

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

NEJC GAZVODA
SHADOW

PUBLISHED BY: GOGA, 2006

TRANSLATED BY: GREGOR TIMOTHY ČEH

ORIGINAL TITLE: SENCA (SHORT STROY FROM VEVERICAM NIČ
NE UIDE)

NUMBER OF PAGES: 19

Nejc Gazvoda: Shadow

I see her shadow, sticking to the wall like a wet kiss sticks on my face. It quivers. I shudder. The bathroom light is blue, the one in the hall orange. There is an orange line on the wall within which the shadow seems to live. The blue light casts my shadow and I turn so both our shadows are on the same wall. She senses me watching her silhouette. The shadow moves.

I say: "Hey ..."

The shadow has gone. I do up my trousers and flush the loo. On the wall the only remaining shadow repeats my movements. I turn round and step to the basin. I look up and see myself. There is no shadow in the mirror, only my reflection. So ordinary I cannot stand it any longer. I brush my teeth standing in front of the hall light and watching my shadow brushing its teeth on the bathroom tiles. Toothpaste froth drips down my pyjamas and onto the carpet. For a moment I think she's back.

But when I turn round I am alone, a man brushing his teeth in the hall.

*

"All I'm saying is that they should have the same rights as us. The same, do you get it? For fuck's sake. No one said they are somehow different. No one. They *want* to be different. I'll have a pint of stout ..."

"A Jaeger and Coke ..."

"Half pint ..."

"Dario, haven't we had many a conversation about ..."

"Fuck you, get it?"

"Get it."

"My grandfather shot one of them once, because he kept stealing his rabbits. They had agreed he would leave the rabbits alone. So he went after him with a shotgun and filled his backside with pellets, ha ha ..."

“Heeheeheeheeheh.”

“It’s true, he got him right in his hairy arse. Then his own folk beat him up for breaking the rules. All I want is for them to stick to the rules. That’s all I’m saying.”

“You can’t just shoot at them.”

“But they’re hardly human.”

“Heeheeheeheeheh.”

“Do you like the story, babe?”

“You’re funny, Dario.”

Babe always finds Dario funny. Her name is Tina and she is carrying Dario’s child.

“Are you listening to me, you pansy?”

“I’m listening, Dario.” I don’t say ‘pansy’ back at him, because he doesn’t get the joke, though he expects me to.

“Are you really listening?”

Get on with it, you fucking primitive cunt, you fucked up overpotent retard, I’ll cut off your balls and stuff them down the throat of this dumb bird of yours and watch her choke!

“Course I am. Get on with it.”

“I will personally strangle one of them one of these days. I’m just waiting for the opportunity.”

“All right.”

“Heeheeheeheeheh.”

“Exactly.”

“Heeheeheeheeheh.”

“Come on, babe, let's go.”

“Heeheeheeheeheh. Is he coming with us?”

“No, thanks, Tina. I've got other things to do.”

“You haven't got other things to do, pansy. You haven't got other things full stop.”

That, dear Dario, is the truth. Apart from today ... when the shadow returned for a second time. This time it stayed a little longer, but it still ran away as soon as I turned around. However ... it did return.

“Just kidding, pansy. See you.”

“See you.”

“Heeheeheeheeheh.”

Brushing my teeth again tonight. First in the hall and then in the bathroom. The shadow doesn't appear.

*

I get to work on time, get everything done and finish five minutes early. I drive a colleague home who talks about her children on the way. She loves her children. I don't listen because it's difficult to be part of a world which you don't even want to think about, let alone live in.

In the evening Dario comes round. It was his first visit, since I had never really invited him until he more or less invited himself. There are some people you simply get for life, like a birthmark or a chronic illness. He was a colleague of mine at the office, but left soon after I got there. Now he's unemployed and richer than ever. He's expecting his second child. He brings round a bottle of red wine with a neck as thick as his fingers. He blinks and spits a lot when he talks.

"Why haven't you got a girlfriend, pansy?" he asked me on that winter's evening as he sat at my table and I poured out a glass of wine.

I stared at the floor.

"Why don't you ever come out with me and Tina? Or just me? Do you fancy Tina? Would you fuck my babe?!"

