Ivica Đikić
THE WILD YEAST

Translated from Croatian by Marina Veverec

PART ONE

CHAPTER FOUR

Luck is the Devil's Deed

The town grew uneasy when it heard of Džop's return. Few were unbothered; few could let it pass in one ear and out the other. Collective anxiety spread like a low hum, a barely perceptible tension, a dark premonition, a lingering taste of something foul. A return to this town always felt more sinister than leaving, no matter for what reason.

The return of Josip Ljubas pulled the town back to the war years, to the same uncertainty, to the darkness where so many lost their way, their spirit, fell apart. Even the very few townspeople of Duvno who suffered no misfortune, who emerged from the upheaval and turmoil with sacks of treasure, self-confident and vain as befits a bunch of former nobodies and rogues, were not at ease; they knew all too well that what came easily could be lost just as easily, that danger lurked in anything that threatened to disrupt the town's lethargy or its established hierarchies. Among those who profited from the war were a few sly men who made a fast buck and built holdings before the war, back when — as at any other time in this place — no real money could be made except through dealings with local authorities. And no matter who came to power, that would never change.

Though nobody said it aloud, deep down, in those low moments, the town saw Džop's reappearance, after so many years, as a premonition of impending evil, an omen of a high tide that would swirl routines, stir ghosts, compromise expectations, and force a choice between what is just and unjust, between evil and lesser evil. It was the last thing the town needed now, when flourishing, prosperity, and abundance were at the doorstep: the windmills had already formed a meandering ring around the town and its fields. All that remained was to wait for the first productive spin, for free electricity to reach Duvno's households and factories, for the land to flow with milk and honey and be enjoyed by the few townspeople who had not been driven away by crushing poverty and hopelessness, the remaining people who — by a turn of luck —

might finally reap the fruits of their patience, loyalty, and endurance. But no, nothing was ever so smooth and simple; the first shoots of doubt were already appearing.

Whenever we had the slightest chance to take a leap, to get ourselves noticed by God, unimaginable turns of events swept our bright future away like waves breaking sandcastles into foam. This pattern recurred throughout the town's remembered history.

At the threshold of an upsurge in prosperity, we were struck by social upheaval and collapse: sudden deaths or hidden mental illnesses among the few powerholders or regents who had favored us; successors who seemed determined — at all costs and in every possible way — to be the exact opposite of their predecessors, or else simply abandoned us when confronted with the invaders to whom they owed allegiance; then came the wars and nature's violent outbursts that left a state of perpetual backwardness and hopelessness; we lost favor with authorities because of our rashness, because we pushed to the front row while the wiser watched from the sidelines, waiting for things to calm down, because of power brokers who acted on a whim, hating our town sight unseen and judging it only reputation, out of some social or personal animosity; we had also suffered because we instinctively resisted good fortune and welfare as if it were a devil's deed, a trap for the gullible and inexperienced, something that was meant only for other towns, other people, those happier and more lighthearted than us.

The last such episode, described thoroughly by the local chroniclers, happened just before the most recent war. A cable factory planned to expand and modernize production, promising hundreds of new jobs. A massive concrete building, resembling a bunker, was constructed to house an accelerator manufactured in the USSR. It may not have been an accelerator at all, but the world came to call this terrifying machine, which no one has ever seen, an accelerator, simply because someone reputable used the term, and so it stuck.

Just as the mysterious device was about to arrive, suddenly, for the first time in Duvno's history, people gained ecological awareness, or perhaps fear was skillfully planted in their minds, which was not hard to do. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster happened less than four years earlier. Why would we, long ignored by the authorities and left to fend for ourselves, suddenly be getting this special machine that generates jobs, money, and happiness, unless it carried some deadly threat to us or to those who would come after? Eh, like the commies would've thought of Duvno if it weren't some hell-raising ambush, more treacherous than anything we had ran into so far!

And then, in the first two or three days of demonstrations against environmental hazards, the real reasons behind the unprecedented tumult that flooded the town streets surfaced. Fear of pollution and radiation gave way to national sentiments — suppressed and undesirable for decades—if there had been any eco-anxiety at all, except as a watchword, a pretext. Songs poured out from the crowd, songs that, in the past forty-five years, would have gotten people locked up if some diligent commissar heard or even overheard them, and there had been many of them in Duvno, more than anywhere else, since the region was known as a Ustaša stronghold, hostile to Yugoslavia and communism. The accelerator was mentioned only sporadically, as a device the commies, the Serbs and Yugoslavs, wanted to use to poison and exterminate the Croats. The grave danger was recognized in time, and the vile intention thwarted: why not send the accelerator to Aranđelovac, to Nevesinje, to Nikšić, let them install it, let the Serbs have all the luck, let their land prosper and their air be sweet with the smell of flourish. The accelerator might have been thwarted, but our enemies would soon come up with something new, something far more lethal if we did not break our shackles—now was the time to act. Not knowing what to do, the authorities resigned themselves to doing nothing, beyond ordering the police to prevent smashing and demolishing.

