

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

NEJC GAZVODA
EXCURSION

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Nejc Gazvoda: Excursion

“She won. I can’t believe it.”

Lojze grinned widely. I sat by the fire, took off my shoes, and warmed the soles of my feet.

“Did it turn out okay?” she asked, laughing naughtily. Dimples deepened her cheeks.

“Outstanding,” I confirmed.

“Tell him, Vida,” said Lojze, still grinning, “tell him how you won.” His sweater was full of little holes. They had been made by sparks from the fire where we sat.

“Okay,” she said. She crossed her legs and cleared her throat.

“Primož was with me. You remember him? He’s one year older.”

“He was in first class,” I said.

“Oh right, that Primož,” Lojze added, “first class Primož.”

“Yeah, that Primož. Well, he was with me in my room, and we were naked, rolling around on the bed, getting ready to have sex. In order to buoy him up a bit, I took his...”

“Primož’s?” Lojze smirked.

“Yeah, Primož’s, into my mouth. It wasn’t very long before we heard the sound of a key in the door. My parents had come home earlier than they said they would.”

“They always do that,” I said. “You should be used to it by now.”

“Don’t interrupt,” Vida said with a pretense of anger. “We got dressed and straightened up in record time. You can imagine. He pulled up his pants, buckling his belt in a panic. I put on my bra. My mother’s steps were echoing on the stairs. When she entered my room, we were each sitting in our own chair and acting as if nothing had happened.”

“So what’s so controversial here?” I asked.

“Don’t interrupt, you pig,” she said and punched me in the shoulder. “Primož stood up nicely and introduced himself to my mother. We started to talk and my father came in. It all lasted about five minutes. I checked to see if Primož felt uncomfortable. He was unusually pale and he looked at me in horror. I thought he was just nervous because he was meeting my parents for the first time.”

Lojze, who had been giggling throughout, burst into thunderous laughter and rolled on the floor.

Vida calmly continued without looking at him: “My parents were also acting a little bit weird.”

Lojze squealed with laughter.

“They looked at me strangely. When they finally left the room, I turned toward Primož and said: *Well, we did it!* But Primož still looked stunned.”

“Shiiit!” Lojze howled. “I think I’m going to faint!” His face was like a cooked crab.

“He reached his hand out toward my face and rubbed my cheek softly. He was holding in his hand a long, twisted, greasy pubic hair.”

Lojze couldn’t take it anymore. And me neither. The whole situation was made even funnier by Vida who was looking at us with a deadly serious expression on her face.

I wiped away the tears of glee and exhaled: “What happened then?”

“I left him,” she said.

Lojze and I congratulated Vida for winning the competition for the most embarrassing story around the campfire and we massaged her feet as a prize.

“We’ll need to... do... you know what...” Vida said quietly.

We nodded.

“Do we have everything?” Vida asked.

“Corkscrew, wine, wine, wine, wine, beer, beer, cans,” Lojze confirmed. “We have everything!”

“The saleswoman’s looking at me strangely,” I complained. “She probably thinks I’m going to steal something.”

“Ma’am!” Lojze called out and the saleswoman looked at him.

“You have a moustache!” he roared.

The store manager kindly threw us out and we bought what we needed at a gas station about an hour from the city.

We drove toward the sea with a full trunk.

“Our last excursion, eh?” Vida said. Her feet were up on the dashboard and she was putting black polish onto her nails.

“Your feet will look like they have gangrene.”

She didn’t listen to me.

“Yes, our last excursion,” said Lojze.

“Don’t blubber,” I piped up from the back. We had drawn straws and I had gotten the shortest so I had to sit squished between the luggage in the far back. “What do you mean last excursion? We’ll still see each other.”

I didn’t even believe what I said.

We made our first stop in a sort of youth hostel a little bit away from the coast. It wasn’t that the journey was so long but we wanted to travel the longest possible time. We shared the beds economically. Lojze, who was the fattest, got the single bed in the corner. Vida and I shared the double bed. We smoked pot and sang patriotic songs until five in the morning.

The heat crept into the car. I opened the window and leaned my head out.

“You look like a dog,” said Vida and patted me on the shoulder.

“Be quiet,” I said, pulling my head back in. “You’re just mad because you drew the short straw.”

