

## Franjo Janeš

**Franjo Janeš** (Zagreb, 1982) is a writer and a university professor, working as a senior lecturer at the Department of German at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, where he also graduated in English and German Language and Literature and received his PhD in Linguistics. He won the 2009 Kiklop book prize in the category best debut for his novel *Night of the Diving Lead*, and the SFera book prize for the best novel for *Formula for Chaos* in 2012. His short story *Genie in a bottle* has been published in the anthology of young Croatian prose authors *No Doors, No Knocking (Bez vrata, bez kucanja)* by Sandorf in 2012. He is also an active musician, playing in the band Astridian.



### Works:

*Night of the Diving Lead (Noć mrtvih živaca, Algoritam, 2009)*, novel  
*Formula for Chaos (Formula za kaos, Algoritam, 2011)*, novel  
*Plucking the Phoenix (Čerupanje feniksa, Algoritam, 2013)*, novel  
*The Tunnel at the End of the Light (Tunel na kraju svjetla, Fraktura, 2016)*, novel  
*The Loop (Petlja, Hena com, 2021)*, novel  
*A Foreign Body (Strano tijelo, Hena com, 2022)*, novel

## A FOREIGN BODY

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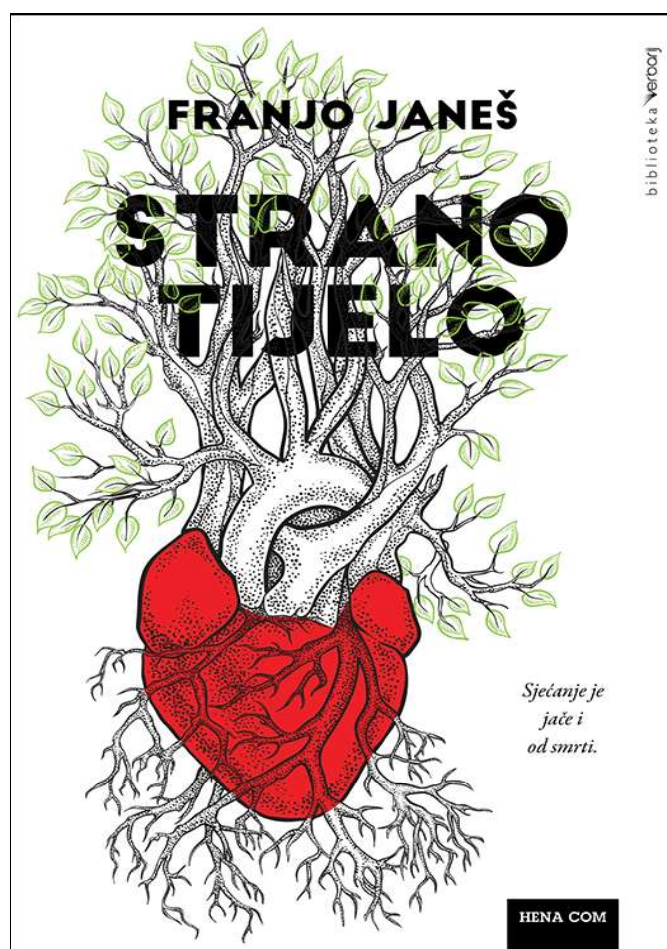
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### About the novel:

*A Foreign Body* by Franjo Janeš is uniquely composed: each of the six parts, here called circles, consists of six chapters that you can read in the order you choose, and the author (born on the same date as Julio Cortázar) suggests that it should be decided by dice, which would some call a coincidence. However, there is not much room for coincidence in the novel. The gallery of younger characters and their parents is beautifully set up and brought to a finale full of twists, turns and violence. In this crime story, Janeš speaks critically about the society, sketching corruption, domestic violence, homophobia, and the disenfranchised... There is no lack of fantasy or paranormal phenomena here: the heart of Agna (the one who purifies, the sixth chakra, the third eye), the first victim in the novel, is transplanted into a body that least deserves it, and it brings with it old memory and trauma, changing its new owner forever!



Franjo Janeš  
**A Foreign Body**

*Translated from the Croatian by Mirna Čubranić*



### How to read this book?

#### 1. Not at all

An option for the general public. Those who are reading this have already skipped this step.

#### 2. Partially

For the quitters. For the partial ones.