I didn't answer. I just shrugged my shoulders and he took this to be an affirmation of sorts and started banging his fist on the table and shouting that no pansy will fuck his babe. He's a guy who knows everything about everyone. I waited for him to get it out of his system. He soon did.

When he started spitting a little less he continued: "Why are you alone all the time, pansy? You sit in this house ... and do things ... What exactly do you do? ... Whose house is this? How long have you lived here anyway?"

"I bought it cheap."

"Where's your mother?"

"She died."

"Oh, shit ... Sorry, mate."

"Two years ago."

Then he didn't know what to say exactly, but still shook my hand. We've known each other for five years and not once has he asked me anything about myself. He didn't know I moved to this house because I couldn't stand living in the place I had lived in with my mother. I had tried for a while, but it felt so lonely. When I moved I was still alone, but at least the feeling that something was missing was gone.

*

Dario turned around at the door as he was leaving: "Come out with me and Tina." Thick snowflakes began to gather on his black woolly hat. "She has a single friend you just have to meet."

I nodded. Dario went to his car and unlocked it. His indicators flashed and for a brief moment they created a shadow of my hand on the facade. I smiled. I have come to like shadows lately.

“Why are you grinning, pansy?” Dario asked. I just nodded and smiled at him.

“Mate ... no, really ... Don't you think there's something wrong with you? I mean you are so... alone?” He stared at me in apprehension. I could see he was uneasy with what he saw. People like him become all nervous when they see things they are unable to understand.

“I mean, think about how old you are!” he said. The indicators flashed again. His car locked automatically.

I nodded again. He stared at me for a while with an expression of disbelief. As if he hadn't known me all these years. As if he didn't know about my way of life. My very own way of life.

“I'm off,” he said. “All arranged then?” He tried to open the car door, but it wouldn't budge. He kicked it.

“Unlock it again,” I told him. He spat and swore.

We'd arranged to meet up the following day. I didn't go and I switched off my phone. I finished off the bottle of wine he'd brought. The snowflakes were curtain-thick now. I stared through the window waiting for the shadow. I was right to wait. Tonight it appeared.

*

I first saw it in the mirror. It appeared on the wall just as I was washing my hands. I carefully turned off the tap and turned round. It disappeared for a while, but I waited quietly and calmly for it to shyly come back. I smiled. I made a step forward and switched off the bathroom light. The shadow became sharper and more beautiful. I held my breath. It felt I had accepted it. It stood still for a while. It no longer quaked. It was time we got to know each other.

I moved slowly. I slid along the tiles, one foot at a time. The shadow stood still, but I still didn't dare rush. I didn't want to. Very slowly and very calmly.

The moment I stepped into the hall, the lights went out. Power cuts are frequent in this house. The snow makes things worse. Now the entire world was a shadow. I closed my eyes. The hum of road traffic was coming from outside somewhere, the radiator in the hall made a gurgling noise. A feverish feeling went through my fingers, right up my arm and stopped in my cheeks. I wanted to brush my teeth. I don't know why, but at that moment I had this urge to feel my toothbrush in my mouth calmly scrubbing the enamel. Then, the electricity was back and the lights came back on. I could feel the long leg of the spider on my cheek. Her head looked larger than mine and her body was like the night. I could see the countless tiny hairs on her legs, shuddering.

Quivering.

I smiled and her four pairs of eyes smiled back.

*

“You seem different,” my colleague told me when I dropped her off at her house. For a moment I wanted to tell her about it all, but I noticed the change in her eyes. She was sorry she'd said it. The truth was she didn't care at all why I was like this. Different. I smiled and shrugged. I like shrugging. It's what makes me ordinary. If you nod you say something. If you shake your head you express an opinion. If you shrug, though, you remain ordinary. No one pays any further attention to you.

*

That evening the spider took me to her dwelling under the house. She wove a bed for me to sleep in. When she moved up and down my naked body with the gentle movements of her legs I didn't move. I just breathed deeply. Then, I allowed her to bite me and continue sliding down my body with her legs. At that moment, right there in the cellar the colour of a day of illness, motionless and half dead, I fell in love.

