

The Love Metamorphosis of Božidar Kukec

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The Morality Department Report # BK75-251-15

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"This is presented as a work of fiction and dedicated to nobody".
- Charles Bukowski, *Post Office*

"Literature is an escape from reality."
- Franz Kafka

"The most important hour is always the present. The most significant person is precisely the one sitting across from you right now. The most necessary work is always love."
- Meister Eckhart

INTRODUCTION

or How I met the Morality Department agents

In all truthfulness, I do not really know how it all started. I lay in my room, sipping water, looking into the distance. An unfinished book was on my chest and I thought about whom to choose for tomorrow's date: Vanja the teacher, Gabrijela the translator or Lukrecija, the psychologist. I thought about the point of dating and going out. Two people meet and agree to go on a date. Why do they do it, really, what do they expect out of it, I asked myself, since I just saw no point in all of that anymore. I had just turned forty and going out has become so absurd and pointless that I needed a kind of a break from it all. I needed a time-out. I was trying to convince myself I had given up on women, that I was no longer interested and that I would not go out, at least for a while. Hmmm, four decades, I thought, and I still haven't found the woman of my life... Or maybe I have, and just did not realize because of all the *dating*.

I turned on my right side, once again putting aside the book I've been wanting to read for so long, Kierkegaard's biography of some 900 pages, on top of other books on my nightstand. I'd been looking at the front page of the book, written by some Norwegian guy, admiring the drawing of poor Kierkegaard's head. The philosopher never went out, never dated. On the contrary, he once met a young girl, Regina Olsen, got engaged, but then decided to break off the engagement. Why? It was pretty simple in his head: the melancholy of his soul could have a negative effect on the young lady, and so he decided to absolve her from his sickly personality, and, with that, hoped the Danish philosopher, from an unhappy future. It seems to me that he never really asked the girl what she thought about it. I remembered how on a recent date I quarreled with a girl over that very topic, barely 20 minutes after we had sat at the dinner table. I think it was my record of sorts. Later, I found out that the other guests at the party did not think it was a fight, but my way of chasing her, according to a female friend of mine who organized the dinner.

But, I digress, wandering into another extreme. I've been thinking about the pointlessness of dating: yes, of going out. It seemed that after forty years of wandering the love desert (as I've been told recently), just like the Jewish people wandering the desert in the Book of Exodus...¹ And that is where I stopped in my tracks for a moment and laughed to myself, hoping that this comparison was not a moral transgression and that there is no Blasphemy Squad or anything like it, whose agents could knock on my front door. The whole mental image made me sleepy – I realized I wouldn't call any of the girls and made a firm decision: enough of me searching for them, or, more precisely, her... it is time that she, the girl or the woman, finds me. Yes, that is right, let this decision take me into the darkness and my sweet dreams. In addition to that, more and more I reminded myself of a man wandering around with a lamp in his hand, looking for the unfound love, while at the same time, if this love/woman was by some chance looking for me – she wouldn't be able to find me, as I'm never in the same spot. We just keep passing each other by. And that is

¹ The Book of Exodus (תּוֹרַת in Hebrew, ἔξοδος in Greek, *Exodus* in Latin) is the second book of the Old Testament and the Pentateuch or the Torah. The focal point of the whole Jewish history, and this part of the Bible, is the departure from the slavery in Egypt and the Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant (all footnotes by the author).

why from now on, I had decided, I would be just in one place and wait. God, I thought, am I really that kind of a weirdo that I am not able to find a compatible woman? What exactly is going wrong with me? Send me someone to knock some sense into my head, so that I would see and understand what I am supposed to do...

That is how I fell asleep.

I dreamt of a meadow and a creek in the middle of beautiful scenery. In the distance, an unknown girl ran through the grass. I tried to catch up with her, but the more I closed the distance, the more her appearance changed: her hair was black one moment, she was a brunette a moment later, a blonde the next one, while the dark clouds gathered in the sky, somehow pressing on my crazed head... She laughed, she threw her hair around and there was no way for me to see her face properly. At the very moment I managed to touch her shoulder – I was directly behind her – I heard her words:

"There's just one woman in the world with a thousand faces... a thousand faces... faces... ces..."

