

Drago Glamuzina

Three

Translated from Croatian by Tomislav Kuzmanović

Listen, That's the Glass Getting Smashed

“Who are those sluts?! Who are those fucking sluts?!” she was screaming on the phone, and I felt panic well up inside of me. I couldn't say anything because my colleagues were sitting all around me, and she was yelling so loud that I was sure all of my neighbors could hear her.

“You hear it? That's me trashing up your place. Listen, that's the glass getting smashed. Yeah, the glass you've just heard, that's your door, you know. And this is your TV. Who are those sluts, tell me who those sluts are, you motherfucker, who are those sluts?” she kept yelling not allowing me to say anything.

I hung up, waited for a couple of minutes, hoping that she would calm down, and then I called her again, from another room, in which there were only two people.

“Who are those sluts, whose photos are those, you motherfucker,” she started screaming the moment she picked up, before I managed to say a thing. And then I heard more glass break. I thought it was the painting in the bedroom. Then there was a muffled thud, like when a chair hits the wall.

I put down the receiver, picked it up again and called her again.

“Who are these sluts?” was the only thing I heard.

I hung up, closed my eyes for a second, and dialed her father's number. I told him: “I'm at work, and Hana's out of her mind and demolishing my apartment.”

“And how do you know this?” Her father was rational, as always.

“Well, I can hear it, over the phone. I can't calm her down. Could you call her, please?”

“First tell me what happened.”

“My father's coming tomorrow. He'll stay for just a few days, but she can't handle it. She's been screaming for the past hour. The moment I pick up, I hear her scream.”

“Because your father is coming.”

“Yes.”

“And she has to move out.”

“Yes, just for a couple of days.”

“You’ve already called me once. In a similar situation. You should be taking care of your own mess, you know.”

“Will you call her?”

“Yes, I’ll call her.”

A couple of minutes later I dialed my phone number again. This time she wasn’t yelling, she was crying so once again I couldn’t say anything. I hung up, took my jacket, and left work.

I drove home mumbling to myself: “I just can’t take it anymore. I just can’t take it anymore. I just can’t take it...” As if it were some mantra that was supposed to get me out of this impossible situation. When my father had phoned that morning, I could feel things becoming dangerous, but I’d hoped that I would be able to explain to her that tomorrow evening she had to leave. Because there was nothing I could do. My old man wanted a checkup, and next week his doctor was taking a vacation, and if he didn’t do it now, it would take another month before he’d be able to see him. But, when in the evening she came by my office at the news agency, I could see she was boiling inside. I begged her to go to sleep the moment she got home, to have some rest. And she said she would. But the terror started when she was still on the bus. She called me from her cell every two minutes.

“You’re such a sissy. How can you let them run your life? It took us the whole year to work things out so that we could spend these fucking two weeks together. Tell him you have to go to an urgent business trip, tell him you have promised your place to some friend who has a lover. Tell him anything,” she fired into the receiver.

Then she cried and I pretended to be talking to a friend. “Yes, basketball on Sunday... yes, everything’s settled,” I said, pressing the receiver hard with my hand so that she couldn’t hear what I was saying. I was desperately trying to keep the thing within the limits of normality. I didn’t want anyone to notice what was going on. But, eventually, I just had to pack my things and leave work. Without a word.

The moment I entered the apartment, I could see she was loaded with alcohol. Leaning her back against the wall, she held a glass in her hand and cried.

“Why did you call my dad?” she managed through tears.

“I didn’t know how else to calm you down.”

“You think he’s happy for me now? That I’m in this state? You think he had to hear me like this?”

“I was scared and I didn’t know what to do, and then he came to mind,” I said, hopping over the broken glass.

“Who are those women?” she asked, this time quietly, pointing at the photos torn to pieces and scattered over the floor.

“The photos were part of some erotic magazine, they were a present for the buyers. Look, there’s the magazine’s stamp on the back of each one.”