We stopped by the overpass. Lojze and I pissed on the cars passing below on the highway. Vida watched as we determined after a long conversation that she wouldn’t be capable of such a maneuver. The cars honked and we laughed like idiots.

Lojze and Vida had been schoolmates. We met each other in the first year at the gym. Lojze was playing volleyball with some girls, and all the boys were laughing at him because he was fat and looked funny. I defended him. I didn’t achieve anything. They just started making fun of me too, but then they soon got sick of it. Lojze sent me a grateful look and I winked at him. Then I stared at Vida who was wearing shorts and a tight black t-shirt. After the class was over, she came up to me and thanked me for defending Lojze. She asked me out for a drink. I thought it was a date and I doused myself in perfume. When I came to the bar, she was sitting at a table with Lojze and they both waved at me. After five minutes of conversation, my disappointment abated. We got along. The same sense of humor, the same enjoyment in immature silliness. After only an hour, we were already having farting competitions. Vida won for loudness and Lojze got a consolation prize for the magnificent stink of his.

“Can they arrest you for peeing on cars?” Lojze asked. He held the wheel feverishly and raced through the narrow streets of the seaside town.

“No,” said Vida.

“Look at her,” I said, “our future lawyer.”

“Shut up! Future what? A weigher of books?”

“Comparativist,” I said insulted.

“What a pathetic title,” Lojze sighed.

We parked at the pier and dipped our feet into the sea. The sun was sinking into the horizon. Then we moved a little bit away, under the pines, and lit a fire. The future lawyer said that we would be fucked if they caught us, which is why we moved a little bit farther away and lit our fire on the pavement. She was still not satisfied but Lojze and me couldn't care less and just drank, and soon she was drunk too. She rolled around on the pine needles and laughed.

"I like to give head," she confessed.

"Good for you," said Lojze.

I smoked a cigarette and Lojze poked a stick into the fire. I thought Vida was asleep. She was just lying there motionless.

"Thanks," she said all of a sudden.

"Why?" Lojze and I asked at the same time.

"You know," she said. "The sickness... and all."

"Ah," I said. "What's with you? That's what friends are for."

"Not everyone would have stuck by me," she said.

"I admit," said Lojze, "you were annoying. You howled at me like a dog every time I stepped into your room and you kept calling me a fat pimp."

"Out of love," she said.

We grinned.

"Strip," I said, looking at her.

Lojze held his breath.

"No," she said.

"Yes," I said. "Otherwise I'll do it for you. And I'll do it slowly."

I was sure she was going to kick me in the balls. But she slowly stood up and started to move her hips, a little stiffly at first and then more seductively. She unbuttoned the top button on her tiny hot pants and slowly pulled them down, first to her knees. Then she stepped out of them altogether and left them on the ground. I looked at her red thong.

"Pick up your shorts," I ordered. "Otherwise they'll be full of pine needles."

I crawled to her on my knees. She was wiggling her hips again and I stopped in front of her circling pelvis as if I were in a trance.

"No, you don't," she said and wagged her finger at me. I crawled back to my place.

She slowly took off her shirt and spun it for a while on her finger. Then she tossed it to Lojze who was watching quite calmly, as if he were bored.

She walked right up to me.

"You undress me," she said.

I stuck my index finger into her panties and slowly pulled them down.

“Only to my knees,” she said. “I don’t want them to get all prickly.”

“Only one little line of hair,” I said hoarsely. Lojze grinned.

Vida slapped me lightly.

“You are naughty,” she said and pulled her thong back up.

“Now your bra,” I said.

She went pale.

“You’re sick,” she hissed.

“Vida, you’re bra. I’m not doing this for myself. I’m doing it for you.”

I stood up and held her by the shoulders. Tears had started to stream down her cheeks.

“She doesn’t have to...” Lojze said.

“Quiet,” I said. “Vida, do it. If you can’t do it in front of us, you’ll never do it.”

She nodded. She took a step back. She reached her hands behind her back. She unhooked her bra. She hesitated a little and then slipped it off.

She didn’t have a left breast. The right one was so beautiful that everything about her seemed beautiful. Where the left one should have been, there was only a small scar.

“Are you happy now?” she asked quietly.