In the morning I decided to take the day off. I lured a stray cat into the flat and then took it down to the cellar. It could smell her as soon as it came into the house and wanted to run away, but I grabbed the cat and put up with its piercing screech and clawing of my hand. I threw it towards the spider and she caught it. I lit a candle and watched her wrap it in her silk. The candle projected the dying of the animal in the name of love onto the wall.

*

Her sons started to visit me at work.

I opened the drawer and stuck my hand inside and they crawled all over me and covered me with the blackness of their hairy bodies. This didn't go unnoticed. People began talking about my strange illness. Yes, that's what they called it. I was ill because spiders followed me. But all I was was different. That's all.

“You are different,” my colleague said. We were sitting in the car again. I stared at her. She started to shake.

“I don't want a lift from you any more,” she said.

“Is it a sin to be different?” I asked her.

“No. It's a sin not to be like us. Don't hang out with them. You don't know what it's like ...” she mumbled and then decided she'd rather not go on.

“Don't hang out with them,” she said again and got out of the car.

That was the last day I went to work.

*

In the evening the spider allowed me to hold on to her abdomen and we crawled up the walls, the ceiling and the roof. I fell off a number of times and hurt myself. She deliberately bucked me off. She left me hanging off the guttering and, had she not come to pick me up a second later, I would have fallen to my death. She enjoyed doing all this to me. It was windy and she spread out her web to lift us up into the sky for a moment, me with my arms around her body and her with her legs wrapped around me.

The evening was bluish, the street lights orange, the stars bright white. She was back. I no longer needed the shadow. I finally managed to turn round in this life of mine. To turn round, look, see and realise. Forever.

*

Dario found me naked on the kitchen floor. I lied to him that I had been drinking and that seemed like a good enough reason for him.

We drank tea without talking. When he was leaving he blurted out: "Oh, tonight me and Tina will come round with that single friend I talked about."

I could not convince him that I didn't have time. I rushed around the house tidying up. In the evening they called round, all three of them. Tina's friend was Suzanna.

And she was a beauty.

*

The TV kept blasting its absurdities into the room and you could feel them droning from under the door. Dario and Tina were in the kitchen and I was in the hall with Suzanna. We had drunk a few bottles of wine. I had Suzanna pressed against the wall and was kissing her. She was shy. She said she'd go for a coffee with me the next day. I said I'd be glad to take her.

The Spider was there too. I could feel her casting her shadow on me and Suzanna, there in the hall where the lights weren't on.

*

I got a new job. Doing the same as I did before, but for a different company. The office furniture was made of slightly darker wood.

Suzanna held my hand all the time when we went for our first coffee at the tea house near the old bridge. At the end of our meeting she kissed me like we'd known each other all our lives. From head to toe I had this feeling of somehow being secure. She will be here when I get up and nearby when I sleep.

In the evening I stayed close to her. I stroked her naked body when she fell asleep. I also fell asleep. I dreamt of white snowflakes falling onto my face, painful, heavy and burning like scorched stones. I woke up in the middle of the night. Suzanna wasn't next to me.

*

I called Dario. He was annoyed because I didn't want to tell him anything more than that he needed to come round. He spat and swore and shouted. I insisted. When he came he calmed down.

"Fuck," he said when he saw me. "You're as pale as death."

I took him down to the cellar. He walked in front of me and didn't stop mumbling. When we got to the door he wanted to kick it in, but I pushed him against the wall to finally tell him what it was all about. He looked at me with his tiny eyes in a way he had never looked at me before.

"Pansy ..." he whispered.

"Dario ..." I began to say, but he stretched his neck and kissed me. I moved back.

"I thought ..." he stuttered ... and stopped. He looked at the floor. He was so small. His fingers were so small. He was breathing like a baby with a cold.

"It's OK," I said. "Let's forget it. You need to help me."

He still looked at the floor.

"I won't ever tell. Anyone. Just... Help me. Please," I whispered.

After the long pause that he needed to grow back to his size, to regain his thick fingers and the look of a person for whom life is crystal clear, he looked at me and nodded.