She just shook her head and started crying again. I walked over the glass that creaked and crunched as if I was trampling over some live sparrows. When I came up to her, I put my arms around her, to what she said: “I’ve been waiting the whole year for this.”

“Me too.”

“Then why are you letting them ruin it?”

“You have to accept that there are things beyond our control.”

“I was so much looking forward to living with you, even if just for two weeks. I planned this for months. I had to work out my days off, your days off, talk my ex into going to the seaside with my daughter at the same time as your wife. Explain my folks that I would be gone for two weeks. Make them not tell this to Petra when she calls, but explain to her that mommy is very busy and that she should call her on her cell. And now you tell me your father is coming to some fucking checkup at the doctor’s and I have to move out. Nothing will happen to him, let him postpone his checkup for a month. Tell him that you’re busy, that you have to work day in and day out.”

“I did, I told him, but he said that I should just go about my business and not worry about him because he’d manage. He thinks the place is empty and doesn’t have the slightest idea that he might be in my way. Besides, the apartment is his, not mine.”

“I can’t believe you’ll let him come.”

“And what am I supposed to do? Should I tell him that my lover moved in with me and he can’t come until my wife returns.”

“Yes, tell him that. If my father knows I’m here, I don’t see why yours shouldn’t,” Hana said and slid down into a squat, her back still against the wall.

Her legs were open wide, and I was staring at her miniature panties when she said under her breath, “I feel so bad.”

“Of course you feel bad. I feel bad too. What am I going to tell him tomorrow evening when he comes and sees all this mess? I have no idea how to explain this.”

“Well, why don’t you tell him your crazy lover did this when she heard she won’t be able to live with you even for two short weeks.”

“And what will I tell my wife?”

“Don’t tell her anything. Call the carpenter to fix the door, the glazier to replace the broken glass, and buy a new TV. Buy her one of those nice, big sets and tell her you wanted to surprise her when she comes back.”

“Yes, that’s what I’ll do, and you’ll give me the money for it.”

“Fuck me if I will,” she screamed.

The phone rang and I answered it quickly. The moment I heard her father’s voice I handed the receiver to her.

“Dad, don’t angry with me, it’s not all my fault,” she kept sobbing on the phone.

“It’s not his fault either,” she then said.

“I know it’s not his father’s fault either. Yes, everything will be all right, you just go to sleep. Yes, I’ll come home tomorrow. No, you don’t have to come get my stuff. Goran will bring it,” she said and slid down the wall again. But then she suddenly jerked and staggered towards the toilet.

I stood at the door and watched her as she tried to throw up.

“I feel really bad,” she muttered, her fingers in her mouth.

I glanced at the half empty bottle of whiskey on the table. We had opened it two days before, lying on the floor and watching the movies we’d rented at the video store. Her movies, the ones she wanted to watch with me, and my movies, the ones I wanted to watch with her. There had been five or six videotapes on the floor next to us and two glasses of whiskey. I tried to gauge how much we had drunk then and how much of it was missing now. Some three or four deciliters, I concluded and then asked her: “How many pills did you take?”

“I don’t know, I took two or three tranquilizers while I was still in town, when I left you. When I got here, I took a couple of sleeping pills,” she sobbed, bent over the tub. And she cried.

“I feel really bad. I can’t get enough air. Please, open the window.” Then she dragged herself to the window and took deep, panicky breaths.

“Hold me, everything around me keeps spinning.”

“Lie down and try to calm down.”

“No, if I lie down, it’ll get even worse.”

Then she ran to the toilet again. I followed her and watched her stick two fingers in her mouth. Deep. She couldn’t get herself to throw up. Her fingers only made her cough, which in turn made her whole body jerk spastically.

“I haven’t eaten anything, there’s nothing but alcohol and pills inside of me,” she said between two attacks of coughing.

Then she got up and headed towards me. She was about to fall so I caught her and led her to the window again. I could see it coming – she was about to pass out – and I didn’t know what to do. I moved around her, picking up things from the floor, then dropping them down again, grabbing her around the waist as she leaned over the window trying to get some air.

