDS is advancing

and that a few years later it won't be considered a fatal disease any more. Soon it will be reduced to a moderate chronic ailment and later a mere nuisance, where you are put on medication and go for regular check-ups. All way too late for me and for you of course. So I cannot be aware even of the fact that fate is already actively plotting against me. It has made Davor's car break down, so he is walking back through town from the garage in order to catch the train home. Superficially tonight seems like any other summer evening.

2

I tell Tjaša that I lost my mobile. Perhaps she's seen it around the house. I talk just so I don't have to listen to her rambling. The bird is well wasted. So totalled she's a joy to look at. She hasn't seen my mobile, hic. But lurking around public phone booths does suit me immensely. According to Tjaša I was made for them, old-fashioned and pathetic. As you see, Tjaša appreciates and respects me nearly as much as I do her. Just as well she seems to have forgotten about you. With her some things are just better left unexplained. Whatever. Today I will again have to get into bed without that feeling that you've just had me. Even if I can still remember everything. It all becomes a torment, even that kiss I can still feel to this day. More and more of a torment, it seems.

Ida would tell me to get my act together. Heck, what for? Being clever is the last thing you need. All you achieve is that they forget you even faster. Blokes see a woman's cleverness as a concession. And you should see Tjaša now when I tell her this! She hugs me and is visibly touched. Knowing her, the slogan will be eternalised on the walls of the loos at the pub. As for Ida, who you may just still remember; I can tell you that, unlike Tjaša, she hasn't always been a cow. That's probably why she messed up even worse once things really got to her. She's the one whose name you could never remember. Whatshername you would call her. You care little about Ida and her cleverness or all the cleverness in the world. I tell men who say things like "I know you've got brains", where to stick it. When someone says this it is as if they whack you over the head and bury you five feet under ground.

Is it obvious that I too have also had a few drinks in the meanwhile? If only I could rid myself of that memory, you know which one. The one I keep chewing over and over until it drives me nuts. Just so you know, it seems that the alcohol has taken its toll on me too. Apparently it's summertime. And summertime is a time for fun. Why else have all the stars congregated in the sky if it's not for us to enjoy ourselves and screw around like a bunch of happy monkeys. The air, simmering with smells of summer and the sea far away. Indulgence everywhere. Wherever you look, kissing, ice creams, loud conversations during bike rides. Everyone but me, off to make beds in the Hotel Dvor every morning, scrub loos and change tablecloths. And there's the exams that aren't going to get passes on their own. Another hellish summer.

What if Magda has finished with you? Ah? You see, I never even thought of this. What then? What could possibly happen? I would have a go at you, corner you and make you admit everything. But she doesn't want to give me the joy of finding out. She coldly and slightly sadistically observes me still drooling over you. Waiting for me to get fed up. Perhaps she's really enjoying this? Who knows? The more she gloats over this torture, the more politely she behaves and talks to me. Perhaps we are both as perverted as each other? I'll be wondering who you're with just like every Thursday when you lie to Magda. Without knowing that I will soon slash my wrists over you, but only because I won't find the courage to tell you I gave you the virus. So today, rather short-sightedly, I restrict myself to cursing you, cursing the bitches who, as I imagine, throw themselves at your feet everywhere you go, and cursing Magda who seems no dumb bimbo and is sure to be preparing some kind of highly original revenge. Cursing Dvor where I am working for the third consecutive year, cursing Cvetka and all those beds, cursing the loos, cursing the hotel business in general, cursing the catering business and tourism and anything else that fits.

3

We reach the railway station, Tjaša and I. Don't ask me how. We probably decided to set off towards home at some point but didn't quite manage it all the way. That's when I see Davor!