*

Down in the cellar the spider had almost totally cocooned Suzanna and only her pale head was sticking out of the silk bundle. Dario shrieked. The spider turned around. I took a step forward. Four pairs of eyes, four pairs of mirrors. In each one there was something about me I had so far not known. Something that leads me to a higher state on cold nights, that makes everything

apart from what is yet to come meaningless. And behind me a man who brings only contempt into my life.

Dario howled: "Move out of the way!"

My black shadow was ready to forgive me. I shouldn't have turned back. I should have looked straight at her, like I once dared to and thus came to know her. She was prepared to forgive me. I knew it at that moment, looking at those black mirrors. I could feel it.

But instead I whispered: "Sorry."

And moved out of the way.

*

"You remember that spider, fuck!"

"Dario, I really don't want to talk about that."

"Come on, I'm just saying what it was like. I strangled it with my own hands. And do you know what your dear hubby here said afterwards?"

"Dario ..."

"He said: "People around you kill what is yours and yours alone." The fucking git."

"Sorry, Suzanna. You know what my Dario is like when he drinks. "Heeheeheeheeheeh."

"Well, Suzanna, just tell me – everything is alright now, isn't it? It fucking should be."

"Yes, it is, I suppose."

"Fuck, what do you mean, I suppose? Yes, I'll have another one. And bring more of what the babes are having. Now ... where were we? Oh, yes – why do you suppose? You've just had your second child. He got promoted at work. He finally got promoted, for fuck's sake!"

“Yes ... you're right.”

“Of course I'm right. I'm going for a piss.”

...

“Suzanna ...”

“Yes ...”

“What are you thinking about?”

“Nothing, Tina ... nothing. “

...

“Well ... it's just ... This morning I found my little Borut ... Oh, it's nothing. Forget it.”

“Come on, what?”

“I got up to go to the bathroom and bumped into him in the hall.”

“And what was he doing in the hall?”

“Hmm ... now this you will laugh at.”

“I won't.”

“You will!”

“No, I won't!”

“Well ... whatever. He stood there in the hall ... and ... and ... “

“And?”

“He was brushing his teeth.”

...

...

“Heeheeheeheeheh.”

3

We met up with Petja at the tea house next to the old bridge. We sat at the table so that we both faced the window and looked towards the river. After we greeted each other we didn't have a great deal to say. She was glad of the box of chocolates, though I knew she wouldn't eat it. Just under five feet tall, thin as a rake, on sunny days she was almost transparent. Straw-like hair wrapped around her head like a lion's mane blown about in the wind every day. She had a habit of never looking you in the eye when she talked to you. She always waited for that silent moment she so liked, especially when it was long and meaningful.

“Am I nice?” she would ask, for example, and fix her eyes on me with such force that my lungs were emptied of air and all I could do for a while was gasp.

“I know I am not,” she said, pouted and sipped from her cup.

“There is no right answer to that,” I told her.

“Of course there is,” she answered fixing her gaze on some point on the table. “The right answer is – Yes, Petja, you are nice. Is that really so difficult?”

“Yes, Petja, you are nice,” I said.

“You are not honest,” she said triumphantly and sipped again.

I sighed. “Shall we go?” I asked.

“But we've only just got here,” she replied.

“We've been here for an hour.”

“Say something.”

“What?”

“How are you, for a start?”

So simple, yet so difficult. A light went out on the bridge.

“Why do you think it went out?” I asked.

“Because the bulb has gone,” Petja answered. “You don't fool me with these philosophical questions of yours. You're so predictable in changing the conversation by pretending to be all profound. So, for a start – how are you?”

“I don't know where mother is,” I admitted. As I said it, it felt as if something had come tumbling down on me. I didn't know what it was or where it had come from. It just felt like I was suddenly squashed onto my chair and all the smells of strange teas, the drab drumming sound from the loudspeakers and the giggling of teenagers on the table next to us, suddenly disappeared.

“Are you alright?” Petja asked bending towards me. She smelt of summer gardens. She touched my face with the palm of her hand.

“What's up with your mother?” she gently asked.

“I don't know where she is,” I said again. “My old man said she left and the neighbour said she ran away with the builder.”