“Should I take you to the hospital?” I asked, having thought about it several times and dismissing it immediately.

“Yes,” she barely managed.

I led her under the arm as we stumbled towards the car. The moment I started the engine, she told me to stop because she had to throw up. She opened the door, threw her legs out, and leaned over the asphalt. She didn’t throw up. We started again. She stopped me again. She said the car made her feel worse. I opened her window, so she could get some air, and asked if that felt better, but she just kept rocking back and forth and repeated, “Please, take me to the hospital, please, take me to the hospital.” I speeded towards the Rebro Hospital, but in a panic I missed a turn. I drove up a one-way street in the wrong direction while she begged me to hurry. After when I finally hit the right street, it didn’t take long before I found myself in the complete darkness of the hospital parking lot. I waited until she stepped outside to close the window. The moment she stood up by the car, I pressed the button to raise the window and heard a scream that the patients in the hospital some hundred meters away had to hear as well. Her fingers got caught between the glass and the frame. While the shivers of horror shot down my spine, I frantically pressed the button in the opposite direction until she collapsed to the ground. She curled on the asphalt next to the car and screamed, as loud as she could. I thought that she was done for, that that shock she wouldn’t be able to take, but later she told me that horrible pain actually brought her to.

I hugged her on that asphalt, and she just kept screaming. I saw the night guard coming towards us from the booth in front of the hospital and I begged her to get up. I tried to lift her and glanced at him. I wanted her to be on her feet before he got to us. While we were passing by him, he didn’t say anything, just watched us with suspicion.

At the entrance we ran into a male nurse who asked us what was wrong.

“She had too much alcohol and took too many pills,” I said.

“She wanted to kill herself?” asked the male nurse bluntly.

“No, why would you think that?”

“And why wouldn’t I want to kill myself?” she interrupted me and grinned drunkenly.

“Cut the crap,” I snapped at her.

“Let her speak,” the male nurse persisted. “Did you want to kill yourself?”

“No.”

The male nurse took her by the arm and led her to the examination room. The doctor was already there and she immediately summoned the psychiatrist and the lab technician, to check how much alcohol Hana had in her blood. Then the doctor started with the questions.

“How much did you drink?” the doctor asked.

“Maybe two deciliters of whiskey,” I replied.

“Half a liter,” was Hana’s immediate response.

“And the pills?”

I tried to say something, but the doctor motioned me to be quiet.

“A dozen,” Hana said.

“What kind?”

“Two or three Lexaurins, tranquilizers, in the afternoon, two or three in the evening, two or three sleeping pills.”

“And why?”

“And why does anyone take pills? I wanted to get through the day,” Hana replied.

I wanted to say something again, but the doctor interrupted me and told me to wait outside. Passing by the nurse who was writing something into a thick medical registry, I nevertheless said, “She’s drunk and doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She’s just horribly sad.”

The nurse nodded as if she understood. “Just take a seat outside, everything will be fine.”

I sat there for a while, then got up and started pacing up and down in front of the double door of the examination room. I paused only to let the lab assistant through when he entered with an empty test tube and exited with it full. I thought about what had happened, about her in a hospital bed, about

the mess back home that I had to clear before my father came. I wondered what to tell him. Should I rely on the parental love and male solidarity and tell him what really happened? Or should I come up with a lie? A big one. Then I went back to her.

I opened the double door and walked into a small hall. She was in the second room to the left, and the door was open. I stood at the door and watched as they shoved a rubber hose into her stomach.

“They poured activated charcoal into her stomach to absorb the alcohol,” said the nurse that had been writing something into the book just a moment ago and now suddenly appeared by my side.

“The lab technician brought the test results. 0.16 percent, not too bad, don’t worry.”