He doesn't even recognise me, but alright, what I'm more surprised at is that he is here at all, especially since he is obviously waiting for a train. Davor, your mate, fatal to women. The fucker usually drives around in dream cars, now he's sitting here on the bench humbly resigning himself to the train timetable. Your colleague! Who has been close to you all day at work and is now returning home! I get the shivers. The guy is really cute, much cuter than I remember him. Especially now that he thinks no one is looking at him. Aren't you going to become jealous? Do you think I hadn't noticed his sporty physique before? Now I notice new details. Beautiful feet for example (in flip-flops) and magnificent hands with long fingers. You are nowhere around to start fearing for my immense love for you. You could have known by now how trivial mankind is, only appearances are important. And you are obviously not at all worried that I am no better myself!

Infatuated with himself and the minutes going by far too slowly, he never notices that I am brazenly staring at him. The fact that he knows nothing about me and I know more or less everything about him is all too amusing. For example I know that he swore never to sleep with anyone more than once. And I know what he's like in bed too. Ida told me. She was much more talkative than usual and so very forthcoming with the details that the whole thing seemed worth remembering.

Tjaša also immediately notices him. She would, of course! More or less for the hell of it I say that I will have him today. I bet he'll fall for the first trick I try on him. Just to mock the way

Tjaša is staring at him. By now she's getting on my nerves and this way at least I will get rid of her. So when the train draws in I follow him onto it. I wonder how this will turn out, I think. Of course I can't even imagine what will really happen. I finally sum up enough dumb courage to follow him into the compartment and, despite the carriage being empty, sit right opposite him. A late afternoon train journey when even the empty trains are ready to retire for the day.

Does he think I couldn't handle it if he let me know that he has noticed my provocative boldness? He doesn't flinch, not even when I increase the pressure and start staring at him with that come-on-look-at-me look. Outside the summer day is still resisting dusk. Does Davor even remember that ages ago he had it off with Ida? I'd imagine not. It was from the very start only meant to be one of those expendable fucks. It is fairly obvious that the likes of Ida are fairly common with this guy.

The journey is a short one. Just as far as the first station out of town. The place is the pits. Mad as I am, I follow him, past a shed they call a railway station, past some garden plots to a run-down bar. Do all spruced up hotshots from town disappear into forgotten corners like this one? I'm seeing a secret part of Davor's life. He seems to feel at home here. All too obviously he seems to have relaxed. As if a model such as him can truly start living only in the courtyard of a run down pub, amongst the tables and plastic table-cloths. He becomes surprisingly natural, pleasant even, sitting on a plastic chair. He orders a beer and sips on it slowly, clearly thinking about absolutely nothing. Least of all AIDS. That you cannot see even from my privileged vantage point.

This evening has turned out quite seductive. Exceptionally poetic, even. That's when I decide to take the madness further and just go and speak to him. After all, what's the worst thing that can happen if I just ask him for a light? So, at last I step out of the shadow and ask him for his lighter. He flicks it and waits for me to light my cigarette. That's when I have to ask him for a fag too. And we both burst out laughing madly.

It's obviously destined to happen. We understand each other instantly. We don't even finish off our drinks or smoke our cigarettes. We set off for his place right then. Not even Ida knows that the guy lives in the ground floor flat of a rather large and rather nice villa that I suddenly notice in the middle of this dump. I didn't expect to see anything like this here. Not that this is the time to ponder upon how it fits into its surroundings. In that same instant we are in his room. Everything happens so fast.

In the morning I wake up next to him on a mattress on the floor of a room without a single cupboard or picture or any of the usual furniture. The walls are decorated with surf boards and skis. Right opposite the bed is the largest television screen available. Unlike what you might expect from such a conceited guy, not a single mirror in sight.

Should I be telling you he was a hundred times better than you? Would you at least be interested in what his dick is like? I don't want to wake him when I get up. I'll have to go to work today. Will he be going to work too? Where he will see you, like he does every day? That's not my business now. I must get back to town as soon as possible. No one will care that today I will arrive at the hotel from a totally different direction. Maybe you would? A little at least?