“The builder?”

“The builder.”

Petja fell quiet for a while.

“Call her,” she finally said.

“The number you have dialled....,” I answered with the voice of an automated message.

“Go through her things, she's sure to have left something that might give you a clue.”

“I already have,” I said. “Nothing.”

“Find her on Facebook.”

I grinned.

“My mother would stop cooking if the cooking spoon needed batteries,” I said. “Don't be daft.”

Petja shrugged her shoulders.

“Shall we go?” I asked and began to get up.

“I have a boyfriend,” she said.

This was rather strange and sudden news. For a moment I felt a little dizzy.

“Why?” I asked.

Petja stared through the window towards the bridge and allowed her sentence to gain a strength that only silence can give. The teenagers on the next table started talking about me. I looked at them. All of them had dyed black hair, heavy black makeup around their eyes and black and red clothing. They kept waving their hands around, giggling. One of them who looked like a ping-pong ball into which someone stuck some toothpicks for legs and arms and added a pair of tits, gave me a piercing look. She suddenly stood up and came to our table. I looked at Petja. She was still looking through the window. I looked back at the teenager and said:

“Yes?”

“Look at how they shake,” she said. She started jumping up and down on the spot. Her huge tits bounced up and down in front of my eyes like a pair of lively puppies. When she stopped jumping she was slightly out of breath.

“Nice,” I said. Her friends pissed themselves laughing. One of them fell on the floor and rolled under the table where she shrieked and kicked her legs around.

“Nice,” the jumping teenager agreed. She stared in such a stupid way with her bloodshot eyes that it was surprising she could breathe without any particular problem. She grimaced, stuck her finger up at me and went back to their table.

“Hey,” Petja said. She grabbed my head and turned it towards her. She kissed me on the lips.

“There,” she said. “I can still give you that. For the chocolates.”

“You have a boyfriend?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said. “His name is Erik and he's five years older than me. He works as a blind fitter and has a motorbike. The firm is successful and they fit blinds all over the country. He's tall and well built and has a huge cock.”

I didn't know what to say.

“But the only reason I said that,” she explained, “is because that's the only feature, apart from the fact that he is a blind fitter, is tall and has a motorbike, that I can remember. Oh, yes, and

he's kind ... That he is. He once said I was as beautiful as a vine. Right after that he asked whether he could fart in front of me. I consented. Next week I'm moving in with him."

I took a deep breath and breathed out a slight whistling sound.

"I don't know what to say," I said. "It sounds like you've been together for a while."

"Ten days," Petja said casually and took a long meaningful sip from her cup so she could calmly avoid the outraged expression on my face.

"Throughout our studies," I said, "you kept saying you were going to find Mr Perfect, even if you died right afterwards. You went through a few idiots and then accepted the occasional fuck from me because I was available and, as you said, you could chuck me out of the flat if you wanted to. And now you're with this ... this"

"Erik ..."

"Erik, yes, and you are moving in with him. Just like that. After ten days."

"And I may be pregnant," she added, just as I was getting up to escape to the loos to get a moment to take it all in. I changed my mind and then suddenly got this whack on my neck, so strong I lost my balance and fell from the chair. The teenagers on the next table laughed so much they were screaming. Petja giggled. I lay on the floor with my shrivelled neck, groaning. After a few long, painful moments Petja bent down and helped me up. She sat me on a chair like a frail old man and stroked my head.

"I did say maybe," she said calmly. "But we're working on making it definite."

I opened my mouth and she closed it by stuffing the biscuit that came with the tea into it. I munched on it like a mouse with bipolar disorder, staring at the tiny person in front of me. Suddenly, all I could see in her eyes was motherly compassion.

"Don't say anything now," she said. "Let's look out onto the bridge."

I did what she said. The bridge was old and beautiful. It looked like it was disappearing into the darkness, made up of blocks, lit by lights that seemed suspended in mid-air above the river. Someone was moving slowly along it, disappearing and reappearing, disappearing and reappearing. Under the bridge a spider hung on its thin thread of silk, sleeping. I closed my eyes.