#### 3. With nerdy determination

In chronological order, turning the pages out of habit, believing that there is only one right way and that the author has determined it. However, the author does not want to encourage laziness, conformity and e-books, so he has mixed the chapters within each of the six parts of the book. Even determinism is just a matter of choice.

#### 4. In a chaotic, spoilery manner

Randomly jumping from chapter to chapter, not even respecting the linear sequence of parts (circles). Considering the significant amount of obscurity and the early obliteration of suspense, this approach is recommended only for re-reading or for the literary theorists who care less about the book and more about proving their own abilities.

#### 5. The author's way

Following the original order of chapters, just as they were written. It works only if the author has given you the code or if you discover it in the poem "The Windmills" (*End or Fin*).

#### 6. With a controlled lack of control

The optimal option, a good balance of linear and nonlinear, free and imposed. Using one of 4320 reading possibilities, there is a high chance you will read in your own, unique way, like (theoretically) nobody else has read. And even if someone has, you'll still have the satisfaction of a certain degree of personal creation. This approach works as follows: the six major parts (circles) unfold in a predetermined order, but the six chapters within each circle are randomly arranged. Following their intuition or so-called *coincidence*, the reader can choose the order in which they will arrange the numbers from 1 to 6, that is, the chapters within a circle. For dramatic effect, rolling a dice is recommended. Having a Yahtzee set helps. A dice can be rolled once before each new chapter, or all rolls can be done at the beginning of a circle. Those with obsessive-compulsive tendencies must respect the whims of the dice and read the same chapter several times if necessary. Anyone dissatisfied with the resulting order would probably be dissatisfied even if it turned out differently.

## CATALOGUE OF CROATIAN PROSE

How does your version of this book begin and, more importantly, how does it end? Turn the page, maybe even roll a dice, and let's get started.

### **THE FIRST CIRCLE: HEART THIEF**

- ▣ The heart attack ending
  - ▣ Pensioners' nightlife
    - ▣ MVP
  - ▣ Where's the money?
    - ▣ Norma Belle
- ▣ Everybody knows what will happen

#### **▣ The heart attack ending**

This is the end. That is what Toni Šestan thought as he was half-sitting, half-lying in the VIP box at the Velesajam ice rink, where his hockey team The Six, known as "Mercenaries" were playing the deciding game against Medveščak, known as "The Bears". He was wrong. First of all, the score was 3:3, and there were more than six minutes left in the final period. Second, and more importantly, after he felt a sharp pain in his chest and collapsed in his seat, no one patted him on the shoulder and informed him he was dead. The old world was still there, like a chronic illness you cannot get rid of that easily. The sounds merged into an unintelligible din (shouts from the stands, skates scratching the ice, the puck hitting the boards, blood pounding in his ears, and Ms Hervatin screaming hysterically for an ambulance), but the image didn't blur. The worried faces of his colleagues and business partners leaning over him, blocking his view of the ice, seemed normal: unhealthy and ugly as usual. He hoped that, despite everything, he looked better than them, and that they couldn't see how scared he was. He had already had two heart attacks, but it had never been this drastic. Had the universe grown tired of warnings? Would he really die this time?

If his team scored a goal and won the championship, would that be a worthy farewell? Not really. Although time hadn't slowed down and his life hadn't flashed before his eyes, he gained some kind of a clearer perspective, as if looking through a microscope and seeing huge voids in the canvas of his seemingly perfect life. True, in his late forties he was considered one of Croatia's most successful entrepreneurs, and his chain

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of retail stores, The Six, was one of the most desirable employers. The logo with the dice showing a lucky six on all three visible sides (which competitors and the Church interpreted as satanic symbolism, thus giving him free advertising) could be seen in almost every place marked on the map. Did that dice really bring him luck? With one failed marriage and a teenage son who maybe loved him, he didn't expect his family to be a source of happiness. What else was he hoping for? Concepts of spirituality and self-development still irritated him, but his therapist once presented a rational recipe for finding a meaning, and he even remembered the name: Viktor Frankl. He forgot everything else, because he never really listened to the therapist; he went to therapy to vent his mental sewage, which was like hitting a punching bag; you don't care what the bag has to say. So what was he living for? Another year of growth? Another night in an empty apartment, in which only his voice echoed before bedtime, when he said: "Siri, turn off the lights!"