Džop and Nada could vividly remember those frosty, bright days of January 1990. Džop, a freshman law student at the University of Split, was home in Duvno for the holidays; there were no classes. Nada was a third-year high-school student. They could remember, but they were not much interested in ecology, revolution, or Croatian nationalism, nor did they really bother trying to understand what the people, the *čaršija*, was fussing about. They had not seen each other for three months, ever since Josip left for university. They were desperate to be together. As soon as it got dark outside, they would be kissing, eager to touch one another, exploring their own and each other's bodies in the back seat of a car parked behind the Eastern Orthodox cemetery. Džop had borrowed the car from Ilija Knez, his best friend. By day they walked the snowy forest paths with their arms around each other. The only sound was the wind playing on their ribs like piano keys. It felt as if they were on another planet, not like only a few kilometers separated them from the historical events reported with condemnation across the country.

Džop and Nada were both in love for the first time in their lives, and besides, their romance was new. What do you mean, you don't care? How can anyone mind their own petty business while we're tearing Yugoslavia down? What could be more important right now? Kolak was on the front line. It made perfect sense that he would be one of the ringleaders. The

Yugoslav secret police, UDBA, had killed his younger brother; the UDBA had made his life miserable, all the arrests and hearings, and now it was time for revenge; now he had an opportunity he simply could not miss. He waved the Croatian flag up front, shouting and cursing, inviting and enticing the indecisive, threatening enemies and militia. This is Croatia, this is Croatia, his neck veins bulged as he chanted and made sharp gestures, urging everyone not to spare their vocal cords. Now's the time, this is what we've been waitin' for all these years, we must not fail now!

Niko's daughter, Nada, was the only child in his household he could get angry with for not joining the town's quivering atmosphere. His older daughter, Božena, Sister Dominika, was serving in the Gorica parish near Grude. Ružica Kolak, Niko's wife, could not leave their youngest child, a seven-year-old son, Ivan, alone in the house. He could not be left alone because he might get scared, hurt himself, wander off, or get lost. He spoke sparingly, did not understand most of what was said to him, shook his head when upset or excited, rocked back and forth, beat his own body, and had outbursts of angry wailing that could not be predicted or stopped until they ceased on their own. The doctors could not — or would no t— help. Niko and Ružica had no other choice but to pray to God, to make pilgrimages to Our Lady in Sinj, Međugorje, and Rama, to believe in a miracle that would never come. They would not let others see their misery. They steered clear of other people's pity.

(...)

Marinko and Zora Ljubas, Džop's parents, were much more reserved about the emotions overwhelming the town. Their older son, Ranko, was doing his military service in Knin. Unlike Josip, who had finished his time in the army, serving in the Sarajevo military police immediately after graduating from high school, Ranko had left to join the Yugoslav National Army after finishing his degree in electrical engineering in Split. Marinko had been waiting for Ranko to return from the army so they could work together at a local repair shop for TV sets, videocassette recorders, and transistors: the shop was swamped with work. Ranko could get in trouble if the commanding officers at the Ninth Corps stationed in Knin found out about his family's involvement in anti-state protests. Marinko and Zora were glad that Josip was not taking part by his own choice, sparing them the trouble of convincing and restraining him.

There were a few other families who did not join rallies because their sons were serving military duty in the YNA. The town understood. Just as it understood that there were not many Muslims among the demonstrators, and not one single Serb. Not only did the town understand,

but it was also what everyone hoped for. To avoid any confusion or misinterpretation in the years to come.

And so, at the latest in a string of similar events, during the first ten days of 1990, potential prosperity was enthusiastically sacrificed for a higher goal, which would never be attained. Even after the war, which had followed two years after the accelerator, Duvno would not become part of Croatia, an idea people lived for and died for; everything else was a defeat and a disappointment, not worth all the blood and mortal fear. The border remained where it was, with Duvno on the wrong side of the meandering line, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and yet neither in Bosnia nor in Herzegovina. Nothing had changed. Croatian passports, though, were sent from Zagreb to make it easier for the people to leave and forget.

At the time of the accelerator, no one could have known how things would play out. And even if they had known, no one would have dared tell the people, for it would have raised the threat of mass resignation and exodus, of people carrying their houses and graves to the other side of the border, setting up Duvno somewhere in Croatia, all from scratch, in the southern or northern part, it really would not have mattered, as long as it was in Croatia. And even if they had known, and even if there had been a hero brave enough to tell the truth, people would not have believed him. Scram! Find someone else to fuck around with! Nobody said a word, even after it became clear that the borders would not move a centimeter. Saying anything would be like rubbing a fistful of salt on a pulsing wound, and the one who spoke would become the greatest foe to this town and these people.

And now, well, now there were no higher goals and reasons, no more dread of revolts and sabotage; now there were windmills, firmly driven into the ground on the heights, all permits granted, contracts signed, fat bribes taken, everyone pleased and content, not a single person would be deprived of benefits, small or large; there would be enough for everyone, if not more, God willing.

Only a few people, though, protested, just two or three dawdling zealots who called themselves climate activists and had started an Association for Bird and Nature Protection, “Orlokuk.” The head of the association was Stana Mandić, a math teacher, a widow, fanatically dedicated to mountains and rivers, forests and lakes, plants and animals. So far, she had posted thousands of photographs online, showing mountain springs, streams, birds and foxes, snakes, pits, trees with hats made of clouds, and steep, barren mountain tops; the mythical fields tattooed by narrow rivers and even slimmer tributaries, white flowers, uncut dew-soaked

meadows, sinkholes, and rock fissures. None of the photos showed people or any trace of human existence.