I could see the bridge slowly falling down. As it was falling it disintegrated into very fine dust that the wind lazily blew around until it landed on the calm surface of the water. The lights were still suspended mid-air, but now they had wings and started to slowly circle around each other. The town was no longer surrounded by the river, but sailed away in a mist covered sea. My chair became infinitely light. I looked up. The tea house was no longer covered by its roof, but by the night sky, black as the spider's eyes. I started to hover. I held on to the side of the chair, bent forwards and pulled up. I was flying. Firstly, I rose through the mist and then through the darkness that seemed to be alive, wrapping itself round my ankles, kissing my face and entangling itself in my hair. And only when I was finally high enough for the darkness to lose interest, with the mist all but a grey patch in my memory, and when I'd forgotten the smell of Petja's mouth and I could no longer hear my own breathing ...only then did I open my eyes.

Houses hovered around me and looked at me with great interest. They didn't have distinctive eyes, but I knew they could see me through their windows because I couldn't see through them. The sky was full of these huge buildings and I was there amongst them, all clumsy and scared on my chair. They creaked as they approached me and moved away again. Bits of plaster fell off them and started to whirl around in the air. I looked down.

There were small islands. The tea house with nothing else around it. Far away was my street, looking like a snake whose head and tail had been chopped off. Petja's house on the top of the hill that seemed stuck like a thorn somewhere in the greyness. There were a few other things that the grey nothingness, under a vault of blackness where I was suspended, sitting in the chair, didn't seem to hide. I knew I was going to die if I stood up. Not even in the sky was I free. I was trapped in knowing only what I could hold on to. Every day, every moment. In all the rest I was just grey.

"Honey?" Petja said.

I opened my eyes.

"My imagination took me miles away," I said.

"You don't have any imagination," she replied. "You are only you."

"Haven't we had enough insults for today?"

"It was meant as a compliment," she said and stood up. She smiled at me, wrapped in her tiny red coat.

"Let's go for a walk," she said.

*

If you go for a walk along the river at night you can't see anything. And you keep tripping over. Petja held me under the arm and trotted along beside me.

"Your legs are like a pencil that's been sharpened too many times, they're literally that short," I said.

"I know," she said chirpily and tripped over especially badly so I was hardly able to catch her in time. "What I don't know," she went on, "is why we are walking down here."

"Stop," I said. "Look towards the river."

"Stop going on about the river," she said. "Stop all this shit about moments of beauty and stuff. Let's keep walking, look at this fucking darkness if we have to, trip and fall along the way, just so we get out of here.."

"What if we never get anywhere?" I said.

"That's also a possibility," she said.

*

We finished our stroll in silence in front of the tea house. Petja hugged me again and kissed me.

"I'm sorry for not giving you any today," she said.

"Fuck you," I replied.

She put her tiny hand on my face again.

"It's alright," she said. "You have all your life ahead of you."

"What are you, some fucking granny or something?" I snorted.

"You can't offend me," she smiled.

"I don't want to," I said. "I like you. I might even be in love with you. I hoped that at some point we might end up together."

She sighed and shook her head. Her hair brushed against my face.

"I am just one of your options that is suddenly no longer viable. Your problem is that you can't make your mind up, darling. Nowadays, when there are so many things we have to decide about, it's really difficult to choose."

"Go bake some biscuits, pick some spring flowers and solve a few crosswords, you dried up old wretch," I said and hugged her. She returned the hug, but soon wiggled herself out of it. She moved back a step or two. Then waved to me. She waited for a while. I waved back at her. She turned round on her tiny heels and walked across the bridge into the darkness.

"Is that your girlfriend?" someone squeaked.

The teenager who had merrily shaken her bust in the tea house was standing behind me. She stared at me with one eye, the other being covered with a lock of straight black hair.

"No," I said. "But you know that. You overheard us."

"Yes," she admitted. "You are both fucking weird."

She drew on her cigarette and then threw it on the ground, stabbing it out with her colourful trainers.

"Drive me home," she demanded.

"Where's home?" I asked.

"You know," she said pushing her hands into the pockets of her narrow jeans.

I didn't know, but could not be bothered to try to convince her. I walked swiftly to the car and the teenager skipped along behind me.