While his lights were being turned off, Toni Šestan couldn't find a good reason why he should stay alive. At this stage, anyone could manage the company, and all the countless jobs that had made him feel like a messiah would continue to exist whether he did or not.

But his hockey team, named after his company, but known as the "Mercenaries", still hadn't managed to win the championship. Was that a good enough reason? People gave their lives for worse things. It would force him to survive until the end of the game, and by then the ambulance might arrive.

Whether he had a purpose or not, he didn't want to die. Even though he always said that dying was like going to sleep, something you practiced every night, and even though he didn't believe in the afterlife punishment, now that he was dancing on the edge of the abyss, he didn't feel indifferent. He regretted that Toni Jr. wasn't beside him, so he could at least say his goodbye.

Ms Hervatin leaned over him.

"They're coming in ten minutes. Hang on, boss! And breathe! Breathe!"

He wanted to say something poisonous to her, like, "Hervatin, the more I listen to you, the less I want to breathe", but she shoved an aspirin in his mouth. He crushed it with his teeth, wanting to tell everyone around him to turn their attention back to the game instead of staring at him. But he realized he couldn't speak.

Suddenly, the stadium exploded. The siren sounded, announcing a scored goal. Of course that the game didn't stop just because his heart did. He wondered who scored. The shouting from the stands didn't tell him anything, because the Bears had more fans even at the Velesajam rink. The faces of the people around him weren't helpful either, because no one in the box was watching the game. Just when the announcer was about

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to say who scored the goal, Ms Hervatin leaned close to his face and said unnecessarily loudly: "Everything will be alright, boss. Don't worry." He wanted to strangle her, but he couldn't move his hands.

The referee whistled for the game to go on. The race between the ambulance and his heart went on as well, and his heart was winning even though it wasn't beating. Time hadn't stopped, but it dragged slowly, like a sticky mass trickling into the abyss. Was that good or bad for the game? Was his team winning or losing? Should he tremble with the eagerness for victory or with the hope for the equalizer?

A regional manager shifted, revealing a view of the scoreboard. Who would have thought that? The Mercenaries were leading 4:3! To make things better, there was only a minute left till the end of the game. The team he had poured millions into was just a hair's breadth away from becoming champions.

The paramedics must have thought it strange when they found him with a blissful smile of a saint dying reconciled with the world. As they carried him towards the exit, a new collective roar echoed through the stadium, even louder than before. Unfortunately, from the stretcher, he couldn't see anything except the ceiling. And the sounds suddenly quieted down as the paramedics rushed downstairs towards the parking lot. Was that the end of the game? Did his team officially win?

They put him into the ambulance and slammed the door shut. As the van danced through the curves, a paramedic gave him an injection and connected him to oxygen. When they finally stopped swaying, most probably at a traffic light, Toni summoned the strength to lift his head. "What... happened?" he asked.

"You've suffered a serious heart attack. If the traffic on our way to the rink had been heavier, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"No, not that. I meant the game..."

"Ah, the game! The Bears scored a second before the end; they will be playing overtime," said the young paramedic, smiling from ear to ear. "What a drama, huh?"

Toni Šestan nodded wearily. If there was anything he hated in life, it was drama.

### ▣ Pensioners' nightlife

The lights of the approaching cars pierced his eyes like aggressive fireflies. Where did all this traffic come from this late at night, Amir Spahić wondered as he drove towards the hospital. The speed limit was sixty, but he was driving fifty, just to be safe. Maybe it was like this every evening, how would he know? By ten, he would usually be in bed, cuddled up next to Aida, who now smiled from the passenger seat as if they were em-

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barking on a wild adventure or a spontaneous outing. It was more like the former, Amir thought, trying to calm his nerves before Aida noticed his jitters and then grew sullen in solidarity. After almost forty years that the two of them had spent together, she changed a lot, but her smile remained the same, as did the heart beating in her chest. His private sun, in the true sense of the word. Just like the Sun, while it radiated the warmth, her heart was dying, only much faster. It shouldn't take eight minutes to see if it had gone out.

In his right ear, the one that worked normally, he heard the impatient honking. Looking in the rearview mirror, he saw a bunch of youngsters who hadn't held a driver's license for long. If they had one at all.