“Yes,” I said. “It doesn’t look bad at all. Fuck it. You have one. Anyone who doesn’t like you because of it isn’t even worthy of being pissed on by Lojze’s little dick.”

She burst into tears and hugged me. Lojze joined us. We fell asleep in the car and the next morning we were a little quieter than usual.

“She’s grateful to you,” said Lojze when we were packing the car. Vida threw stones into the sea.

“But she also hates me,” I said.

“Also that,” Lojze agreed. “But it’s worth it.”

“It is,” I nodded.

“You start,” Lojze said to Vida.

The sea murmured. We were going home in the morning.

“Wouldn’t you rather massage my feet one more time?” she asked.

“I’ll start,” I said.

“How does it go again?”

“The worst thing that you have ever done to us.”

I was quiet for a while, thinking.

“Why are we even doing this?”

“You know,” said Vida. “Don’t pretend you don’t. We’ve talked about it enough. We do it so we’ll argue, because we have to, otherwise we’ll miss each other too much.”

“That’s stupid,” I said. “Wouldn’t it be better to say goodbye with nice memories?”

“No,” said Lojze. “It would be better to talk about the worst thing. I’ll start.”

He cleared his throat.

“Vida... I made fun of you when you were sick. Once when I was drunk. I said you had it cut off on purpose... because... it made you back curve and you didn’t want to be a humpback old lady.”

He turned to me.

“I was the one who told on you when you broke the window when we were on school duty.”

“I almost got thrown out because of that,” I said.

“I know,” said Lojze. “I just freaked out.”

“I told him you were a homo,” said Vida.

Lojze’s went pale.

“That’s why you didn’t want to stay in the same room with me on the graduation trip?”

“Yeah,” I said.

We were quiet for a while.

“I made fun of you because of your thinning hair,” Vida said to me. “I said you were going to have a head like a pumpkin. I always told my girlfriends how ugly you were.”

“Oh,” I said. I had become uncomfortably hot.

“Now you say something,” said Lojze. “It’s your turn.”

“I didn’t hand in your essay for that contest because it was better than mine,” I said to Lojze.

I turned to Vida.

“Primož wanted to get together with you again and I knew that you liked him too. I told him about your cancer even though you asked me not to. I didn’t want him to be with you.”

The silence was torture.

“We’re pigs,” said Vida.

“No,” said Lojze. “More like people.”

Vida hugged me. Then I hugged Lojze. Then we cried for a while.

“It didn’t work, did it?” said Vida, half crying, half laughing.

“Not really,” I said.

We fell asleep entwined.

I said goodbye to Lojze at the airport.

“America is fucked up,” I told him.

“I know,” he answered. “But my mother’s waiting for me.”

“What sentimental shit,” I grinned. “Like in Casablanca.”

“I can’t help it if she picked an old ugly rich American,” Lojze defended himself.

I hugged him.

“If I were gay,” I said, “You’d be the first guy I’d fuck.”

“Thanks,” he smiled. “Say goodbye to Vida. Too bad she couldn’t come.”

I watched him as he got on the airplane. Just before he disappeared into the metal bird, he took his pants down in front of a horrified stewardess and waved his dick at me. I laughed until the plane took off.

“Florence is fucked up,” I said to Vida. Most of the passengers were already on the train. The platform struck me as depressing.

“No, it’s not,” she said.

“You’re right,” I agreed. “It’s not. Will you come back?”

“No,” she answered. “You know what it’s like here.”

“I know,” I said. “Congratulations again for getting into university there. I hope the dean sexually abuses you.”

“I like you too,” she said and hugged me.

She adjusted her hair and boarded the train.

“I love you!” I cried.

She paused mid-stride.

“No, you don’t,” she said simply. She held the metal railing with one hand. “You just think you need me because you play for keeps. But you’re losing something that you know was always yours.”

She blew me a kiss and disappeared into the train. The whistle sounded and the wagons squealed. I started to walk away. The platform trembled.

“Hey!”

I turned around. Vida’s hand had reached out the window and something black had fallen to the ground. I ran back and picked it up as the train pulled out of the station. She had left me her bra.

I took off my t-shirt and put the bra on. Vida had taught me how to clasp it. Then I sat down on the ground, crossed my legs, and closed my eyes.