The mayor, Jozan, tried to negotiate with Stana many times, but it was of no use. He showed her how much money would pour into the town's treasury, patiently recited everything the town could build, and detailed how much every person in town would receive. He tried explaining, he tried convincing, and even tossed three papers on the table — three very costly studies on the environmental impact of wind power, citing examples from wealthier countries. Nothing. The brass statue of King Tomislav in the neglected town park would have budged sooner than Stana Mandić.

"You know, Stana, no matter how long or how much you keep foolin' around, this is still happenin'," Jozan opened the last round of negotiations, "But then again, I'm a politician, and I don't like when anyone's against somethin' that's good for all of us. And this — this is good for all of us."

"I am against it," Stana said calmly. "And you know very well why."

"I know you're against it or we wouldn't be havin' this talk, but why — I've no idea! No idea, I swear on my dead mother's grave! This is like... what, our fourth meeting, and I still don't know why you're against it," he paused, staring intently at the other party. He was expecting an answer. Stana remained quiet. The mayor continued. "The greatest experts claim everything's fine, there's no harm, no pollution, just benefits... What more do you want, goddammit?!" He spread his arms.

"Nowadays, there are experts who'll write whatever you ask them to, for cash."

"Oh, aren't you a know-it-all! The whole world says wind is the purest form of energy, the greenest choice—but no, you can't be convinced. Which is better, wind or a thermal plant? Hydropower? Or maybe we should shut it all down and go back to livin' in caves? And mind you, without the Internet you won't have your Facebook!"

"I don't know what's better or what's worse. That's not for me to tell. I only know what I've seen with my own eyes. You've dredged up and felled forests because of those goddamn windmills. Our forests will never recover. And if you get them up and running, we'll lose birds, too. The aggregator noise will drive them away. They'll fly off, so the sound won't drive them mad. We'll never have birds again. There are fewer of them already. Do you know how many bird species we used to have around here? More than a hundred!"

“Again with the birds,” Jozan rolled his eyes and sighed nervously. “They’ll fly off someplace else. They’ll be just fine. Pardon me, birds don’t give a flyin’ fuck. But we — see, this really matters to us.”

“There’s no life—no life—without the birds. No life! Remember Saint Francis? And look at our Fra Ante, a Franciscan, going after the birds. I mean, look at both of you. Everything comes down to money and power. You don’t care at all!”

“We’ve been over this so many times, there’s no point,” he rested his forearms on the table. He leaned forward, closer to Stana. He quickly looked over his left shoulder and then over his right, as if to check whether anyone else was in the room, if someone might overhear what he was about to say. “I’ll ask you one last time, think of me as an older brother: do you need money?”

He looked and sounded as if he were offering her a favor he had never offered anyone before, something no one should ever find out about. Teacher Stana sat riveted to her chair. She did not say a word. She could tell by Jozan’s eyes and lips that he was losing patience.

“Where would you get the money from, Jozan?”

“Why do you — pardon me again — give a fuck where I’d get the money from?” He sat up straight and leaned back. “I asked you a straight question, so give me a straight answer! Yes or no?”

Stana stood up without a word and walked out of his office. She almost ran out of the municipal hall. She was frightened by the thought that she might change her mind.

Since then, the mayor had stopped paying attention to Stana Mandić and her loyal supporters, who protested daily against putting some hundred and seventy enormous windmills into operation — windmills which, seen from above, looked like toothpicks stuck around the rim of an oval platter covered with slices of prosciutto and cheese. About forty turbines had been put into service a year earlier, but, like the ones waiting to be switched on, they were not spinning, since there was no wind. Jozan ordered the police and the rest of the town services to act as if nothing was happening, as if Stana did not exist. Like a plant without water, she would wilt without attention. It had worked with everyone else so far; no doubt it would work on her, too.

Džop’s return, as we said before, had churned the town’s peace and routines. Though nobody could figure out how the presence of a single man, no matter who he was, could jolt the

town's high expectations off the rails, everyone would have been much calmer had Džop not returned at this decisive moment. Duvno had been watching his every move ever since he appeared. The town tracked him even when he was a thousand or even more kilometers away; it would have been surprising if they were not watching him closely now. There was no aggression in it, not even the passive kind. At least, not yet. There were only false pretenses, caution, distrust, and dark inklings, spoken roundabout and always out of Džop's earshot.

I heard his old man, Marinko, is back on the booze. He's tryna hide it, even from himself, but he's back at it alright. And now that he's back at it, I don't see him stoppin'. And why would he? He's lived enough — year here, year there, same difference.

Poor fella, it's not like he coulda kept him outta the house. What's he gonna do? He's better off drinkin' than makin' a clown of himself, lettin' folks mock and gloat. He's better off bein' numbed by rakija than watchin', listenin', thinkin', doin' somethin' bout it. He's better off lettin' go.

Would anybody in Džop's place be comin' back here if they had anywhere else to go?

It's not easy for him. Compared to what he's carryin', Jesus cross was made of Styrofoam!