I watched her jerk on the bed from time to time with a black hose sticking out of her mouth, but she seemed calmer than when I’d brought her in, as if she had given over to the doctor and the nurses and was now somehow relieved. As if they were someone who would finally take care of her. It seemed I could see her tortured face calm down, the muscles of her jaw relax. Then some elderly man in a white coat pushed me from the door.

“That’s our night shift psychiatrist,” that nurse almost whispered and pushed me back into the hall.

I got back inside only after they’d called me. They were all smiles. Both the doctor, the psychiatrist, and the nurse. The doctor said that everything was fine and that I should sit by Hana’s side until the IV ran out.

“Then you can go,” the doctor said, pushed both wings of the double door with her hands, and walked out. The psychiatrist had also disappeared; perhaps there was another door.

I got inside and sat beside her. I observed her tired but calm face.

“Are you ok?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she muttered.

When we got home, it was almost morning. Carefully, we walked into the apartment. We stepped over the smashed glass and around the overturned chairs. Then we crawled into bed full of clothes, books and wrinkled linens. She curled in one corner, and I came close and curled behind her.

Interruptions

Those interruptions killed me. Today, when I think of it, it seems we never had sex without them. Of course we did, but that's the first thing that comes to mind when I think of her and me in bed. We'd stop because she was thirsty, just when I was turned on the most, she would reach after a bottle of beer standing by the bed. Or she would have to tinkle, minus five degrees outside and she would step out of the car... When she came back in, she would expect of me to pick up where we had left off, as if it were a book I had closed two minutes before and now I just had to open it again and continue reading. Interruptions caused by phone calls from my family, her family, work, those don't count, there was nothing to be done about them, but the ones when she would start digging through her purse, while I was still inside of her, and she just couldn't find what she was looking, so in the end I would roll off of her, sit and watch her dump all those things out of her bag, until she'd find a pill of Lexaurin and swallow it greedily, those are the ones that stuck in my mind. Okay, before that we'd have a fight over something, or she was late to get home, or she had problems at work she couldn't stop thinking about... But that drove me crazy. After she gulped the pill, she would look at me as if surprised that I was not already back in her. Of course I complained and warned her I was not a machine with an off and on buttons, but it didn't help – she was thirsty, she had to tinkle, she was nervous. But sometimes this would turn into an interesting conversation. One rainy night at Bundeck Lake, by the time she came back and got in the car, pretty drenched, I had already put on my trousers and was just turning my T-shirt inside out. She grabbed my hand and asked: "What are you doing?"

"Let's go."

"But why? It's not my fault, I had to tinkle. You think I felt like going out in the rain?!"

"It's not your fault, but I just don't feel like it anymore."

She started crying and I stared into the darkness in front of me.

"But how did you fuck that HDZ monkey? At the ministry you could just run out into the toilet because everyone would see you," I said eventually.

"Well, I didn't go out."

"So why do you torture me with it?"

"Well, honey, when I have to."

"But why didn't you have to back then?" Now I was almost yelling.

"Well, I had to even then," she said, staring feverishly into my eyes while her lips and face shivered as if she was about to burst into tears. Or start laughing.

“I don’t understand,” I said, feeling something coming.

“I tinkled in the office.”

“You did – what?”

“He would give me his cup or his glass,” she said slowly, carefully, intently watching my face and trying to anticipate my reaction. And maybe even to make things more dramatic.

“And so you peed in the glass?”

“Yes.”

“In front of him?”

“Yes, in front of him. He watched. He liked to watch. And then, when I got up, he would take the glass and pour it into the flowers.”

That’s what she always did. No matter how fucked up or tired she was, when she saw a chance, she took it, always, and said, as if reluctantly, that what she knew would get to me, one way or another, and change the tone of our discussion even if for a notch. Something so powerful or amoral or insane that it made whatever had preceded it, whatever we had fought about, seem irrelevant. I sat by her side and kept quiet, and she fumbled with her hand around my crotch. I imagined her squatting in front of that guy, I knew how she taunted him and I could see every move she made back then, and then I saw him drink up his tea and pass her his cup, and then later take that cup to the pot by the window, and somehow it became clear to me that that thing between them was much more intensive than she was willing to admit. And that, of course, stung.