And that somehow scared the shit out of me. The girl's face shriveled and turned into a deeply lined face of a very old woman. Sounds echoed around the meadow that was not so spacious anymore, as the dark sky had almost merged with the ground. I looked toward the sky and saw a huge black sun, while in the background I could hear Soundgarden's "Black Hole Sun". The girl who had just become an old woman turned to me. Her face started to dissolve and I started to panic, already running away from her.

I ran and I ran, as fast as I could, becoming totally gray, the way it can happen to one only in a dream, in a gray suit, with thinning hair, so that in the end I had literally only three hairs on top of my head. The world around me turned into a two-dimensional street-plan, with socialist buildings and little houses, while I... (was it possible at all? Yes, it was) ...I looked more and more like a cartoon character, entering a room with a huge computer that produced the photos of their ideal partners to the people queuing in front of it. All of them were very satisfied with what they got.

It was my turn then... I gave the CD with my basic info to the uniformed men standing beside the computer, and after they did a few very simple operations... something unexpected happened. At the very moment the photograph of my soulmate was supposed to come out of the lower portion of the machine, the fucking computer crashed, started to cough and emit smoke in front of the surprised uniformed technicians, who started running, aimlessly, around the smoke-filled room. And though the poor machine labored for quite some time, in the end it managed to produce, while everyone watched incredulously, a color photograph (in a black-and-white world, ha!), but not of a beautiful woman like, say, Monica Bellucci or Penélope Cruz, but of a huge head with just three hairs on top of it, somehow so familiar, since I was thus staring at a face – none other, of course, but my own. The only problem was that I, as it usually happens in dreams, was not really me, but a gray cartoon character named Gustav.²

At that moment, two men in black (not gray) suits entered the smoke-filled room, and one of them pressed the red button. The sound was more like a front door bell ringing, not like an actual alarm. The bell continued to ring. Riiiiingggg... Non-stop. I opened my eyes and it was then that I realized I was not dreaming anymore: that was my doorbell.

"Who is it now?" I mumbled dreamily, squinting and trying to fully open my eyes, adding more loudly: "Coming! Let me just put on my T-shirt. "

² *Gustav* is a Hungarian animated cartoon series (*Gusztáv*, 1961-1977) with short 5-minute episodes depicting the bureaucratic labyrinths of the Communist system, the different fears and problems of a modern man (from the influence of modern technologies, to loneliness, to self-centeredness). The series was very popular in Eastern Europe, while in Yugoslavia of the 1980s it had a cult following.

I managed to reach the corridor, knocking down a few books from my nightstand in the process, and opened the front door. Lo and behold! From the semidarkness of the hall, two men in black suits peered at me – one had his sleek hair combed back and also had a serious face, dominated by a mustache, while the other was bald, with glasses and a stupid grin on his face.

"Allow me..." said the bald one, grinning while giving me a black business card, with, it seemed, golden letters. "We are from the Morality Department, and this is about the official report # BK75-251-15..."

"I beg your pardon? What are you talking about?" I interrupted, still drowsy, at the same time noticing that the business card really said, in capital letters: THE MORALITY DEPARTMENT. "What kind of a shitty department?"

"No profanities, if I may kindly ask," said the mustached man for the first time, at the same time putting his foot in the door opening, probably expecting me to shut the door in their faces. "We've come here because of your... how shall we say... negligence... you practically invited us, have you not?"

"My dear colleague", said the other one, smiling. "Do not get ahead of yourself. There's no need to stress this gentleman's negligence, as if he were already guilty. We'll see... You know very well nobody is guilty until proven guilty – ha ha! – isn't that right?"

"Listen to me now, mista' Gott."♦ The man with the mustache now stood just a few inches from his colleague's face, disregarding his politeness. "I've told you already, on our way to this wretched man: he's just guilty as charged... We have loads of records anyway. He's just supposed to fill a few points crucial for his case. But, please, please... yes, we'll go by your book. Get it out and start recitin'."