The Gravedigger

I don’t allow them to decompose.

At one in the morning, I went out and looked under the streetlights. The rare passing cars paid no attention to me and I none to them. I had work to do.

A shaft of light illuminated a dark clump in the middle of the lonely street. When the street was clear and the noise quieted, I ran across the street and figured out it was a hedgehog. It looked in pretty good shape, only slightly injured on its belly. It had probably died from internal injuries.

I picked it up and carried it to the side of the street and hid it in some grass.

About a half hour later, after looking up and down a kilometer of road, I found a run-over cat on the side. It was quite beat-up. It didn’t have a head.

I put the bodies into a bag and slowly set off into the woods. People don’t know the essence of this place. It is not in the magnificent trees here, the walking paths, or the big light meadows. But these woods are filled with dark inaccessible corners that conceal true treasure. I made my way through the dense undergrowth to a small well-hidden glade beneath a crown of trees. I used to lovingly call it my little glade.

Arrayed across a few square meters are five wooden crosses and five wooden headstones with writing on each one. Five tiny graves. Now two new ones would appear.

It was late and I didn’t have much time, so I made the crosses from two large branches that I found at the edge of the clearing and bound them with hazel wood strips. They looked a bit shabby but never mind. Then I dug a small ditch into which I placed the hedgehog and buried it. I always keep a shovel at the glade and a big waterproof pen to write on the headstones. This is what I wrote on the hedgehog’s stone:

“Here lies Franci, the hedgehog. He lived a full and beautiful life. His family will miss him: his little wife, Alojzija, his mother, Margarete, and his son, Ferdi. Rest in peace.”

I was more original with the cat:

“Ophelia, the cat, fell as a war hero during a fierce battle with the Grizold estate. She perished from her wounds. She will be remembered by her lover Alfonz.”

Seven graves, seven destinies that I created. My little kingdom where the lost feel at least a tiny bit of grandeur.

On my way home, I stopped as always at the house of Aunt Gabi. She never sleeps. Her light is always on. I knocked on the living room window and she waved, all wrinkled and lonely, from her rocking chair. She is already so old that even the oldest people from our street think of her as old. Each month, one neighbor is responsible for bringing her food every three days and checking in to see if she is breathing. I often go to see her myself and tell her a few stories. She always smiled at me and her eyes would shine.

It stank of paint at home because dad had painted the living room blue. I don't know what got into him. The blue color would have suited a woman more, though there hasn't been a woman in the house for years. My father used to bring women in from time to time, but they always came late and always left early. Just like my mother left when I was three years old. Whenever dad gets a dull look in his eye and sits quietly in a chair, I know he is thinking about her.

In my room, I picked up a pair of binoculars and looked at the attic window of the neighboring house. The girl wasn't there. Don't think I'm some kind of a pervert. She's just really special. She's always a little sad and she has a dreamy look. I think she knows I'm watching her, but maybe it doesn't bother her because she never closes the curtains. The only problem is her boyfriend who doesn't like me. If we happen to meet he gives me a real ugly look, but the girl always smiles.

The next morning my father drove me to school. I turned left in front of the school door as I always do and walked into the park. I hadn't discovered anything in school that interested me. It just made me sad. Mostly I had sat on the windowsill all alone and looked at the happy people outside walking happily and talking happily and it made my heart heavy. I somehow finished the first year, but then at the end of the next September I just quit. Of course, my dad didn't know that – I don't know how I pulled that off. I needed a lot of administrative interventions and good luck but it all worked out in the end.

I don't do anything in the park. I sit and watch. The autumn turn of the leaves, the reawakening in spring, the dying of winter. The people who walk past seem to suit the seasons. In the winter, they're usually sad, wrapped in scarves with heavy wool hats on their heads. I know there's nothing unusual about that but I like it all the same, that synchronicity. As if they were afraid of winter. The cold forces us to hide. Spring awakens and lays us bare. But it's always winter for me. At least that's the way I feel. Wintry.

After a week or so I had some work again. I found a big brown dog in a ditch. It was late at night when I dragged him into the woods and made an especially nice grave for him.