By now her hand was already on my face, and lips. I turned my head to the side and said, “I don’t feel like it, let’s go.”

But she wouldn’t let go. And I knew it was better I take off my clothes again; I knew that was my fastest ticket home.

Everything Is Just the Way It Should Be

1.

“He’s here,” she screamed into the receiver. “I saw him.”

“Who?” I asked, although I knew it was about him.

“Him! He passed right by me, and then he turned around and came after me,” she spoke quickly in a panic. “I ran into a coffee shop. I’m calling you from their phone.”

“Where’s the baby?”

“In the stroller.”

“And he? Where is he now?”

“I can’t see him through the window, and I’m not gonna go out and check, no way.”

I looked around the news office to see if anyone was listening. Then I said, “Maybe he just wants to know what you look like?”

“You’re making jokes and here I am dying with fear,” she replied, still panting excitedly.

“No, I really mean it. Maybe he just wants to know who I live with.”

“I don’t know. I just want you to come home. I’m not moving until you come,” she said and hung up.

I told my boss my wife was sick and I had to go home. In the car, making my way through the traffic and cursing at every light, all possible scenarios played out in my head. Perhaps he was there by chance, perhaps this wasn’t him at all, perhaps he wanted to scare her... I didn’t go further than that, but even this much was too much.

When he first called her on the phone, five or six months before that encounter, he was convinced this was the most efficient way to get even with me. He would destroy my marriage, just as I destroyed his. He made a call, introduced himself politely and said, “Your husband is sleeping with my wife and I think you should know that.”

She replied that she already did.

“So?” he asked.

“So, what?”

“What are we going to do about it?”

“Nothing.”

“What do you mean nothing?”

“I think you can’t force someone to love or not love someone.”

“Excuse me?”

“I have no intention of talking about my intimate problems to someone I have never met.”

First he hung up, and then, a couple of minutes later, he called again.

“What you’re saying is that I should just let that moron of your husband screw my wife?! You primitive motherfuckers,” his voice boomed through the receiver unstopably, and then she, when she collected herself, hung up on him.

Thirty seconds later the phone rang again.

“Don’t you hang up on me ever again, you fucking...” he kept yelling, but she was no longer listening to him. She walked to the wall and pulled the phone cord.

With the same persistency he had been harassing Hana, now he harassed Sandra. He called whenever Hana was out. When I picked up, he would just hang up, but if Sandra answered the phone, the torture would begin. When she saw that the guy had lost it, and that he would not be easy to get rid of, she tried to talk to him, comfort him, but he only became more aggressive. Spying on Hana and disrupting our relationship became an obsession that filled his each and every day. Jealousy, spying and revenge spiked him with adrenaline and anything that threatened to put that mania in danger he automatically pushed away. He suffered, his daughter, who had to hear every day that her mother was a whore, suffered too, but it seemed to him there was no other way to go. And now she told him that there was another way, that he had no right kicking her out of their apartment in her pajamas, that he could not force her to be with him.

Soon it seemed he hated Sandra more than me. She would hang up on him the moment she recognized his voice, but he just kept calling. He somehow found her parents’ number so he called them too to explain what kind of a person their daughter had married. Sometimes she would unplug the phone, but as soon as she plugged it in again, it would start ringing. And he would pick up where he left. Psyched up as ever, with terrible aggression in his voice, he would scream that his wife was a whore, that I was a bastard, and that she was a primitive dimwit from Dalmatia who thought her husband was a god who was allowed to do anything he wanted.

Sandra coped with it well, but things were slowly getting out of hand.