I watched the odd couple arguing, not understanding any of it, of those torrents of words. I think it was the first time in my life I was rendered speechless. The first to address me again was Mr. Gott, the smiling bald man.

"I apologize. My colleague, Mr. Vargek was very rude..."

"What kind of last names are those... Gott and Vargek?" I asked.

"Please, do not interrupt!" said Gott, and continued: "So, we work for the Morality Department and have come here regarding the official report # BK75-251-15. You see... # BK... let me explain..."

"C'mon", said Vargek impatiently, "explain everything to this great lover."

"Do not hurry me", said Mr. Gott nervously. "So... you are Božidar Kuček, born in 1975 in Zaporozhje... Hm, hmmm. This is wrong." Gott was concentrating on the screen of his laptop, adjusting his glasses. "Correction: Born in Zagreb, in 1975. Is that correct?" he asked with a smile, to which I nodded. "On this very day, on purpose or accidentally, which is totally irrelevant, you initiated the procedure, against yourself, with regard to morality and your dating... how shall I put it... dating a sizable number of women."

"Stop that crap!" said the other one, looking less and less like a gentleman to me, let alone like a member of some official government department. "The guy is a notorious adulterer, seducer... A serial lover, do you understand?" The mustached guy smirked at me, reminding me of the local version of Freddie Mercury...

"OK, whatever", said Mr. Gott pleasantly. "We have come to investigate that, to make a report, and everything else is" – he looked upwards significantly, just like some priest – "in somebody else's hands. As I've said, I am Mr. Gott, of the Morality Department, a part of... hmm, hmmm, it doesn't really matter... and I will represent your interests. And this is..."

"My last name is Vargek and in this case I'm gonna represent somebody else's interests", said the mustached man and laughed boisterously, thrusting his hand at me. "At your service. Namely, my dear chum, I hope not to be at your service."

♦ German word for 'God' (*transl.*)

After those words, I heard only the "Black Hole Sun" again and very soon everything grew dark around me. The next thing I remember was lying groggily in my bed.

THE SERIAL MONOGAMIST

“AND WHY DID YOU COME?”

“I CAME TO BRING BACK YOUR UMBRELLA!”

It seems that I, Božidar Kukec, had been slandered by someone, since you appeared at my door like this, though I hadn't done anything. I said, or thought, something along those lines. I was not quite sure about the real meaning of those words, since I lay in bed with a wet towel on the back of my head, where the bump had appeared, as a consequence of my fall. And the cause? Ah, the cause... It was caused by the pointless blabbing of the dynamic duo. It had just occurred to me that the whole thing did not happen at all when I heard Mr. Vargek's voice.

"You got it all wrong, my dear colleague, the cause and the consequences. You see," he said, twisting the end of his short mustache, "the cause of your fall is... ha-ha, if I may say so, your Fall, get it? It is in the distant past, in your unrestrained enthusiasm for fun, for going out, for... how do you youngsters like to call it? For boogying. "

"That's not the language I would use", I said brusquely. "The term is rather out-dated."

"Fine, but it does not really matter how one jabbars. Our visit was only the immediate cause for your fainting, and we have all gathered here because of your actions, nothing else, if you catch my drift. Your actions toward the opposite sex and your going out in general have caused this situation and the process we have just started. Dig that?" he asked, winking.

"Something's surely wrong with you", I said, peering behind Vargek's broad shoulders. "What kind of a process are you talking about? Please, tell me: where is Mr. Gott?"

"My dear colleague! Do not, for the second time in such a short time, scare away this poor client. Here, I've found something that'll bring back the blood into your cheeks, my dear Kukec." He was smiling warmly. "In your modest kitchen, I have found a bottle of cherry brandy. Here, have a sip... there you go..."

I had a sip of the liqueur, more and more aware of the fact that I was in a pretty pickle. An unpleasant silence ensued, and my head was abuzz with hundreds of questions. Still, I was not able to single out one coherent question, so I waited for a while, closing my eyes, hoping the two creatures would disappear when I opened them again. After a few seconds with my eyes shut, just like a child waiting for the problems to disappear of their own accord, I opened one eye, and then the other. And lo and behold: the two heads were still there, bent above me, peering at me. One was neatly trimmed, the other bald, all crooked somehow, with a bulbous nose and gray eyes that grinned behind the glasses, but in spite of the aesthetic faults, I somehow liked this head more, as it uttered things that were at least partially in my favor.