I heard he's openin' a bakery. A
bakery, for real?
Learned the craft in a German prison. Man's gotta be doin' somethin' for a livin'. The craft of stealin' gold and jewels — that's what he learned in Germany.
Come on, the man's sick of jail and livin' in fear. He smartened up, y'know, he's not that young anymore.

Openin' a bakery in Duvno sure isn't a smart move. What's he gonna do when that fails?

It's bound to fail from the start. He's not gettin' municipal permits. I doubt Jozan forgave him for drivin' him around the town like a gypsy flauntin' a Merc.

Before y'know it, he's gonna be back to stealin' and robbin'. Nothin' to lose, plenty of scores to settle.

Did he visit his brother's grave? Does
he have any money left?

You don't open a bakery if you've got no money.

I see him eatin' at Ilija Knez's restaurant every day. I suppose that takes money.

I'd say it takes some nerve. What's he thinkin', that everyone forgot what he'd done to Nada? That Nada forgot? It'll never be forgotten, shouldn't be!

The war screwed him up. Used to be a nice fella, good student, he was alright. But then...

I'm sick of hearin' that, man — the war screwin' people up! Soon as someone does somethin' stupid, everyone blames it on the war, it's been thirty years! When's it gonna stop?

Ain't he afraid of Niko Kolak? The man's been waitin' thirty years for him to show up, and his fuse sure ain't gettin' longer. Ain't he afraid of Nada? It's not somethin' you forgive overnight.

Say no more, who knows what she's goin' through. Lemme tell ya, God forbid I walked in her shoes — or Ilija's, or Niko's.

The town kept its eyes on Nada just as closely as it had on Džop. Everybody knew what had happened and how it had happened. Nobody forgot, even though it was all so far in the past. The town keeps the memories of personal tragedies and the downfall of families forever. It stays alert to such events so the mark would never fade. Moments of happiness, fame, or good fortune, though, dissolve in the collective memory as quickly as a pat of butter melts on a heated pan. Nada had dropped out of university in Zagreb, where she studied German and art history, and moved to Germany to be with Džop, who, a year later, left her for a Serbian turbo-folk singer. A fine thank-you that was! His own brother had been killed by the Serbs, and what does he do? Dates a Serb. What a way to repay his brother for being dead instead of him.

Nada Kolak had returned to Duvno without a university degree and without a life. The name Josip Džop Ljubas was etched even deeper, irrevocably fixed on the list of the most notorious scums to hail from this town, and, God help us, the list was long.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

The Revenge of the Birds

Duvno, like a shy young man, did not know what to do with Jelena Gašpar, and yet it felt pressured to do something, as if everything done so far was not good enough or grand enough to honor the posthumous glory of Šimun Kolak. In the first couple days, four news crews showed up at the request of local authorities: to film Jelena, to take her to her father's grave at the far end of the Karaula Cemetery, to talk to her about the man she had never seen, the man who had never seen her, whose grave she had never visited, and whom she knew more or less only through the archived reports from the German police.

The mayor Jozan officially welcomed Jelena and presented her with thick, heavy monographs on Duvno's role in Croatian history and on the coronation of King Tomislav, an event that — according to oral tradition — had taken place at the Duvno Field a thousand and one hundred years ago, he told her that he and Šimun, three years his senior, had been very close, how they used to steal apples from the neighbors' gardens, attend NK "Budućnost" football matches together, and then asked her frankly what else, in her opinion, the municipality could do to honor the memory of her legendary father.

"Our elementary school is named after him, we have a Šimun Kolak Street, one of the main streets as you've probably noticed, and we placed his bust outside the Cultural Center... If there's anything else we can do, just let me know. Money is no object."

"I don't know, really... All of this is a bit new and unusual for me. I haven't really thought about it. If I think of something else, I'll let you know."

(...)

Šimun Kolak's daughter was also hosted by the friar appointed as the Guardian, Fra Ante Kožul, an enterprising, middle-aged Herzegovian. He showed her around the church, the

monastery museum, and the library, presented her with a rosary whose beads were made of stones from Apparition Hill in Međugorje, then checked his watch, said his time was up, and slipped his business card into her hand, telling her to call if she ever needed anything, before hurrying off. He kept hitching up his habit with each long stride so it would not tangle around his legs as he rushed to an important meeting. Most of the time, the habit was a major obstacle to his grand entrepreneurial ambitions, and yet it kept him safe, opened many doors, and ensured inertia never turned into full-blown greed.

It was the Guardian who deserved the most credit for the international investors' decision to choose Duvno of all places and bring the luck of a wind farm capable of generating enough power for the whole town of some four hundred thousand people, the town twenty or thirty times more populous than the entire Duvno municipality. He was the one who drew them all together, persuaded, convinced, negotiated, and reconciled. Mayor Jozan did not meddle in Fra Ante's affairs; he entrusted the entire matter to him with complete confidence that the Guardian would achieve the best possible outcome. All Jozan had to do was handle the paperwork and licenses.

(...)

Both the Guardian and the mayor, however, were growing deeply uneasy; for forty-six days no more than a breeze had blown in Duvno — a breeze too weak to shake the spring bloom from the laden branches, let alone spin the heavy iron blades of the windmills. An opening ceremony for the new wind park had already been rescheduled twice, and each postponement meant new rounds of negotiations, alignments, and contrivances; not even the highest-ranking party and state officials wanted to miss out on a free ride to a dash of media attention. What good is an opening ceremony if the three-bladed propellers remain pinned to the sky indefinitely?