“Ok, you are sleeping with his wife, maybe you have fallen in love with her, I swallowed it all, but I don’t have to put up with that maniac too. I want you to do something about it and make it stop. And if you can’t break up with her, go find that guy and smash his teeth in,” she said at a party one Sunday evening after several of our friends asked why our phone didn’t work the whole week.

“I’m not sure that will get him to calm down. The guy is out of control. He won’t let her divorce him, won’t let her leave and take the child, he keeps spying on her and following her around town... Imagine what’s inside the head of a man who’s been calling you on the phone for the past half year although you have nothing to do with this.”

“Listen, I don’t care what you’ll do, but I want you to do something!”

I didn’t do anything. I was still with his wife, he kept calling, all of it was slowly turning into a tiring routine, and then she called and said he was following her around the neighborhood. This was alarming, for both of us. When I found her at the coffee shop, I tried to convince her she’d made a mistake, but I too had hard time believing in that story.

“I recognized him; you know I once saw him on TV,” she said without hesitation. “When I turned around, I saw him standing there and looking at me. Then he started towards me. The whole time he was looking into my eyes,” she said quickly, trying to catch some air after every few words. I could see she was really scared.

“Yes, but he doesn’t know you. How did he know whom to follow?” I was still trying to reassure her.

“And how did he find the number of our house at the seaside? How did he get my parents’ number? Maybe he was hanging around the neighborhood for days and waited for the two of us to show up together.” For a moment or two she was quiet and then she added, “I worry about the baby. Who knows what that madman is capable of?”

“Come on, you’re overreacting, everybody tells me otherwise he’s a nice man... Should I call the police?”

First she jerked her shoulders backwards and stiffened, as if thinking about it, but then she shook her head and said, “What for? He didn’t do anything. And he can always say he just happened to be there.”

“You’re right. Hana called them at least a dozen times and every time they told her they can’t do anything if there are no physical signs of violence.”

As I said this, I stood up and leaned through the window.

“Do you think he’s still outside? I can’t see him,” I said and sat down again.

“I have no idea.”

I got up again and went to the phone on the kitchen counter. I dialed his phone number. When he answered, I hung up.

“He’s home.”

“This means he left when I got in the coffee place.”

“Yes, if that was him,” I replied.

“It was him, I’m sure. Tall, slim, neat dark beard, dark hair, elegant suit...”

“Ok, ok, as long as he’s left.”

2.

“It’s over,” she said on the phone three months later.

“What?”

“I got rid of him.”

“How?”

“I’ve hit him where it hurts.”

She waited for me to say something, but I kept quiet.

“I let him rant as usual, I let him say all that nasty stuff he’s always saying... he yelled and called me a primitive dimwit who knows nothing and lets men run her life, he said he would fuck up my marriage, he said you were crazy about her pussy and that you would never free yourself from it. He threatened to make our lives a living hell. And then I told him, ‘That’s it. Enough is enough. I’m taping all this and tomorrow I’m sending it to the judge deciding on who’s going to get custody over your child. And to your wife’s lawyers, and to the police. I’m going to press charges for threatening me.’ He hung up momentarily. And then, a minute later, he called again and said, ‘I will not call you again.’”

“And that’s it?” I said, buttoning up my shirt and putting a finger over my lips to show Hana to keep quiet.

“No, he kept whining for a couple of minutes: ‘I know you’re angry with me, but I can’t take it anymore. I can’t help it. I don’t understand how you can deal with it... I won’t call you anymore, but maybe we could meet for coffee and talk. I don’t know what to do.’”

“And what did you tell him?”

“I felt sorry for him. I knew he was telling the truth and that this really hurt him.”

“So, just like that, you forgot how he tortured you for months?”

“Of course I didn’t. But at that moment I felt sorry for him.”

“Ok, and what did you tell him?”

“Nothing, that I couldn’t meet him for coffee.”

3.

Five years after that conversation Bero and Jasmina are at our place and she’s telling them this story. At first they are a little embarrassed, but they’re listening.

“You really taped him?” asks Jasmina, playing with Bero’s ear.

