

Ante Tomić
NOTHING SHOULD SURPRISE US
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Translated by MarijaNađJavornik Čubrić

“Yes, comrade lieutenant?”

“Lock the door.”

“Lock the door?” Siniša was surprised.

“Yes.”

Siniša locked the door. Nađ looked angry about something. On the desk between papers, on a dirty and written over map, there was a half full bottle of *Rubin* brandy and a glass with some brownish alcohol on the bottom.

“Would you like to have one,” said the officer, noticing that he looked at the bottle.

“No, thank you.”

“Come on, have one, we don’t have to be formal all the time,” said Nađ exceptionally cordially.

Where is this coming from? The recruit thought. As usual, officer’s cordiality only made him suspicious. The last time an officer was this nice to him he was an intelligence service major who wanted to make him talk of nationalism.

“What do you think, Siniša,” said the major then in a smooth voice, “is there nationalism in Split?”

“Yes, there is,” said Siniša readily.

“Oh really,” the major got cheerful, “and where did you encounter nationalism?”

“In public toilets.”

“Get out of here! In public toilets, you say?”

“Public toilets are full of nationalist messages on the walls,” Siniša explained.

“Well who writes them,” whispered the major in a concerned tone, while his eyes sparkled.

“I have no idea, some fools I guess,” said the soldier innocently.

“Haven’t you by accident seen somebody writing them?”

“Well no, I usually go to the toilet by myself,” explained Siniša simply.

And that was all that asshole got out of him. He was not such an idiot to be misled by his mock friendship, so now, when Nađ offered some alcohol to him, something told him that in his cordiality, in sudden breaking of the rigid class relationship between noble officers and knavish soldiers that was so unlike Nađ there could certainly be nothing good for him, so he refused the drink one more time.

”No, it’s too early for me.”

“I see,” said Nađ somewhat disturbed, as it seemed to Siniša, as if he was expecting a different answer. Thy fell silent. The lieutenant had his hands in his pockets and was somewhat desperately staring in front of himself, and Siniša felt awkward, so his eyes circled the room, from the blue metal cabinet with one door slightly crooked, white and black photograph of Josip Broz in marshal’s uniform to the black bakelite telephone with the written message *Look out, the enemy is listening!*

“Sit down,” said Nađ suddenly.

Siniša sat on the chair in front of the desk. The officer remained standing.

“Sirišćević, can I trust you?” He asked in a serious tone of voice.

Sinišaraised his eyebrows.

“The situation is fucked up,” Nađ continued, “and I need an absolutely trustworthy man in it. I am asking you word of communist’s honour that nothing said here...”

“Excuse me, I am not a Party member,” the soldier interrupted him.

“You are not in the Party?”

“No.”

“Why did I think you are?”

Siniša confusedly, perhaps slightly in an apologising manner, shrugged his shoulders.

“Alright, it doesn’t matter,” continued Nađ, “what I want to say is that the situation is very fucked up and I am looking for a man I can completely rely on. Are you that man?” He asked seriously.

“Well, it depends...”

“What depends?”

“Depends whether it is dangerous. I mean... I wouldn’t like to get killed,” said Siniša cautiously.

“You will not get killed. In that respect you are in no danger. All that is expected from you is to keep your mouth shut. Can you keep your mouth shut?”

“What do I know... I can,” said the soldier.

“Can you or can’t you?”

“I can!”

“Really?”

Really!”

Lieutenant Imre Nađ looked at him once again suspiciously, then he went around the desk and stood in front of him. At the distance of some half a yard.

“What you are about to see,” he said, “you have never seen, do you understand?”

Then he grabbed his belt and started unbuttoning his pants. Siniša froze.

“Don’t be afraid,” said the lieutenant.

“I don’t get it,” said the surprised soldier.

“I have to show you something.”

Realising at that moment that his head is exactly levelled with the officer’s loins, Siniša quickly got up.

“No, no, everything is fine, sit down,” Nađ reassured him.

“What is it all about?”

“Everything is fine, I have a problem I have to show you,” said Nađ, now only in his grey-olive green shorts, with his pants down the thighs.

Siniša sat down again restlessly. Perform your order and complain later, that thought came to his mind.