Have I already caught it? Or will it be the third or fourth time round? In fact I don't have a clue what I have incurred. I am a bit concerned that I haven't brought a book with me. As if I really study that much, eh? It's clear to me that there won't be any studying, but still. At least I'm thinking about it. This lounging about has to end at some point. Cvetka had better not find me reading. I'll have to wait for her to get back to her brooms. That's where she belongs. The book would then be driven around on the housekeeping trolley with the bedding. I probably won't even open the first page. At least this way I can pretend I won't ever have to plod through this shit. The fact that I hadn't been home at all and my lack of sleep are beginning to show.

Just so you know, at least today I don't have to try not to call you at work at seven o'clock in the morning. I feel too awful. In a few years' time it may be possible to take some drug even a few days after suspicious sex and repress the virus, but for now I haven't even thought of the possibility that Davor could be HIV positive.

Cvetka is calling me, again. She never lets up, especially when I'm on dining room duty. According to her the turnover of guests at breakfast does not warrant our continuous presence there. Figaro here, Figaro there. At least I can think about things on the way. About Thursdays. Or Magda, even. How come this woman hasn't blown her top yet? I know I would in her place, a long time ago. I can think about this cleaning the loos, but right now there are three filthy tablecloths that really do need changing. The dining room is like that of the Titanic, I mean as it is now, after all these years. The guests are like the sinful souls traipsing around the ocean floor. In the meanwhile I can think about the fucked up world, about how it's about time we all went mad and started telling it all as it is, right to the end. Add to this the cooks with their plucky silhouettes and all their stories about the guests. This one, that one and all of them. Looking at them from behind the pots and pans they just look so much cuter. Details of who did what last night. That's what I have to listen to. Wise women! They know everything! It's as if they were there in person!

Mirko calls me. I must cover Reception. Nowhere is there a single sign that I only have a few months left to live. I will slash my wrists soon after finding out that I am HIV positive.

I don't even know that you divorced a while back. That you were divorced even when you started going out with me. You didn't tell me. You're no fool. Of course I also don't know that Magda can only feel sorry for me. I would have stopped calling instantly had I known that she can but pity me. To the extent that the woman is seriously thinking she ought to tell me everything at some point. How you are long divorced and how you lived at her place because you had nowhere else to go. How she's quite appalled by the way you have been treating me like some stupid bird. How she was just a means of scaring others away with your marital status whenever it suited you. Obviously, I don't even know that you have in fact finally moved away. Would she really tell me? How half a year ago your grandmother died and left you her flat? You must have your reasons for hiding it all from me. It's not too hard to understand. Any fool could see. You want to avoid the process of ownership that had unavoidably started, or at least you thought it had. You think I'm one of those women who just have to crown their blunders with a gold ring. Something like that does not tempt you, of course. How could it possibly? You have only just got out of your previous mess. Once bitten twice shy, as they say.

So you also spent this night in your new old flat, safe from all my matrimonial stalking, free like you have always wanted to be. To sit around, to open a beer, all cool and easy. You are a little surprised, not to say disappointed, that beautiful nymphomaniacs without taboos didn't go crazy for you now that you had a flat. This for some reason is not what happened. I am thinking totally in the wrong direction with my bouts of jealousy and guessing in who-are-you-with-now mode. I can't know that you are inconsolably bored, lounging about the flat. That your days stretch and repeat themselves between work in the morning and the box in the evenings. Well, and the same place at the bar of the local pub, day after day. That you can only wonder when this celibacy might come to an end. When you might catch something cute, pleasantly loose and easy. The material on offer is exceptional so there's sure to be something in there for you, after all that's how you met me. But there never is. Not even at the local bar. Just some spotty teenagers at the table we used to sit at and some under-age cows that don't even notice that the guys they are flirting with are still on shandy. So much for all the resolutions that this time you'll be wiser, that you will let any girl know from the start that you are not looking for serious relationships, but you do appreciate quality fun, and the determination that you can also convince her that this is best for both of you. All they need to do is glance at you and you shrink. They dismiss you as far too old in the first second. All the longing glances are in vain and every night you drop into your bed alone.

Do you remember the mornings I would call you at work every day at seven? Do you at least miss those calls? But since then miracles have stopped happening in this world. This will just be an ordinary working day for both of us, you having yet again to postpone your five minutes of fame, me, knackered and worn out, wanting to just lie down in one of the beds I'm supposed to be making up and fall asleep.