“No, I was bluffing, but I had to do something because he wasn’t doing anything,” Sandra answers and motions at me with her head.

“What do you mean, I called Veljko Đorđević and asked him how to deal with such a person.”

Sandra gets up, approaches my armchair, and sits on the armrest. “My hero,” she says and hugs me.

Everyone’s laughing and I put my arm around her thighs and say, “Well, he’s the best know psychiatrist in the country, what more do you want?”

“What irritated him the most?” suddenly asks Jasmina, obviously intrigued by the story.

“He’d get really furious when I defended his wife.”

“How did you defend her?”

“He kept saying she was a whore, and I said he couldn’t talk about his wife like that. Once, I was so annoyed with him that I told him I had met her and that I liked her, and he just went berserk. His voice shivered so much that I really got scared. After that I didn’t talk to him at all, until the taping thing.”

“And why did you defend her?” Jasmina persists.

“Probably because he was getting on my nerves... because he was so aggressive. But I wasn’t defending her always, sometimes I would pander to him because I thought he would leave me alone.”

“Did he ever call you again after you threatened to tape him?” Bero finally joins in the conversation.

“No.”

“And you?” he says and glances at me.

I shake my head.

“You really put him in his place,” Jasmina says and reaches for one of the glasses on the crammed table. While she brings it to her mouth, she puts her right leg under her left leg, which makes the miniskirt she is wearing tighten around her thighs and rise towards her waist. I don’t want anything from her, I am just glad that Bero has finally found a girl and managed to stay with her for more than six months, but my eyes nevertheless make their way towards her legs. But I quickly look away and up at the window.

A gloomy Sunday afternoon in Travno.

Sandra suddenly gets up and starts collecting empty beer cans from the table.

“He says he’s not with her anymore,” she mutters, quietly, and takes the cans in the kitchen.

No one says anything, but she disappears in the kitchen, which is good. Because this was one of those silences you want to break as soon as you can, but you don’t know how.

Bero is first to speak. “When will we play basketball?” he asks.

“Tomorrow I’ll watch Kukoč, and when I do that I jump more than when actually I play on the court,” I answer quickly, shoot him a thankful glance, and then add in a serious tone, “Maybe that’s the last time I’m watching him.”

“Actually he is your greatest love,” Bero says to that and smiles. Sandra smiles too, having returned from the kitchen.

“Well, it’s not like I’m hiding that,” I reply and then offer him my glass to say cheers. “When he stops playing, I’ll no longer watch basketball.”

It was half past one when Bero and Jasmina left. I turned on the TV and flipped the channels. I stopped at some documentary, National Geographic. We watched a cheetah run for a while and then she got up and went to bed.

I waited until the beast caught an antelope, and then joined her. We lay on our backs and listened to the scratching of the tape on a stereo in the next room. The tape had been spinning for a while – it was one of those long playing tapes Bero had recorded all of Azra’s ballads on back when we were still in college – but the volume was down and we could hear it only now, after we had turned everything off and made it to bed. I thought I should get up and close the door, but I didn’t.

“Do you remember that woman in Omiš, some fifteen years ago?” Sandra suddenly said.

“What woman?”

“We were sitting below the church when that couple came to us and asked us if they could join us at the table because all other tables were taken. They were drunk, but you nevertheless told them to join us.”

“I don’t remember.”

“They sat at our table and argued. She talked about the stains she had found on his pants again. About a whore from his work he was fucking.”

“Really?”

“We were embarrassed, but we just sat there and listened. Then he tried to stop her, told her she was drunk and didn’t know what she was talking about. To that she said, ‘And I loved him so much.’ And then she told us how on their wedding day she’d had an orgasm even before he’d touched her. It was from pure happiness.”

“Yes, I remember, I remember that.”

Then we went quiet, and then I said, “I have to get up and turn that damn stereo off.”

“No, don’t,” she replied. “Everything is just the way it should be.”