Aunt Gabi's light was on. This was unusual because it was really late and she never stays up that late. I went up to the window and sighed with relief – she was sitting in her rocking chair and smiling. I knocked on the window and waved. Nothing. I knocked again. I looked a little closer. Her mouth was slightly open and her cheeks shone with an unusual pallor. But her eyes. My animals had those kind of eyes when I buried them. Aunt Gabi's were glassy and lifeless.

I climbed into the apartment through the window and somehow managed to put her into a burlap potato bag that I found in the basement. Aunt Gabi was small and bony but still it took me some time to drag her into the forest. I knew that my little clearing was becoming full and I would soon have to find a new place. But Aunt Gabi deserved company because she had been such a wonderful woman. And also lonely. The people who had brought her food didn't like her very much. Probably because she smelled of death. But I was used to that smell.

Finally I dug a big enough grave and put Aunt Gabi into it. I picked some flowers at the edge of the clearing and threw them in the hole – I wanted it to be nice. While I was putting the soil back in, I slipped and the shovel struck the bag in the grave but I didn't have time to check where it hit because it was late. I quickly finished the burial and decided that I'd make the cross the next day. When I came home, the police were already waiting for me.

Aunt Gabi supposedly died because of the blow of my shovel against her head, which, of course, isn't true. It was an accident. But nobody listens to me. Probably somebody saw me through the window. The police beat me in the interrogation room and called me a sick, crazy, anti-Christ. They wrote in the newspaper that I abused dead animals and probably also had abused my aunt. My father doesn't want to see me. It said in the newspaper that I had always struck him as odd and maybe I wasn't even his. My mother supposedly left because she felt guilty. My only friend was a poor little policeman who smuggled a thick woven rope into my cell. Just before I kicked the chair aside, I quietly uttered the words that I had written in my suicide note: "Bury me in the little clearing."

The Lake

I don't remember how we met. Probably she was always here when I was there. But once was enough for both of us to be here. Or there.

It started slowly. With walks. Usually they were long and sometimes we didn't say even a word, just sensed each other.

I would be understating it if I said that she had merely changed me. A more picturesque way of describing her influence on me would be to say that a car driving one hundred kilometers an hour had crashed into a concrete wall. Boom! Fast and effective. I see more. I know much more. I also loved unconditionally for the first time in my life.

She began to spend her days alone in her room and got a sad and painful look on her face. Of course, nothing changed on the outside. But something changed inside and she started to perceive the outside world differently. She was experiencing it from the wrong side. Everything cut into her.

Sometimes she told me things that made me shiver. She lay in my lap and her eyes moved sharply and she took shallow breaths. I heard stories, stories about anonymous people. About a boy who killed the murderer of his parents even though his parents are still alive, about a boy who didn't understand death, about a girl who couldn't take this world, about a boy who discovered the essence underneath a tree in the park. Telling the last story, she usually cried, sobbed, and hugged me, and I would whisper *Remember the crow*. She always calmed down when I reminded her of it.

In the fall, we had been walking home across the woods and a crow flew up between us, hovered there for a while, and then screeched. Then a second crow flew up from another tree and screeched as well. The first crow answered and they met in the vault of the sky. In that instant, I realized we should imitate them. We came home late in the evening because we hid in the woods, screeching like crazy, looking for each other, and hugging when we finally found each other.

That memory always calmed her down.

Maybe someone might say that she had supernatural characteristics. But I viewed her extraordinary pain only as something sorrowful. I knew she always hurt. When we walked through the city she looked lost. Sometimes her gaze would come to rest on a person and I knew that she knew him but I had no idea how or from where. Only that she felt unbelievably strong. And I knew something else to – that she couldn't go on like this much longer.

I took a week off and rented an apartment where I could spend every free moment with her. She became less sad and very calm. I bathed her and washed her long hair. I wrapped her in a robe and put her to bed. Then I stared out the window and felt terribly lost. I could have simply left her and lived my life but I didn't want that. I was too deep in it and it was too beautiful. I still thought then that something could be salvaged.

Then one night she woke up and asked me to drive her somewhere. We sat in the car and drove. She briskly told me which way to go.

We came to the lake.

She slowly made her way to the bank and leaned over the surface of the water. The moonlight was so bright that I could see how her hair covered her face, how her tears fell into the water. I held her and kissed her but she only wanted to look at her own reflection.