"Just overtake me, why are you honking?"

"Because you are driving like a pensioner," Aida teased him.

"I am a pensioner."

Not by choice, he justified to himself. If that damned Toni Šestan hadn't bought the oil refinery and then quickly shut it down, he would still have another good five or six years of working life. To hell with the severance package that melted away like a scoop of ice cream. No matter how strange it sounded, he loved his factory job. If nothing else, at least he was somebody's boss. Now he was nobody.

"My vital pensioner," Aida patted his forearm.

As another car overtook them, loud music successfully penetrated through two car bodies. It even registered in Amir's semi-dead left ear.

"How are they not deaf?"

"Of course they are," Aida agreed. "That's why they have to turn the volume up."

She laughed from ear to ear. Amir also forced a smile for a moment, but it felt unnatural. Whatever she said or did, he couldn't relax and pretend this was just a late night outing in the city. After they called you from the hospital when you were already in your pyjamas and told you that a miracle had happened, that they had found a donor you had been hoping for for months, you couldn't act like it was a normal evening. If it were, he would have checked Aida's blood pressure and pulse, given her the prescribed handful of pills and kissed her goodnight. Now he needed someone to measure his pulse, and a pill wouldn't hurt either. He didn't dare feel relieved. Life had already knocked a candy out of his hand too many times.

Aida, of course, noticed. She gently placed her hand on his shoulder.

"It will be alright."

Amir didn't say anything. Between the two of them, she was usually right. He hoped she would be right this time as well.



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"It depends," he mumbled in the end. "Nobody donates a heart if everything is alright."

Now even Aida looked gloomy. It was as if he had kneaded a cloud with his hands and placed it in front of the Sun, which was doing its job perfectly. He tried to salvage the situation.

"But that's in God's hands, isn't it?"

Aida nodded, but the cloud remained in place. Apparently, even God's hands weren't always gentle.

However, it seemed that they were favourably inclined towards them tonight. At Rebro hospital, they immediately found a parking spot. Or was it just because of the late hours?

Amir got out of the car, walked around it and opened the passenger door. He took Aida's hand and gently helped her out.

"Isn't the air here lovely?" Aida said, breathing loudly through her nose.

Of course it is lovely, when you can't smell the landfill, he thought, opening the trunk. He took out the sports bag with Aida's things for the hospital and slung it over his shoulder. Aida took him under the arm, and they walked towards the main entrance like the two stapled pages of the same archived document. So slow, they looked like two people on the downward path of life, who were learning to walk again. Amir made sure to adjust his pace, to remain in slow motion, to suppress the desires of his body ("Speed up, you're not that old!"), to fully adapt to Aida, for whom every exertion was a Russian roulette.

When they finally dragged themselves to the right ward, he helped Aida sit down, left the bag on an empty seat and approached the reception desk. Now his pulse also quickened. He hated dealing with other people, and it seemed that the nurse on duty that night wasn't any better. She stared at him like he was a ghost. He turned his better, right ear towards her and said:

"Aida Spahić. They've told us they have found a donor."

The nurse typed something into the computer, clicked the mouse and rummaged through the papers. Under the fluorescent light tubes everybody looked pale, but Amir could swear the nurse was blushing. Why was she silent? Why wasn't she directing them to a room? Why didn't she call someone?

Aida stood up and dragged herself to the reception desk. Amir was annoyed with her reckless stunt. He wanted to lead her back to the seat, when the nurse raised her head and began to clear her throat as if something was stuck in it. Her gaze skilfully searched the empty space between Aida and Amir, making sure to avoid their eyes.

"I apologize, it was a false alarm. It's not compatible after all. I'm sorry."

Aida remained silent, and Amir forced himself to ask: "Are you sure?"

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"Unfortunately, yes."

Amir was flooded by the familiar feeling of being thrown into dust by the life's whims and fancies, helpless to do anything but watch. Like a child who doesn't know how to blackmail their parent and is left with only naive questions.

"Are we still... the first on the list?"

"Yes, yes. That hasn't changed. I'm just saying that the donor has to be a hundred percent compatible."

Amir would have preferred it if she had said that looking him in the eye. Even though they hadn't taken from them anything else except the newborn hope, even though they were in the same place as yesterday, and actually in a plus for almost an hour of optimism, Amir felt worse than ever. It's better to be drowning in hopelessness all the time, than to be pulled into it again after you've surfaced and reminded yourself what it is like to breathe.