Now there's this phone. By the bed I am making up. Ringing persistently. I should have

just let it ring. But I still hope it will be you. All this is going to get to me in the end. Phones ringing in one room or another, as if someone was following me around, though there is no one here at this time of day. Looks like my messed up nerves are getting the wrong message.

The hour before I get off work drags on forever. I seem to be more alert. The bright day outside is fulfilling its promising start. The way home will include excessive brightness from the sun, cars madly bolting down narrow roads and figures walking in the opposite direction. All as if from a nightmare. A twenty minute walk home. Half way there is the railway station. At this hour it is camouflaged with feverish rushing around. Nowhere will it be obvious how seductive it can be with all its platforms, departures and arrivals. After the station the urban sprawl thins out. I will leave you far behind, working for an hour longer than me. Never again shall we meet up at lunch time in the caf half way between the hotel and your office. Never again shall I wait for you to join me at some bar after work. We work all of two hundred metres from each other and have never met by chance. So there is no point in me looking out for you. All I see are dead serious, business-elegant women with an attitude. Our college was full of girls like this, in control, full of enthusiasm, but never forgetting to discreetly show off their new shoes - ones to die for. Progressively trotting down the crowded street to meet their lawyers and economists, infatuated with the vision of relatively high incomes, relatively elegant cars with favourable credit conditions and travel to exotic destinations. Ljubljana is full of such women, but somewhere close to the railway station they suddenly disappear (I never have managed to find out where to), they just seem to vanish together with their relatively successful careers. They or their carefully pressed skirts and jackets are nowhere to be seen. This is not a place for sophisticated women. Only college girls, usually ones with a slightly Goth image. I will soon be beyond the railway station, the underpasses, the coffee shops and all that. You can see our landlady's house from afar. As if to rub in just how long a way I still have to get home. I am supposed to plod along this long stretch in the pouring rain or burning sun. Only once I have toiled along the entire length am I worthy of pushing the front door open. Eight hundred metres without a spot of shade or shelter, with all the mirages that appear along the way. With thirty seven degrees centigrade like now, how can anyone say summer is a time for fun.

A row of phone booths lines my route along the length of the railway station. It is not as if at any moment the phone in any of them would ring. It's not as if it would be for me. It's not that it would be you. Twenty paces further down there is talk only about the bus strike and when this nightmare might end. The long haul drivers aren't giving in apparently, though the local drivers have already agreed. Stuff like that, blah, blah, blah, blah. Another eight hundred metres and I will be home. Along the way it feels like there are phones hiding in the grass on the verge. There just to ring for me. You would be so obsessed that a mobile wouldn't be enough for you.

It's a good job I'm wearing my sunglasses. Behind the dark shades I can cry if I want to. If I screamed, would anyone even hear me in this host of angels?

6

Of course the landlady is not stupid. I don't want anyone to think that. You just have to approach the house and her almighty eye awakens. I push open the garden gate and there it is. Observing from above. Knowing all, seeing all, controlling all and used to it all. Like the Eye of Providence, enclosed by a triangle, respectfully gazing from its eternity upon the insufficiency of all things earthly. I just need to step on the gravelled garden path and I know that there is no escaping it; the trees are here to provide a deceptive peace, so are the roses and the range of other flowers. I don't know what they are called, but I notice it is all very colourful. All these plants, here only to sway in the wind. All their leafy presence and shade are just a front. The birds can sing all they want. The lawn is mowed and the old bitch is asleep in the hammock. Her eye, set in auto mode for eternity, will go on working. Controlling all entrances and staircases. All hidden corners give in to it without any resistance whatsoever. The lower floors rented off to retired school teachers, the steep staircase, wallpaper from year dot, carpets, candlesticks. Even whilst she sleeps her gaze will calmly oversee all the old widow's clutter. She herself can be snoring if she pleases, but the eye will still be hard at work. Without fail. *For where her treasure is, there her heart will be also.*

But in the afternoon when I appear and the heat has still not eased off her salvation is still far away. She will raise her head enough to see that I'm not Zorro, come to kiss her hand. She would also be just about satisfied with Robin Hood. Why else did she paint her nails if not for them? But instead of some hero in a dark cloak there is only me, creeping up towards the house. She sighs and collapses back into her sweaty delirium amongst stale memories.