I watched her contorted face and felt sick. I couldn't leave. With clenched teeth and blood pounding in my head, I stared at her reflection knowing what it meant but being unable to say it. It was all too obvious.

I couldn't prevent her from jumping in the water. I waited some time. She drowned the pain of the world.

Maybe it is really very simple. Evil and pain have their shape and they settle in all of us, though in some more than others. She couldn't accept that. But she did feel what was in other people. She felt those destinies moving into her. The worst things happen to the best people.

I cried for a while and then decided go back to the city.

The Call

She sat less than a meter from me, with her hands resting on the bar, her gaze sliding up and down over the muscular barman who was wiping the glasses and probably waiting for better times. She was drinking a martini. I wanted to be a granule of sugar on her lips. She knew I was looking at her. She didn't react. She crossed her legs a little tighter. She had a pretty knee with a small scar on the joint. She had covered the scar with make-up. It was interesting, all the things she thought of to do. I wanted to know if she was single. I looked for signs. The mark of a kiss on her neck. The looks she sent all around because everybody was looking at her. These were not the looks of a single woman. Her gaze slid over us as if we were little puppies who she knew would always come back. Then she withdrew her gaze so quickly that we all froze. And sank back into our glasses.

She got up and went to the bathroom. The barman looked very obviously at her ass.

"All you need to do is whistle, chief," I said.

"When I see you again, when I'm not at work, I'm gonna fuck your mother," he said. He made a loud rumble knocking his huge signet ring against the bar. She was still not back yet. The seconds passed very slowly. I had the feeling that the whole bar had gone quiet. As if we were all waiting for her to come back. At that moment, the bar trembled ever so slightly. Her mobile phone was vibrating. It was a little one, some kind of designer model with a light pink case. The barman had gone off somewhere. Nobody was looking at me. I wanted to see who was calling. I reached out my hand and grabbed it. Adrenaline rushed through my veins and I felt turned on. The word blinked on the screen – LOVEY. I reached out my hand to put the phone back. The barman still wasn't around. Maybe that last beer gave me courage. Too much courage. I answered the phone.

"Hello," I said.

“Katarina? Hello?” It was a man. “Who is this?”

“Her boyfriend,” I said with a low voice. I was shaking from excitement. I saw the barman who had come back and was staring at a list of orders.

“I don’t have time for this bullshit. I really don’t. Tell her that that they took her dad to the hospital. Heart attack. He might die. She should call her mother as soon as possible.”

The line went dead. I looked up. The barman looked at me. His signet ring shone under the neon light of the bar. I very slowly stretched out my hand and, staring into the waiter’s eyes, put the mobile phone down where it was before. He stared motionless back at me and washed the glasses. That’s when she came back. Even before I saw her, I heard the sound of her high heels. She sat down and crossed her arms. She was no longer looking around her. Her eyes were half closed. I felt drops of sweat gathering on my forehead.

The waiter turned off the water and wiped his hands. He approached her. She moved her hand slightly away but then he came close to her ear and whispered. He was murmuring something. His gaze shifted toward me. She was also excitedly saying something to the barman. I stared into my beer. I heard her getting up and taking two steps. I felt her standing right next to me. I looked at the barman. He stood with his arms crossed, flexed his biceps, and grinned at me.

“Your dad’s dying,” I said, staring ahead of me. “He’s in the hospital. Call your mother.” The waiter’s smile disappeared. His hands fell to his sides. They begin to shake slightly. A few seconds passed. I only heard her deep breathing.

“Thank you,” she said finally. Sincerely. Her voice quavered. She put her phone in her bag and walked out of the bar with rapid steps.

I drank a beer with the waiter on my account. Then he paid. Then I did. We stayed in the bar until everyone had left and the waiter turned out almost all the lights. We sat in the dark. Somehow it was easier to drink if we didn’t have to see into each other’s eyes.

Seven twenty-five

I cut myself before I go into the city.

The knife has an engraved handle. I make a straight cut from my wrist to my elbow. I hold my arm under the water and watch the rivulets of blood. The scene is filmic, suicidal, tense. An adrenaline bomb. I put a bandage on and still feel the pain. I pull the air into my mouth through clenched teeth with a hiss. I see things that I wouldn’t see otherwise and feel a bit of fear about my fucking perfect life. Fear and pain keep me together.