"I'll defend you, you'll see, my dear and esteemed mister Kukec. You'll see for yourself, you'll prove that this is all one huge misunderstanding. This Devil's advocate³ is not going to hurt you one bit. Isn't that right? Come on, have another sip... We live in a legal state, after all... In his *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant states "that the legal state is an idea of the mind and so can be based exclusively on the mind's principles a priori..."

"Oh, do shut up with those ethical ramblings of yours!" interrupted Vargek.

"Mister Gott..." I tried to ingratiate myself with the bespectacled man, while still lying with a wet towel on my forehead, trying to get back to my senses, "you strike me as a smart man. Tell me again, what Department exactly do you belong to? The Immorality Department or what?"

³ *Advocatus Diaboli* in Latin, formerly an official position within the Catholic Church. This church official was supposed to argue against someone's canonization or beatification. More broadly, the term denotes anyone with contrary arguments, held due to the procedural reasons and in order to reach a sounder decision or conclusion.

"My poor man, you got it all mixed up in your head", said Gott, dabbing at the droplets of brandy on the edge of his lip. "We're from the Morality Department."

"But what kind of a department is that? What ministry does it belong to?" I asked, plagued by a terrible headache.

"Enough of your questions, Božidar Kuček, the self-styled Bukowski." For a split second, a barely perceptible smirk flashed on Vargek's lips. "Say, where did you get that horrible nickname?"

"From a friend, back in high school."

"Yeah, that's your shtick, but it just doesn't hold water. You see, we" - again, Vargek straightened his freshly dyed mustache - "know that isn't true. You gave that nickname to yourself and used it to introduce yourself in various places... while going out, too."

"But look, Mr. Vargek..." I tried to protest this lie, but he silenced me momentarily.

"Shut up! Don't even try to fool me with your talk. Yes, while going out, on various dates... But that's almost beside the point here. As it is irrelevant for our case that you are prone to acting as an architect in various circles, although you never studied architecture, and just took the entrance exam instead... Likewise, it ain't important that you lie about this centrally located apartment is being yours, or that you personally know a number of important and well-known people from the cultural and business circles of the country. All that doesn't really matter. We've come here for one thing only: you've been charged for going out with way too many women. And if I manage to prove your sins, you'll be temporarily grounded."

"Grounded?" I wanted to get up, but I couldn't move. "What gives you the right...?"

"Easy, easy," said soothingly Mr. Gott somewhere from behind him.

"You stay out of this," said Vargek, now proceeding in a more informal way. "First, I have to read the indictment. But before that, he might suddenly remember the charges. C'mon, c'mon, think harder... Shitting your own pants, eh? Recently, you went out with a sculptor. Remember her, right? How was that?"

I tried to remember. Yes... not long ago, I met this sculptor in Ilica. It was the same girl I fought with a month earlier at a friend's dinner party. We talked very politely, as if that evening had never happened. It started to rain and she suggested we go to her studio and...

"Please, think aloud", said Gott, "as any information could prove valuable."

"Fine", I said, and continued, "so this girl suggested we go to her studio to get an umbrella..."

"You did not agree, did you?" asked the bald one angrily, "though I still don't see how any of this could be connected to our story."

"Shut up and don't interrupt. And then..."

"I did not want to go to get the umbrella, I said I didn't mind the rain, but the girl, Bojana, persisted." At that moment I saw how Mr. Gott rolled his eyes in disbelief. "So I went, after all. Just to get the umbrella. But the girl gave me her cell number with it, asking me to return the umbrella later on. 'We could also go out and have a drink then', she said. I did not know what to do, so I took the umbrella. And a week later, I returned it to her at Petica."

"What is Petica?" asked Gott, who was surprised.