All those stairs left to the top. Creaking on each step, dust falling. Framed pictures and clocks on the walls. The privilege of having a room in her flat upstairs. Though I have the blinds right down throughout summer, I still can't sleep. Day or night. The landlady down in the garden, realising that it wasn't something worth turning her head for, will roll her eyes.

"Know what! You walk like a bloke!" she will shout after me.

Poor woman! It's clear nothing else will happen today. In about an hour's time she will be disturbed by the crunching of gravel on the drive. It will be Edo, bringing Tjaša back from work. A little later the bus will drop off Jožica on the corner. She's another old hag who also lives in our house. This has long been a house of women, lonely women, abandoned in all possible ways. It is sure to be haunted some day. There's more than enough ordinary, everyday shit going on. Tjaša has nervous breakdowns on a more or less daily basis. She's only just started working at that shop and regularly comes back from work ready to explode. All those pots and pressure cookers she is surrounded by all day long seem to really get to her. It doesn't help that Edo picks her up from work every day and drops her straight off to the watchful eye of the landlady. She has a go at him every time. Calls him an idiot. If he really is such a calm guy he could at least pretend not to be. All his calm approach just works her up further. When we are alone she's a

different person. Especially if we have a drink or two. Why did I ever tell her about you! It's a good job you don't know that I did.

7

Just imagine, Tjaša is idealistically in love. As soon as the door shuts behind her and all of us who get on her nerves with our superficiality and absolute insignificance disappear, we have a case of spontaneous combustion.

She has all the afternoon to recreate Škis as the prince of her dreams. Who else would have taught her how to party? Who else could be a hedonist and fucker capable of making her feel like a star? Besides, Tjaša doesn't really have to make any final decisions yet. That's the best thing about it. No begging, no resentment, no misunderstandings, no trauma, drama or hysteria that usually accompanies her break-ups. She will just enjoy every sweet drop of this situation all on her own. Oh, that blessed wedding of her cousin's where she saw her beloved Škis among the wedding guests. He couldn't take his eyes off her. It wasn't only that Tjaša was wearing her most sexy rags. Tjaša and Škis used to go to school together. It's quite a shock to see someone when you least expect to. Suddenly it no longer mattered that it was he who had mocked her throughout school about her wretched tits, gigantic even then, far too provocative for school. After all these years. No school, blackboards or teachers, just some over-decorated dance floor and a bunch of drunken musicians. As if it was all set up just for him to admit that the reason he made fun of her was because he fancied her. The tormenting details and justifiable questions disappeared in an instant without a trace.

That's what Edo gets for choosing to revise over joining her that day. He just had to be punished for having an exam the following week that he passed with a straight A. If only he knew that Tjaša and Škis had such a great time on the night of the wedding, much better than the groom with his pregnant bride. Edo, so naïve! Why did she ever start going out with him? She can't even remember herself and doesn't even want to try. She won't ruin a beautiful afternoon with the fact that she is with him only because she's afraid of being alone. She never thought a woman with thighs her size could ever get a bloke unless he was slightly bonkers. No worries, her day has come as well. She no longer needs to pretend Edo is her wonderful beast, because he is not. She went out and got herself someone who is.

Needless to say, Škis doesn't have a clue what kind of pedestal he has been placed on. Or that he is sure not to be very pleased if he found out. Or that Tjaša is in no hurry to start advertising her fancy growing into a secret love. Škis, oh Škis. Or that he is actually no longer as cute as he was at school. Then it wasn't obvious that he would soon be bald, now it is. Or that, as people back home at her village would say, at his age he could at least be earning his keep. Not to mention his greasy hair and that impossible rocker jacket he wears. At least he could try to make an effort for her sake. Then there's also the fact that she's not really interested in what

he says. If it turns out that she won't be able to handle all this for long, who else will ever show her eternal love? For sure not Edo, still living with his mother and unable to break away!