Jozan and Fra Ante were reluctant to share their concerns and dark prospects even with each other, they were cautious even when no one else was around. Knowing what the townspeople were like, in less than twenty-four hours the word would spread across the town that the windmills wouldn't amount to anything, forget about our welfare, once again we have been doomed, fooled, oh, what wretches we are, our history keeps repeating itself, defeated once more in stoppage time. And soon enough, the town would start looking for someone to blame for their betrayed expectations, drawing up accusations at once, met with glee all across the bars lining up the main street: we're getting punished because our priests, instead of being devoted to faith and prayer, as God commands, instead indulged in money and business, though

it had not been much better back when our guardians were lonely worshipers and martyrs, drunk poets, passive-aggressive enforcers of fear of God's vengeance, hyperactive political activists, or kind-hearted zealots devoted to serving the poor; we sure had it coming for electing thieves, gamblers and scumbags to run our town, and yet it had been just as unbearable when Vjeko Tomas, a nationalist and a willful idealist whose only talent was systematically turning friends into enemies, and enemies into conspirators ran the town for four years; it was only right, because the authorities failed to find a way to get rid of a man tailed by misfortune, a man we all knew quite well, wherever he turned—bad luck followed, and until we get rid of him, we won't sleep sound at night.

Jozan and Fra Ante, though, had no problem whatsoever with the town blaming the lack of wind on Džop Ljubas, but only as a last resort, because that would mean the whole thing had fallen apart, that it was time to run for one's life and once again leave behind the beautiful and sweet expectations the town had deeply embraced.

In this all-out pursuit of a culprit, not a single soul would naively cry out: Oh! What wrongs have we done against God to deprive us again of life in prosperity? No, not a single soul, because everyone knew we had done wrong. Yes, that's right! We were complicit or kept quiet, knew what was going on but decided to look the other way, exulted in other people's suffering, bemusing ourselves with lies that they had brought it upon themselves, that if we hadn't done it to them – they would've done it to us... Yes, yes, we have done wrong! We gave in to mass insanity, succumbed to evil — out of our fear, too, which wasn't irrational or unreasonable — we snarled at everyone obstructing the closing of ranks, always ready to go after the weak while being servile to our oppressors, extortioners and impostors, because they were our people, because we feared them, because we hoped they would take care of us, reward our obedience with at least the moldy crumbs from their table.

Stana Mandić would be standing outside the municipal hall all by herself, holding a sign: "This is the revenge of birds!"

Duvno sat nine hundred meters above sea level, with close to three hundred windy days each year. There was the Bora and the Scirocco. The Bora was a much stronger and harsher wind; at times it brought people remedy, at times it gave them chills. Scirocco heralded rain or came along with it, twisting faces into grimaces, churning minds, turning bones limp. The gusts normally rose up to twenty-five kilometers per hour. Only about seventy days each year were windless: it seemed we had already passed through two thirds of them in unbroken succession, which now left us with roughly three weeks of hope the wind would return; but the real problem

was, ever since people could remember — or the chronicles record — never before had all of March and April passed without at least a strong breeze.

The town was not blind, and neither was it deaf; it had noticed that the wind was not coming and knew the dreams of happiness rested on it. The town invested all its hopes in the wind. The wind had never failed us, never let us down. No one wanted to be the first to voice doubt aloud. No one dared. The first to speak always got into trouble. And yet, even the most skeptical and fainthearted were still hoping the wind would breach the invisible curtain surrounding Duvno, a curtain tracing the exact circle marked by the windmills. What, in the name of Mary, was this thing? What kind of natural phenomenon? Who could be playing such a cruel trick on us?

(...)

Jelena Gašpar found herself again in the mayor's office, not long after their first meeting. Jozan could not avoid it, though his intuition was telling him to come up with a reason why he would not make it, a polite excuse to stay home or drive out to Mostar or Split, walk into the nearest slot-machine club where no one would recognize him, and get a shot of adrenaline pumping through his veins. His informers had reported that Jelena had been seen in cafes and all over town hanging out with Džop, and that the two of them would be supporting Stana's upcoming protest outside the municipal hall; all three had been spotted in the woods, near the largest of the seven Duvno wind farms. Stana must have been trying to draw them into her rebellion, to set them against the authorities and progress, and it certainly was not hard to talk Džop into anything reckless, anything contrary to reason and to what the majority stood for.

The mayor, however, could not afford to get on the wrong side of Šimun Kolak's daughter, especially now, with the windmills stubbornly clinging to the clouded sky and the elections looming closer.

"So, you came up with a play?" Jozan went straight to business, clearly intending to get rid of his visitor quickly and routinely.

"No, not yet. I still can't think of anything," she said apologetically. "Let me be honest with you — I came to ask you for a favor, if you don't mind."

Jozan was a little confused, but he nodded.

"I'd really appreciate it if you could speed up the process of renting that shop Josip Ljubas came to see you about. If it's not too much to ask. And just to be clear, he didn't put me up to this, so please make sure he doesn't find out I came here to ask you, he'd probably get mad at me..." she said in a single breath.