"Irrelevant," said Vargek, "some joint, a watering hole. I mean, a pub, my dear colleague, as I can see you're writing it all down piously. OK, so you went there and blabbered... about what?"

"Just like that... a bit about politics, a bit about literature and so on. She talked about her shrink."

"Did this Bojana girl ogle you?" asked the Devil's advocate, grinning.

"Well, maybe, a little bit", I said, already flushed.

"And then?"

"After that, she asked me to tell her about my relationships. So I started to talk about them, as I had already had a few beers, so I started to recount some of my girlfriends, and then I said I had recently celebrated my 'jubilee' tenth relationship... I do not know how to say it, but the girl... she just snapped. 'Ten relationships? What is wrong with you? Are you crazy? What the fuck is wrong with you? You are, you are...' Bojana struggled to find the appropriate word. 'You are a serial monogamist, that's what you are. I'll now go to the ladies, and you get back to me in some four to five years, after you've thought hard and thoroughly about your love life...' she shouted so loudly that all the people in the café had in the meantime turned toward us, 'and after you've come to your senses!'"

"You see how she saw through you immediately, my friend. That is an indictment..."

"What exactly?"

"That... that you, you rascal... are a SE-RI-AL MO-NO-GA-MIST!"⁴

"What kind of a charge is that?"

"Just the way you heard it. It is not for you to question the validity of our system. We question your morality. And what happened after that? Finish the story, you moron, so that your attorney can hear it, too."

"Nothing. I mean... Nothing. The girl returned to the table, somewhat calmer now. And when I asked her what the whole fuss was about, she said: 'Look, I came here to see whether you were a possible lifetime partner for me... a compatible man. And you? Why did you come?'"

"Please, my dear colleague Gott, take a note of this stupid answer."

"Yes, I told her..." my voice was faltering, "I came to give back her umbrella!"

"Her umbrella! The guy came on a date to give back an umbrella! Ha-ha-ha... I just can't believe... This is killing me!" Vargek gloated. "He came to give the lady her umbrella. Beautiful." After those words, he suddenly became very serious. "And then the poor girl got up and went out. You are a true gentleman!"

"My dear colleeeeeague, please, calm down." Gott was now pacing restlessly. "By doing this, mister Kukec did no harm to anyone. True, the word choice may have been a little unfortunate, but all in all, I think... that is true. He really came there to give her the umbrella back."

"All right, my colleague. If you say so. But the prosecution is then going to go step by step and prove the recklessness of this young man... I mean, this middle-aged man. He did a lot of things on his so-called dates: forgetting the appointments, seducing, being late, having sex in various parks, being drunk on the edge of a building roof, dating a young girl for full two weeks, although he did not know her name..."

"That must have been a mistake. How could it be possible that the esteemed Mr. Božidar Kukec did not even know the name of the girl he dated? That is not in my client's nature."

"Nonsense, my Gott. Write it all down. Write and be astonished. And you, Bukowski, continue the story and do not omit anything. Everything you say can in any case be used against you. The nameless girl lived in Šestine, did she not? You remember...?"

"I do, of course I remember..."

⁴ The term was not invented by the Morality Department's Vargek, as it has been known before and is being used for those among us who just jump from one relationship to another, i.e. who after a break seek a new partner, as soon as possible, in order to avoid being single.

And it was true, the memories just rushed forth, and in my quavering voice, I repeated the story of an evening long ago, while the pedantic Mr. Gott carefully wrote my every word into his computer.

THE SIXTH(ISH) SENSE

“CAN YOU SHOW ME YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE?”

“WHY? I DON'T HAVE IT. I DON'T DRIVE.”

I still remember it quite vividly, that evening on the Strossmayer Promenade, although it happened a long time ago, in 1995. I remember the bench, the cold evening and myself, with my ribs hard against the unyielding wood, my empty head and my looking into the distance. No thought could penetrate my brain, my heavy fingers picking at the outer layers of my brain, while the hollow I should call my head echoed just the magnificent sentence from the very end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*:⁵ "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

Yes, I was silent, truly silent, as there was only one question that I asked of myself, only one question was important to me at that particular point in the universe. My silence was broken by a girl who sat next to me the whole time. I forgot to mention she was there, too, so I might as well start from the beginning...