"Amir, let's go, I can't stand here anymore."

"Good night," the nurse said, "and sorry for making you come here for no reason."

"Good night," Aida replied with a trembling voice. Amir couldn't do even that. He slithered down the corridor like an advanced worm that took millions of years of evolution to develop the ability to feel worthless.

They returned to the parking lot and slowly walked to their car. He had already sat Aida in the passenger seat when she asked: "Where is our bag?"

Amir sighed.

"I left it on the chair. I'll go get it, you wait here."

As if she had a choice.

When he moved away from the car, he could give vent to his feelings.

"Bloody motherfuckers! Why did you call us to come, if you weren't a hundred percent sure?"

He cursed the whole way to the ward and stopped at the last corner before the reception desk. In his right ear he heard a male voice he recognized from TV and a meeting that lasted less than five minutes.

"This was really fast. I thought it took months."

*Years*, Amir corrected him in his mind, hiding behind the wall like a criminal.

The nurse's voice replied: "Well, it usually comes from abroad, but you were lucky, this donor is from Croatia."

"Nothing like homemade," said the male voice, to which only the third, female voice laughed.

Amir forced himself to peek around the wall. Toni Šestan was standing at the reception desk. More

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precisely, he was casually leaning on the counter as if he owned the entire hospital. Amir was waiting for him to start scratching his balls.

The nurse led Šestan and his assistant down the corridor.

"We have to hurry. We have only four hours for transplantation, and one hour has already passed."

"There's enough time for everything," Šestan replied, trailing behind the nurse. His assistant walked at the rear, like a strange mix of a bodyguard and a dog jumping around the legs of its owner.

"There's enough time for everything, when you are Toni Šestan," Amir muttered to himself in the empty corridor.

He remembered how Šestan had puffed on a cigarette while informing him that he had become redundant. Aida had never smoked in her life. And who got rewarded?

He turned around and hit the wall with his fist. The wall was unimpressed. It remained more or less the same, with just a few crumbs of scraped plaster and barely noticeable bloodstains on it.

Amir waited for his breathing to slow down before he took the bag and headed back to the car. He hoped Aida wouldn't notice anything.

"I see you've had another fight with the wall," she said.

Amir shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't look her in the eye.

"Who won?" she asked.

The ones who always win, Amir thought and started the engine.

### ▣ MVP

As soon as the Tibetan bowls rang, Sabina Hervatin groped for her phone and turned off the alarm. A second too late, as usual. Igor heard it and reflexively buried his head under the pillow.

"Jesus, Sabina, it's still night!"

"Go back to sleep," she replied, getting out of the bed. Her attempts to move quietly like a ninja were in vain, as Igor seemed determined to completely break his cracked sleep.

"I really don't get it. Why do you have to be at the office before six, if you start work at seven?"

"Because I have to."

That was the short version. The longer version, which he wouldn't understand and therefore wouldn't get, was that Toni Šestan sometimes battled with insomnia. And since he wasn't the kind of a

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businessman who jogged before work, he showed up at the office before the beginning of working hours. It was embarrassing to be an assistant who arrived after her boss, who had already made himself a coffee. Truth to be told, it happened only once, after she introduced the practice of the preventive early clocking in. Some might say that "Hervatin, what are you doing here so early?" wasn't a compliment, but astonishment was a step in the right direction. The only tangible signs of admiration she had received so far were from the security guard, who nicknamed her "Little Owl". She hoped he was alluding to her nocturnal activities, not to her eyes, which were disproportionately large compared to the rest of her face, especially behind the thick glasses she wore. She tried switching to contact lenses, which ended in tears, and all she got from Šestan was: "Hervatin, why are you crying? Are you in PMS?" After that, she stuck to sweat and blood. Admittedly, it was paper cuts, but nobody could say that she didn't bleed for the company. Sweat, on the other hand, broke out every time Šestan yelled at her, but he never came close enough to her to smell it.

If he were fully awake, Igor would have argued that it made no sense to get up so early this morning, especially since the doctors wouldn't allow Šestan to return to work after the last night's incident. She would've snapped back that the professional athletes train even when their coach wasn't watching. He would have retorted something like: "And what about the professional brown-nosers?" And it would have escalated into a loud bickering and a whispered question of whether he was living with the right person.