No, I don’t have a tragic story. I don’t go to a psychiatrist. I didn’t have an unhappy love affair. Most people say I’m good-looking and I feel good about myself when I look in the mirror. But I want misfortune. I need tragedy. I want my completely blue eyes to be red and swollen from crying, and I want to hear suffering and see hell. There’s no more room for happiness

because I've had enough of it. I'm sick of happiness and caresses and turning cartwheels in a meadow at dawn. Time for something else.

I know I'm a spoiled brat. But nobody suffers because of me. I'm irrelevant. You all walk past me, unknowing. I used to think I could change things. That I would have an influence on the world and breathe with it and changes its flow. Now I just cough. The flow is gone. And she's gone.

The city has a pulse. The city has no pulse. I'd philosophize about it but I realize that I would vomit in disgust behind the first bush if I started to write about our city, a city of little teenage girls who lost their innocence too soon, a city of pimply teenage boys who haven't lost theirs yet but want to, a city of lonely thirty-year old women with big behinds who dream of the time of lost innocence, and a city of drunken fifty-year old men who no longer know what innocence is. The streets are dirty, the lighting is bad, the neon signs scream illusions, and the bars reek of cigarette smoke and endless debates about unimportant things. Welcome.

I inhale the sound of the bar around me, its sharp aroma of perfume and smoke. Tears come to my eyes and my arm burns. The barely distinguishable figures around me, twenty-year olds with cigarettes, my peers with glassy eyes and absent stares, all the little people who litter the world. I am waiting for one of these little people who might come in handy for once. That's why I am patiently sitting here, my head slightly back, my eyes closed. The bar sounds even worse than it looks. Breathing, hysterical laughter, terrible music blasting from speakers, the clanking of glasses. And the sound of futility, the sound of conversations that will never touch anyone outside of this bar but mean everything here.

"Will you drink something?"

I open my eyes and am looking at a little girl with chocolate eyes who is smiling at me. She becomes uncomfortable when she catches sight of my bandaged arm and my old wounds, the broken bone above my right eye, and the ashtray in my hand. I shake my head no.

After a while, one of the little people comes in and brings me what I need.

There is probably some kind of confused smile on my face because an older lady nods at me encouragingly as I walk past. I nod back and pull down my cap down over my face and hurry off as fast as my legs will carry me. I'm afraid of old people. They know too much.

I come to a place of lies and deceit, to a little space somewhere at the edge of the city park where I lost my innocence, broke a heart and got mine back broken even worse, where I drank more alcohol than a small Russian army, where I once busted my friend's jaw because of his lies, where I have been deceived again and again. Hey, but still I've somehow always quietly loved this place. Scabies of ugliness. The aesthetics of disgust – when you think even of your own vomit with a certain warmth in your heart because it was followed by a friendly smile and a friendly pat on the back.

I sit under a tree and rub my chin. At this moment, in my pocket, I have access to the meaning of everything that pursued me during the last five years when I was with her. It is only a single step into an unknown world.

The little person who sold me the thing guaranteed me unbelievable pleasure and revelation. I take it, lie down, and close my eyes.

I don't see anything.

I just hear a scream.

Does it sometimes seem to you as if someone has slipped past you? You look up quickly but there's no one there. Maybe it was me. Among my people, people of the shadows, it is said that you can see us in the place and the time of our death. Before I say more, I have a job for you: take a breath and scream. Scream until there's no more air left in your lungs and the last hoarse cry comes out of you. Well, that hoarse cry is our generation, the generation of the last scream. Everything happens when you exhale, while you're screaming, and we disappear in the last hoarse shout, so unimportant, that no one hears us. I hold on to the end of the scream, not wanting to be unheard, though it's probably too late. Please, take a breath. If you don't want to, at least look around you once in a while and listen to what you're saying. Look at what you're doing. The world around us is banging on and we're just killing time. If you change something maybe you won't become a shadow just slipping past. Maybe you'll stay in the light. Do whatever you want but do something. Anything.

If you're ever walking by the outskirts of the park at around seven twenty-five in the evening, look up in the crown of that old gnarled tree.

Maybe we'll see each other.