I met the girl at a costume party a few days earlier at Jabukovac, at an acquaintance's house. I've never been a fan of such costumed gatherings, I did not like being in a costume and having to walk through the town, so I tried to use my natural strengths (or weaknesses, depending on the angle) to the best of my abilities. With my long hair, dressed in black from head to toe, with a long black leather coat, I played the role of a vampire of sorts. I put on the false teeth, but shoved them into my pocket the minute I entered the house. The few droplets of blood a friend of mine drew around my mouth with her lipstick vanished very soon, after the first contact with wine. It was really a very unusual costume party. The whole evening, I sat in the kitchen, with one girl, applying my so-called charm, interspersed with scraps of witticism, while my university colleagues – Tino, dressed as a fireman (he borrowed his father's uniform from the Bukovac Volunteer fire brigade) and Mimica, dressed as a skiing champion Stenmark, with an appropriate hat and his ski poles – peered into the kitchen every now and then, wanting to see how things were developing.

But, as there was no way for me to remember the delicate piece of information, her name, things just were not developing in any direction. I have always had problems with remembering names after being introduced to someone: I do not know what happened in those moments... I would concentrate on the handshake, the face or the expression in the eyes of another person, or only on my own presentation at the moment.

"What was your name, again?" I also thought it would sound very stupid to pose the same question for the third time.

"I've told you already... My name is..." Some pots fell to the floor at that very moment and I did not hear her again.

"I am sorry, I am a little hard of hearing", I tried to wiggle my way out of this, "what did you say, again?"

But at that moment something else grabbed my attention, and after that it really became pointless to ask again, so I resorted to the easy enjoyment in the dinner and her really pleasant company. The most interesting bit is the thing that I still know she lived in Šestine, what she looked like, even, thanks to a strange set of circumstances, how tall she

⁵ The last words of Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century were: "Tell them I had a wonderful life." He studied aeronautics and then philosophy with Bertrand Russell at Cambridge. In the trenches of WWI he wrote his *Logico-Philosophical Treatise (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus)*, published in 1921. This was his only work published during his lifetime, and at its end he concludes that the whole *Tractatus* is, strictly speaking, pointless. According to him, what makes sense are only the logical and mathematical analytical conclusions and the empirical conclusions in the fields of sciences. Having finished that book, he took a complete 10-year break from philosophy, working as a monastery gardener and as a teacher in Lower Austria villages. Equally important is the fact that the philosopher, at one point, renounced this work.

is (171 cm), even her clothing size. We liked each other and agreed that Saturday evening we would meet again. Those were the good old days with no cell phones, so we said, right away, we would meet again on Monday at 7 pm at the main square, Trg bana Jelačića.

And we did meet, on that cold wintry evening, and I, having firmly resolved to find out her name, proceeded to mention some obscure philosophers, constantly circling in front of the bookstore that was there at the time. I showed her various books and, already pretty freezing, patiently waited for some acquaintance to come by, so I could introduce the two of them. We did not have to wait for too long. Fortune smiles upon the brave, states the old saying, but not completely, since the person that came by was Trunk the Poet, a blabbing beatnik I met at my night job at a bakery.

"This is Trunk", I said, waiting to hear her name.

"You kiss dangerously well while leaning on my *shuriken*," were the words Trunk sprang on us, followed by a few more lines regarding the problems of a contemporary nin-ja-hero, already disappearing in a cloud of alcoholic vapor.

Of course, I did not get to hear her name. What's more, I had absolutely no chance to hear it. The whole incident got me down, even made me sad. We finally started to move, my ineffably dear girl and I, walking through the night, entering a coffee-shop, drinking rum and tea, kissing and hanging out. That evening and for several days after that, I tried to devise various tricks in order to discover her name. I asked her to show me her driver's license.

"I don't have one. I do not drive", she said.

"May I see your ID?" I would putter inarticulately a few days later.

"Why?" she wondered, and I couldn't blame her.

"Well, so that... I can see your photo from your younger days."