She quickly got ready (*no need for an eyeshadow if Toni is not in the office*) and left the apartment. Her stomach growled loudly, objecting to skipping breakfast.

"Shut up!" she rebuked it, descending in the empty elevator to the ground floor. "We need to lose weight."

Even though summer was approaching and it was already daytime outside, Sabina couldn't say she was enjoying the sight. If there was any beauty in the slow awakening of the city, it was too tiny for her myopia.

She started the car and navigated through the empty streets. Instead of music, a motivational speech by Gary Vaynerchuk was coming through the speakers, which would have sounded insulting to the laypeople.

"Get off your ass!" she repeated like a parrot. "No fucking excuses!"

If anyone at the traffic lights was paying any attention to her, they would have thought she was arguing with herself.

Before she arrived to the company's parking garage, she had enough time for three sets of self-confidence affirmations. When the security guard saw her, he said: "Good morning, Little Owl."

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"Good morning," she replied. She wondered how obvious her lie was. It always seemed to her that the truth popped out like a footnote, small and suppressed at the bottom of the page, yet visible to everyone.

"Will our boss survive?" the security guard asked.

"He's holding on."<sup>1</sup>

"If the last night didn't kill him..." he said with a laugh.

"Don't you dare mention that to him."

"Do you really think he ever talks to me?"

She waved at him and continued to the elevator. She went up to the fifteenth floor and stepped into the dimly lit hallway. It seemed eerie, like the inside of the closet where her parents used to lock her up when she was naughty. For a few seconds, she just stood there. Her feet seemed reluctant to step into the darkness. Something moved between the walls. Was it coming towards her? She frantically groped along the wall, searching for the light switch. When she turned on the light, she realized it was just a strange play of half-light and shadows. There was no one there except her.

She continued to her office, brewed herself some green tea and sat down at her desk. There were more or less banal tasks waiting for her, something she could dedicate herself to, but what would be the point if no one saw her doing them? Some athletes still needed a coach.

She took out her phone and found Toni's contact. She desperately wanted to press the call button and report for duty, like a soldier reporting to their commander. Unfortunately, this wasn't the army. And Toni was lying in the hospital, the last thing he needed was the work-related stressors.

She could almost hear Igor laughing at her. While she sat uselessly at the oversized desk, in front of the glass wall behind which most of the city was still asleep, a part of her agreed with him. Even though she wasn't torturing herself with contact lenses, her eyes were stinging. No wonder, since she had stayed at the hospital until midnight yesterday. Her eyelids were sinking like sunken ships. She would close her eyes, just for five minutes. Top managers do that. It was not slacking off but a *power nap*.

She sank into the backrest and turned off the lights. The world became quieter, as if wrapped in a cotton candy. Just five minutes... Just...

*"I leave you for five minutes, and you make such a mess!"*

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<sup>1</sup> He won't be fine.

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*Peeking from under the bedspread, she saw only her slippers. She heard her favourite dolls flying around the room, bouncing off the walls. One Barbie, armless, landed on the floor.*

*"You rude little trash!"*

*She wanted to say sorry, but that would have angered her mother even more. She trembled as the slippers turned into plastic sandals. Dad!*

*She crawled towards the light and went towards Dad, only to realize it was Toni Šestan, naked to his waist. The skin on his chest pulsated, as if a foreign organism was trying to break through. He began to laugh in a high-pitched voice, like a teenage girl. He brought his right hand close to his chest and dug his fingers into the skin. The whole fist disappeared beneath the flesh. Inch by inch, he pulled out a large, bloody heart that was still beating. When she looked closely, it wasn't a heart, but a curled-up foetus trembling with fear. Šestan slowly approached her desk. She wanted to tell him to stop, but she had no voice. She could only blow through her nose. She couldn't even stand up, her legs were nailed to the floor. Šestan leaned over the desk, extended the foetus towards her and said...*

*"Wake up, Hervatin! You're not testing these mattresses."*

*She opened her eyes. Šestan was indeed standing in front of her desk. In a suit. With no bloody foetus anywhere in sight.*

*"Oh God... I'm so sorry... I..."*

*"Relax, I was just messing with you," he said, sitting down on the visitor's chair. "It's only half-past six, why are you here already?"*