"Džop?"

“Yes. Džop, Josip.”

“What’s this got to do with you, Mrs. Gašpar?” he suddenly addressed her formally as “Mrs.” He had been under so much stress over the past few days that he had lost control of his moods and could not even manage to pretend he was awfully surprised she had come to ask a favor on Džop’s behalf.

“Well, nothing really,” Jelena backed away, “It’s just that he told me the whole process was going slow. That there’s been a problem. So I thought maybe… we could speed things up a bit.”

“The process ain’t goin’ slow; it’s goin’ exactly as it should. Why complain to you? Why didn’t he come to me?” Jozan snapped. “We got rules and laws here. This ain’t the Wild West. Everything in its own time.”

“How long do you think it will take?”

“How should I know… I’m not the one doin’ the paperwork and issuin’ permits. I’m the mayor. I got bigger things to worry about, bigger problems on my plate.”

“But how long does it usually take for other people?” she pressed.

“What’s the rush, for God’s sake!” he raised his voice. “Patience. It’ll get done when it gets done. He ain’t the only person in the world.”

“When?” she asked coldly, staring into his eyes like a loan shark coming to collect money after losing all patience for the debtor’s lies and deceptions. She did not know Jozan had past trauma tied to the question “when,” and to the way people normally asked it.

“Look, Jelena, you’ve been around long enough to know that Ljubas and I had some problems back in the day,” he dropped the formal address and moved closer. “Everyone knows that Ljubas will never get the shop because of it. And no one questions it ‘cause everybody knows it suits him right. Even Džop. He got off easy on my part. Everybody knows — except, well, you, I guess. Or you playin’ dumb?”

“So, it’s not about rules and laws then, it’s about something personal? Or should I say — it’s about revenge?”

“Not all rules and laws are written. If people consider somethin’ right and just, then it’s a law. And just ‘cause you’re Šimun Kolak’s daughter, you think you can break the law? Forget it! Here, the law applies to everyone!”

“And which law would that be?”

“Keep your nose out of things that ain’t your business,” his tone was threatening. “You shouldn’t be meddlin’ in things that are between me and Ljubas. Not you or anyone else, but especially you, ‘cause you don’t know the first thing about us. About Duvno. If you had any

goddamn clue, you'd be stayin' away from that fool. Of all people, you hang around in barrelhouses with that guy."

"Are you jealous?" she asked, aware she was crossing a point of no return. "To hell with you already, young lady..." he waved his hand dismissively. He was more embarrassed than angry. "I told you: stay out of it, and everything will be just fine."

"All right," she stood up, "You're not allowed to use my father's name anymore."

Jozan opened his mouth to say, "Fuck you and your father," but held it back. "I'll hire a lawyer and ban you from using his name. I'll call the press and cause a scandal..." she continued, moving one step closer to the door at a time. He remained seated in his chair.

"Your old man's name ain't your legacy," he said dismissively. "He died, poor fella, had no idea he fathered you."

Jozan's last sentence knocked the breath out of Jelena's chest. Of course, she had wondered many times whether her father had died before Koraljka Gašpar got to tell him she was pregnant. In fact, Jelena had even asked her mother about it: she said that Šimun knew. And that was it. Was he glad, was he happy? She never got the answers, but that alone seemed to answer her question. Jozan's words suddenly tore at her because it was the first time someone had voiced that possibility aloud, and what's more, it was intended as a threat and a disqualification.

"Even if he didn't know, he sure was my father. That's more than enough. I'll ban you from using him for anything whatsoever."

The mayor leaned his elbows on his thighs, rubbing his eyes with his fingers for quite some time. He could not tell if he had lost the argument with Jelena, but he definitely did not feel like someone who had come out as a winner. Not even close. He would've been better off had he avoided the meeting. Why are all these things happening to him at once? What should he do?

In the town, five privately owned shops stood vacant, long abandoned after the businesses that once occupied them failed, and new tenants never came. There were not many people left here, and soon there would be even fewer; who would you be selling your product to? Out of the five, Džop found three more or less suitable, but none of their owners wanted him as a tenant. They all had excuses. If Jozan would not give him a publicly owned shop, they figured, then anyone who did rent to him would be frowned upon by the authorities, and no one wanted to end up on the wrong side of Jozan, not now when everyone was worshipping him like some kind of deity. Nobody wanted to be associated with a man in the mayor's crosshairs.

Everybody was convinced that Jozan would get back at Džop for parading him through the town on a tank, now that Džop had given him a chance, practically set himself up like a clay pigeon. Who could resist taking that shot? Who would simply wave it off and look the other way? And what would the town say if he missed his chance at revenge, now that the perfect target was in sight, even if thirty years have passed? How would they see this merciful person: with awe, disappointment, or disdain?

In this town, forgiving and forgetting were seen as signs of weakness, a betrayal of justice: holding grudges earned respect and gave the person an air of authority. Barbarić had learned and absorbed that lesson a long time ago. Politics was no place for people who deviated from this principle, for those who underestimated the masses' ability to sniff out a power brokers' bleeding wounds. Vengeance was not listed as a mortal sin, nor is it mentioned in Ten Commandments. Just because Džop had already been punished by his brother's death — the worst punishment imaginable — did not mean Jozan's duty of revenge was canceled. To him, this whole thing with Džop likely felt like an obligation, a task, something that simply had to be fulfilled for reasons higher than himself.