Does that principle apply in these situations? Does the Regulation book anticipate such cases?

Nađ Nađ lowered his pants and stood in front of him with his naked curly loins, then he took his penis in his hand and removed the foreskin.

“Look at this!”

“What?”

“What do I know, you are the doctor, you tell me.”

Siniša, feeling overwhelmed with relief, took a look at Nađ’s penis. On the delicate mucous membrane, next to the head there was an oval, bloody red wound the size of a fingerprint of a thumb.

“I would have to wash my hands.”

“Fuck the hands.”

Carefully, as if he was taking a small animal in his hand, such as a chick or a guinea pig, Siniša took his lieutenant’s dick in his hand and touched the protuberance with hard edges with a finger cushion. The lieutenant gasped in low voice.

“Hurts?”

“A little.”

The young doctor has seen something only on pictures, but having spent a painful month with the book Skin and sexual diseases by Franjo Kogoj, with the authority of an A in dermatovenerology, he could say with certainty:

“Syphilis, comrade lieutenant.”

“Ouch!” Comrade lieutenant sighed.

“Have you recently, let us say, in the past three weeks, had intercourse with persons of... well... suspicious sexual habits.”

“Pussies!” Nađ cried out bitterly.

"There were more of them?" Siniša was impressed.

"No, no, my buddies, pussies, they all laughed when I went with a whore. They knew, fuck them, they all knew, and nobody would tell me."

Lieutenant Nađ was obviously not well liked among his peers.

"When did you notice this?"

"This morning."

"Have you seen a doctor already?"

"I went... Got in and got out."

"I don't understand. Did you have a check-up?"

"Well, no," Nađ replied. "I got scared... I mustn't, Sirišćević... I came to the infirmary, and the man asked where is your file? When I heard 'your file', my legs gave up. I don't want this in my file, do you understand?"

"But it is a medical file, not a personal dossier."

"Let that be," said the officer with distrust. "It all ends up in the same place later."

No, thought Siniša, how could he know something like that. That one's personal file could contain intimate matters such as sexual diseases was certainly not the most probable thing one could imagine.

"You will treat me," said Nađ a determined tone.

"Hey, take it easy, it does not work that way," Siniša rebelled.

"You will have to do that for me," the officer was relentless.

"But how, man? I am not officially a physician here, I have no medicine, if they catch me..."

"Nobody will catch you," Nađ said. "Just get some medicine and help me to get rid of that shit, and I will know how to repay you. But, mind you, you must not say a thing to anybody. Not a word to anybody! Not to the soldiers, not to the officers, not to a living soul! It will be our little secret..."

Our little secret! How romantic, thought Siniša.

"While this lasts, the blockhouse is in the status of intensified combat alert and nobody can come in or get out," Nađ continued now, probably completely unconsciously in a military tone of voice. "Only you will leave for Struga today and get everything you need, and on the way..." Here the lieutenant paused, and then continued in a calmer tone, "...on the way you will go to see my wife."

"I didn't know you were married."

"I am."

"And have you in the meantime perhaps...?"

"No," the officer cut him off.

"I mean, you have to know," Siniša said, "this is no laughing matter, because if you had relations with your wife after..."

"I did not have relations with my wife," the lieutenant cut him off again, brusquely emphasising every word. "That is not your job, you don't have to worry about that. And when you go to see her, do not mention this, do you understand?"

Sinišanodded.

"She must not know anything. Just tell her that we have a situation on the border and that for some time... How long will the treatment last?"

"Well, at least three weeks."

"Three weeks?" The lieutenant was shocked.

"Cannot be done sooner."

"Oh, fuck, I did not know that... Never mind, you will then go to my wife, I will give you the address, and you will tell her that we have a problem here, that, I don't know, large movement of the Albanian troops was spotted at the border and that for three weeks I will..."

"At least three weeks," Siniša pointed out.

"At least three weeks I will not come home!" Lieutenant Imre Nađ finished. "Do you understand, Sirišćević?"

"I understand, comrade lieutenant!"

“Are there any questions?”

“Yes.”

“Speak up.”

“Are you perhaps allergic to penicilin?” Siniša asked timidly.