"No need to," she said. "I have a new ID, got it just a few days ago, and my photo is not older than two or three weeks.

That is when I got to know the whole history of her family, even the names of her father and brother. I still do not understand how we got to talk about her height and shoe size.

It was a Saturday, and I was supposed to phone her from a payphone, which I hated the most in any case. You know... it's freezing outside, a true blizzard, and I'm using a phone booth, with my lips pressed tightly, my teeth chattering wildly, to call various people around. I dialed her number. Her old man probably answered it, so I hung up. There was a male voice again when I phoned the same number again, but this time it was different, maybe her brother, how could I know...? I hung up again. And so it went a few more times, as I did not know whom to ask for. I tried to imagine my answers to the expected question.

"Could I, please, speak to a dark-haired girl, aged 20, 171 cm high, shoe-size 39...?"

"Excuse me, who do you want to speak to?"

"Well... your daughter or your sister... maybe a granddaughter... She said she had no driver's license, and had a brand new ID-card. I know it sounds like a classified ad, but..."

"You are crazy. Do not phone ever again!"

To cut the long story short, the girl I had dated for two weeks answered the phone in my ninth try. We had a deal I would phone at 2 pm, and I managed to speak to her at 3:30. Having stated I sounded like I had a lollipop in my mouth (I was freezing, she must have heard my teeth chatter), I said I got stuck at a student job and that the strange sound must be the echo on the line. She asked me whether I also phoned before, since there were many calls to the same number and someone just kept hanging up. Resentfully, I said I was no nutcase and I had better things to do.

And that was the prelude to the magnificent evening at the Promenade.

"I wonder what that Wittgenstein's sentence, 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent,' really meant", I am thinking aloud, looking into the distance.

"I have no idea," echoes the girl's voice.

"As far as I know Wittgenstein, through his two works, it probably refers to the aspirations toward clarity, while the mathematician Carnap thought it was meant to 'shut the metaphysics' mouth'. But how could Carnap have known anything? Wittgenstein couldn't stand him..."

She is still silent. Sitting and looking into the distance. Only one question weighs on my mind, you know well which one. And I may be saved after all, all of a sudden: she wants to go to the park and pee. I tell her to leave the purse with me, so she won't have to think about it.

The girl leaves, I hunch over the purse in my black coat, seconds pass, I will finally know her name, I am holding her wallet and... I hear her angry voice behind me:

"What are you doing?!"

I threw the wallet and the purse to the bench – she had come back to get some tissues – and no explanation comes into my mind. I just waved and ran away, as fast as I could. From that day on, I have called my inability to remember names in her honor, and paraphrasing a famous movie title, the sixth(ish) sense.

Still under the influence of the misunderstanding with the nameless girl, I looked at the Cathedral, descended the stairs, entered the Radić Street. I sat at Pinta and had a cold spritzer.

Later, I saw her two more times, in passing. We did not even say hello. I never got to know her name, and I remember the incident every time I find myself at the Strossmayer Promenade.

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"Really beautiful", Vargek grinned at me. "Who knows what the girl could have thought after your rummaging through her purse. And this assertion that you cannot remember the names of the girls you date..."

"It happened just once," I tried to defend myself ineffectually. "Well, a few times."

"Hm-hmmm... OK... alright... just a moment... The whole situation is a tad unusual..." Gott interrupted, and it was the first time that I saw a trace of doubt in my benevolence and mental abilities in his face. "Let's say something like that is possible. Here, I've taken it all down, it's not that bad... though not too commendable, either, dear Mr. Kukec."

"But that is not all," whispered the devilish Vargek. "He makes the girls drunk if he chooses... Isn't that right?"

"Well, not really... I mean, if you are referring to that incident with that journalist, some ten years ago..."

"Exactly... Prague, 2005. January, if I'm not mistaken..."

"My colleeeeeague, you are very well informed," Gott was satisfied. "Here, a lamp has just lit up, indicating that year and that month. The note says Prague. So, what happened there, Mr. Kukec?"

"Look, it was nothing special, a pure coincidence..." I had a sip of that cherry brandy and continued the story.