Petja said I had to make my own decisions. So far in life I haven't decided about anything. Primary school was compulsory and secondary school too. I enrolled into university just because it seemed like the next logical move. My degree was just a completion of this move. And now

I'm here. My father wrote "Find a job" on a load of post-it notes. Maybe that's what I'll do. Just because that's the next logical move.

Beyond that, I haven't got a clue.

*

The teenager gave me directions as we drove along. It was exactly the way back to my place. And we ended up in front of my house.

"And what now?" I asked.

She pointed to the neighbouring house, the one in front of which my neighbour had given me my first shock when I returned home.

"Is Gregor your father?" I asked.

"Yep," she said. And then I remembered. I could see right into her room from my bedroom window. I saw her changing once and she caught me at it.

"You've changed," I said.

"I dyed my hair, moron," she said.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Shall we?" I asked.

She fidgeted in the seat and tapped her fingers on the dashboard.

"Are you nervous?" I tried.

She burst into tears. She became a small child, a little girl, putting her face in the palm of her hands and snivelling. I wasn't sure what was appropriate behaviour for such a situation, so I decided to just hold the steering wheel and look straight ahead. Then I decided I should comfort her. When I stretched out my hand to stroke her hair she moved her head away.

"You don't know what it's like at our place," she whimpered.

"Tell me," I said.

She shook her head.

"Tell me about yourself," I said, trying to mimic Petja.

"I do jazz ballet," she whispered and wiped away her tears. Her makeup smudged in a black line across her cheeks.

"So, that's why you jump around so well?" I tried to make a joke.

"Thanks for the lift," she said and stepped out of the car without looking at me and went into the house. I looked over at the house until she closed the door and all the lights inside went off.

When I was about to drive away someone knocked on the window, scaring the living daylights out of me. I wound down the window. It was Irena, staring at me with the nostrils on her hook nose twitching slightly.

“Do you have a cigarette?” she asked.

“You have one in your mouth”.

She needed a few seconds to comprehend what I had said. With a slow movement she lifted her hand to her mouth and took the nearly burnt out cigarette between her thumb and index finger. She sucked out a last drag, chucked it on the ground and blew her stinking translucent plume of smoke at me so it filled the car and made my eyes water.

“Sorry,” she said.

“I can still give you a fag,” I said, but she'd already turned away and left.

*

When I went into the kitchen there were three post-it notes on the table and five stuck on the cupboard doors. They looked like giant yellow insects which had decided to rest on our property.

Each one said “Find a job, I'm off to bed”.

I lay in bed and couldn't sleep. The laptop on my desk buzzed. I decided to switch it off, but changed my mind and moved the mouse to get the screen out of sleep mode, blasting its unhealthy light right at me. Such evenings are always endless.

I could see movement through the window and stepped closer to have a look. In Gregor's house a teenage girl was standing by the window of her room, naked. She was no longer as sad as she had been in the car. She waved and I waved back. Then she started jumping up and down, her tits readily bouncing up and down with her. This went on for a few minutes. When she was done I gave her the thumbs up. She smiled and drew the curtains.

I sat at my computer and opened the web browser. I typed in www.facebook.com. Then I closed it again. I opened it again and typed facebook in again. I entered mother's name in the search box. The blue line at the bottom of the screen stared filling out.

Searching.

I was sure nothing was going to come up. I was about to call Petja and tell her what a stupid cow she was. Then mother's profile came up. She presented herself with a photo from ten years ago. She had five hundred friends. She could be friends with me, too. All I needed to do was click. She was smiling in the profile photo, showing off her white teeth. She had her sunglasses on the top of her head. I knew the photo. Father had taken it. Again the ceiling came tumbling down on me. I lowered my head and had difficulty breathing, so I lay down on the floor and waited for it to pass. When I had calmed down I sat back up again and clicked on the image. It didn't want to show me the profile, so I clicked “Add as friend” and wrote:

“Where are you?”

I couldn't sleep for ages and ages. When I most wished for the ceiling to tumble down on me, I fell asleep.

I was woken up by the noise of a car outside the neighbour's house.