The Guardian Fra Ante returned from his trip to Humac after being informed that Jelena had joined Stana Mandić's protest outside the municipal hall, with Džop following shortly after. They were waving placards, blowing whistles, shouting slogans. Fra Ante was angry at Jozan. "I knew you'd mess something up," he said, then hung up the phone.

The Guardian, as we said before, was not so much bothered that Džop stood with Stana; pity and ignorance would now give way to open intolerance toward those who wanted to see us go under, out of pure malice or out of mere defiance of the world. Džop's environmental protest only proved to people that the wind farms were harmless; it was all an act of sheer arrogance, a childish sticking out of the tongue simply to oppose everything, to set oneself apart, to stand out from the crowd.

No, Fra Ante was worried about Jelena. She was the one causing confusion among people. To be fair, it was well known that Džop had turned her to his side, or, one might say, against Jozan, but still, she was not a nobody, and she was not a child, you could not simply act as if she were not there, for she was educated, she was intelligent, she would not have just sided with the erratic Stana or embraced Džop's rebellious motives overnight unless something else was at play; we had done her no wrong and so we could not claim her resistance to the windmills sprang from hatred or wrath. The doubts, the Guardian envisaged, would only multiply and thicken unless the wind soon blew and scattered them like cobwebs from a dandelion.

When the blue aluminum sign that had read Šimun Kolak Street was gone, and when the sign at the school's main entrance, "Šimun Kolak Elementary School," was removed, Fra Ante asked Jelena to come see him. He immediately apologized for Jozan's insensitive manner and short temper.

"He's under a lot of pressure," he tried to excuse him, "He's in a bad place. He's tense, impatient. Hundreds of problems! You unjustly got in the middle. I'm sorry things turned out this way. He's sorry too, believe me."

"If he's sorry, will he rent that shop to Josip Ljubas?"

"No. I'm afraid he won't. We can't expect that, and we shouldn't ask that of him."

"Why not?"

"It has to do with dignity, my dear. He's a proud, tough man. He's gotta be, we gotta be considerate. That's how things go around here — the rules, the mentality," he said, intending to close the subject, to stop wasting time on what could not be changed. "Let it run its course. The two of them will sort it out among themselves, for better or for worse."

"Then why did you call me?"

"I wanted to ask you to take things down a notch, I mean this whole thing with your late father. Put the plates back where they belong, because if this goes public and the press turns up at our door, things will be blown out of proportion and misused... We don't need that, do we?"

"Well, I want the whole thing to go public, I want the press to come. I'll tell them everything."

"What will you tell them?" the Guardian went cold at once. "Everything."

"What do you mean — everything? That you're trying to get the local authorities to rent a shop to a man you've grown close to, a man you only just met, by using your dead father's name? Will you tell them the man is a convicted criminal, an outlaw, sentenced several times? Will you tell them you've been blackmailing the local council with your father's name for personal gain?"

"I'll tell them the mayor is denying permission to open a bakery on grounds of personal affairs. I'll tell them the windmills are a cover up for corruption. That the mayor and perhaps others have been lining their pockets, speeding up licensing and lowering concessionary prices. That the forests are being destroyed... Is that enough?"

"Stana Mandić put those ideas in your head. She's been talking about it for months and—nothing. Nobody pays attention anymore. Not the people, not the press. It's all filth and lies," for the first time, there was a hint of insecurity in the Guardian's voice.

“But I’m not Stana Mandić,” Jelena said calmly, “They’ll want to hear what I have to say.”

“You think too highly of yourself and too low of everyone else.”

“We’ll give it a change, then we’ll see. Maybe you are right but taking a shot costs me nothing.”

“Yeah, you’d think it costs you nothing,” he said as if his words were directed at someone else, not her.

“Are you threatening me?”

“No, no. I’m just letting you know that mistakes always come at a cost. Mistakes are never free.”

“Thank you for a wise advice.” “Wise

and free. Goodbye!”

As soon as Jelena left his office, Jozan rushed to see Fra Ante. He was sullen and had shrunk into himself more than the last time they had met, anxiously pacing the room while Fra Ante told him all about his conversation with Jelena Gašpar. After the friar was done talking, Jozan still paced about the room. Puffing, shaking his head, cursing inwardly. For the umpteenth time in the past several days he wondered: how had things gone wrong so suddenly? How come everything had been called into question, without warning, and had now been spiraling into chaos in which any outcome was possible? Was it a coincidence that everything went downhill the moment Džop Ljubas appeared in town? Did it just happen to coincide? Did the daughter of Šimun Kolak show up out of the blue, and then latch on to Džop, of all people? Those two impostors, bearers of bad luck and bad fortune, had to be eliminated! That’s what it would take if we wanted hope!

“This may not actually be the worst thing,” said Fra Ante. Jozan stopped and looked at the Guardian in bewilderment.

“What do you mean?”

“If she keeps amusing the town with her little stories and shenanigans, people won’t be thinking and talking about the wind. At this point, every day counts.”