Would Škis be capable of sorting it all out and demanding that she makes her mind up? Even Tjaša isn't so dumb as to expect something like that to happen. For now she is satisfied with not having to think about Edo. Isn't life with Škis just like a fairytale? Like a film or at least a comic strip? Isn't that what makes it worthwhile? She's not even sure that a rocker and party goer is what she really wants to be. In fact she can't stand very loud music or bingeing. And then there's all this talk about drugs! But, for Škis? She can be a little patient if needed, she sure knows how. Just as she knows how to pretend at being a good student working during the holidays and ignore the fact that she can more or less forget about finishing uni and ever getting a degree. We are talking about Tjaša, clueless as to her place in this world or to what she wants from life. At least there are a few possibilities that she could never imagine herself pursuing. She knows for sure that she will never be an intellectual, an astronaut, a cook, a sportswoman, a world traveller, a terrorist and so on. And on and on. She sheds a few tears without really knowing why. Then she's back on cloud nine, for the fourth time in a single afternoon.

Once she's done with dreaming she goes downstairs to watch a soap with the landlady. Now she doesn't even need to dream any more.

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In the afternoon all my dried up tears start rolling again. Onto the wooden floor, the tiles in the hall, the bed covers everywhere. Of course they always have to leave patches that are instantly recognisable as dried up tears. Even on the staircase, even in the local bus, even in the dirtiest of places, you can instantly recognise a mark made by a tear. You can't miss it. You can be right in the middle of an ugly, smelly crowd, but it is still immediately obvious whether a mark is made by a tear or not. It drops to the ground with a splash. Don't ever rely on the sweaty paws of the aforementioned crowd to walk it into oblivion in the general rush of town traffic. Even if the rubbish collection truck drives over it, a tear is still a tear. You can try any method of removing it. You may get rid of the actual mark, but it always shows that here was a tear that has been removed. Simple as that.

In their roles of Scylla and Charybdis the landlady and Tjaša will be watching the box for a while yet. At least they won't be going on and on with advice about removing stains from this, that and the other. So I must take care not to allow myself to die crying. No point in wasting all day before death by powdering my face, is there? Or combing my hair. Ida knows why. Because I have no patience. No discipline. Forget the flowers, the candles and the black lace dress. What's the point in the nicest of funeral music when there is no order? What's the point of professional make-up if there is no pride? I should just accept that you're a jerk and won't condescend to

attending. She knows that. What about that film? About I-forget-what-her-name-was? The woman who ended her life, but finally realised that the whole thing wasn't worth it. Death or no death, the guy didn't show up. A pointless funeral! So pointless she stood up and walked away! Not as a ghost, that I would understand. She didn't start haunting people. The woman simply reversed her death. Returned to life, you could say. I hope I won't have to stomp over candles and wreaths all stiff from lying in the coffin like her. Careful that my long dress doesn't catch fire. Not even cremation could stop me. That's how stubborn I can be. And what are women like this supposed to do then? Nothing. Once the shrieks and cries of the horrified people at her funeral settled she went home. Even the papers soon stopped writing about it. Pretty quickly boredom set back in. The poor woman soon realised she was exactly where she was before. Nowhere. Worse than nowhere. Of course all this didn't make the guy fall in love with her again. Who would? Days stolen from death became longer and longer. Soon she didn't know what to do with her salvaged life. She's probably still alive today if she hasn't died yet, well, re-died, so to speak.

What would Ida say about all this? Ida with her refined cynicism she's so proud of. She'd probably come to the conclusion that all this stuff with Magda is plain old mischief, that now it's down to who is going to give in first and that we are both behaving as if we have infinite time left. She'd probably conclude that we deserved each other and that there is no way of knowing which one of us is madder than the other.