*Because I'm your MVP, she wanted to say.*

*"I couldn't sleep", she blurted out without thinking.*

*"I didn't get that impression."*

*She wanted to continue with apologies, but he interrupted her: "Relax, I'm just fucking with you."*

*"Why are you here?"*

*"This is my company, Hervatin."*

*"I mean, shouldn't you be in the hospital?"*

*"How does my heart know where I am?" he replied, lighting a cigarette. "If it holds up, it holds up. If not, the hospital won't help."*

*Sabina pulled out an ashtray from the drawer, prepared for such occasions.*

*Although it didn't seem like the boss was on his deathbed, he had definitely seen better days. He*

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looked like he had been sucked dry by vampires, leaving only his skin, which looked unhealthy and parched. His chest looked normal. There was no pulsating.

"What has the doctor said?" she asked.

"He said the next one would be fatal. They have exhausted all possibilities, blah, blah. The heart is most definitely exhausted. I mean, I've exhausted it."

"And that means..."

"A transplant, Hervatin. As we say in our meetings: the market demands an innovation, and everything that isn't a growth is a decline."

She had a ready response to this:

"I have a friend<sup>2</sup> at the Rebro hospital."

"Hervatin, there is a waiting list, and I don't intend to jump the queue. I'm not as big of an asshole as they say."

"Jumping the queue was not what I had in mind..."

"Then what? You wanted to ask your friend to put me at the top of the list? Same thing, different shit."

"I wanted to say the lists are made by urgency, not by waiting time," she bluffed. "And the donor compatibility is the decisive factor."

This was actually true; she had googled it.

"Hervatin, think about it. What are the chances I would find a compatible donor within a month? Given the time since my last heart attack, I'd say my days are numbered."

"What if we..."

"I have no intention of quitting smoking and drinking coffee."

Jesus, coffee wasn't good for him at all, and she was boasting about making gallons of coffee for him!

"Let's be optimistic," she said with a faint smile.

"Let's be realistic, Hervatin. I am as dead as landline phones. I only exist out of habit. If anything, you won't have to look at me for much longer."

But I want to look at you, she almost replied. He got up and disappeared on the other side of the frosted glass door. When he closed it, she wondered what it would be like if that door never opened again. What if he really died? Just a few days ago, that would have been unthinkable, but after what happened last night...

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<sup>2</sup> A person that owes me a favour

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She picked up her phone, looked towards her boss's door, as if she could lock it with her gaze, and called her "friend" from the Rebro hospital. While the phone was ringing, she decided to speak quietly enough so that nobody would hear her outside the office, but still loud enough not to whisper, which would seem illegal. Anyone would do the same in her position. She just wanted the man who had given so much be given a chance to keep giving.

"He's given you nothing at all," said Igor in her mind. "You wish," retorted Sabina, quickly dismissing the thought. She wasn't attracted to her boss. Yes, he was an attractive man, that was a fact. He was quite a catch, but that didn't mean... Her thoughts were interrupted by a voice carried by the radio waves.

"Yes?"

"Hey. I just wanted to check if our deal was still on."

"It's on, but we won't discuss it over the phone."

"But he's the first one on the list... if the miracle happens, right?"

"Sure. But I can't do anything if I'm not on duty when the miracle happens."

"I'm confident you'll make sure you are informed."

She said it in a very Šestan-like manner.

"Okay, but don't call me again, please."

"You'll call me."

"You sound like a mobster," said Igor in her mind after she hung up.

"Shut up," she said out loud.

Just when she put her phone away, Šestan came out of his office, talking into his own.

"Yes, I'm alive. You aren't that lucky."

She smiled at him as he passed by, but he didn't even look at her.

"The child support money is on your account, what else do you want?"

When he disappeared around the corner, she realized that she had stood up as if the national anthem was playing. Now she sat back down and stared at the blank computer screen.

MVP, right. She wondered what that really meant. A low chance of praise. To make the matters worse, she felt guilty about that phone call. What if they really found a donor, and someone else needed that heart more than her boss?

Why bother with a conscience, interjected Igor in her mind, you're the MVP: cheat, deceive, bribe.

To silence him, she threw herself into all the tasks she wouldn't enjoy and that wouldn't make the world a better place.