“I know, Fra Ante, but all these stories will be set against me. That I’ve taken from the people, that I robbed, that I cheated, that I’m gettin’ my revenge… I’m not sure that sort of amusement is what we want. Pardon me, the motherfuckin’ elections are coming up.”

“It’s either that or you rent that shop to Ljubas,” the Guardian said sharply, ignoring his swearing. “It won’t be long before some rag or website asks her to give an interview and publishes it. We can’t prevent every single thing.”

“We can’t stop every journalist from publishin’, but we can take care of those two. I think that’s how we should handle it,” said Jozan. Fra Ante looked at him questioningly: was he serious or was it panic and rage talking?

“Come on, knock it off!” said the Guardian resolutely. “You want to turn them into victims? If so much as a single hair on her head is harmed, we’ll never get rid of the reporters and investigators. Even if her father was not as important as he was, she’s a citizen of Germany. Do you know what that means? Plus, she’s an artist. Don’t you dare ever mention something like that again!”

Jozan slouched, ashamed of his idea. The Guardian was pleased his dressing-down had worked.

“You have to suck it up,” he encouraged Jozan. “The town will talk about it for a day or two and then it will be done. Rent him that shop so we can buy ourselves some time. Let’s wait until this thing settles, and then do whatever you please!”

The mayor stared at the Guardian for a while, hoping for a single crack that would let him avoid humiliating himself in Džop’s eyes. The wait was futile. He stood up and walked away like a condemned man.

Fra Ante started taking the absence of wind more and more personally. Once alone, his mind wandered to birds and to St Francis. Oh, my dear Francis, the Guardian addressed the saint with soundless words, looking from the darkness of his bedroom at the moon with its several bright rings hanging over Duvno — you must understand me: these people will scatter like feathers if we don’t do something to keep them here; they’ll scatter and we’ll never gather them again, the windmills were our only way and our only chance, I don’t see another option, nobody does; please understand, I was not made, my bother, to be a saint or a martyr, I was made for this earthly labor: to help our people’s survive, to save them from suffering, to help them live to see joy and pleasures; who will celebrate the saints and martyrs, who will build churches and chapels in their honor, if all our people leave; don’t be hard on me, Saint Francis, don’t look down on me from your sanctified heights — will you step into my habit, walk in my shoes, look at these people, please have some understanding.

The rings slowly released the moon, fading until they vanished. The Guardian took it as a sign, pulled the curtains over the window as if to brush away previous thoughts, then retired for the night.

PART THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

The Authorities

Fra Ante Kožul spent two days composing the letter he intended to send to the bishop. Writing usually came easily to him, but now he lacked the clarity to decide whether the letter should be short and formal, long and somewhat personal, or somewhere in between. When he finally made up his mind and wrote it, he set it aside to rest. For three nights he tossed and turned in bed, knelt in the empty, dark church, quietly hoping for a voice, a sign, a miracle. Once it became clear that nothing and no one would make the decision easier, he resolved to send it.

"Most Reverend Father Bishop, I beg you, with brotherly understanding, to accept my request to leave the priesthood. I also beg you to take care of all the customary formalities required for my irrevocable decision. I have lost my faith, Father Bishop. Or, to put it more mildly, I have lost enough faith that my priesthood is crippled. The ground beneath my feet no longer feels solid. I have given way to doubt, and once doubt takes hold, there is no return. It is not something you can get out of your system.

I will return to my family house in Široki Brijeg. What comes next, I do not know. Thank you and please forgive me for everything."

Jozan Barbarić, too, was burned out, worn to a shadow. He had not resigned, he had not signed a surrender, but he had stopped showing up at his workplace. Only the window on the front wall of the municipal hall remained wide open, as if the mayor had just gone to the bathroom and would be back any moment. But he was not coming back. He was not answering his phone, and no one knew where he was. Some said he had locked himself inside his house, never to return to society. Others claimed he had suffered a nervous breakdown, that he was in a psych ward in Zagreb, numbed by pills, blankly staring at the wall and mumbling to himself. His wife, Iva, was gone too; nobody had seen her in days. No lights shone from their house at night. Some reported that he had settled in Vienna with two suitcases full of cash, drinking at the priciest bars, gambling with Serbs, Russians and Arabs in the rooms of luxury hotels. Others were convinced he was hiding from the investors who had financed the windmills. Some

insisted he would never return; others were convinced he could not last long without Duvno, that he would return, he could not wait to come back — who was he without Duvno? And Duvno was not the same without him either. Jozan would be missed. It would take a long time before people got used to life without him; many of them knew no better.

The town was lawless now. No mayor, no Guardian, even the landlords had taken shelter, waiting to see how this vague revolt would turn out; the few notable citizens kept their heads down, too, careful not to say something that might someday be used against them as proof of betrayal of this or that side. One authority had stepped aside, another was nowhere in sight; it had been twenty years since anyone had even imagined a different person in power, especially after Jozan surrounded the town with windmills, and curtained it with the illusion of lasting happiness.

Suddenly, anything could be said or done, anything went, nobody feared anyone, nobody could tell who was with whom or against whom, or why; nobody wondered what would come of it, nobody but the few cautious who recognized the warning signs from past experience. The town had surrendered to the current of boisterous freedom, to the joy of aimless, socially unproductive disobedience, the most wonderful and rarest form of all. One that often precedes wars.

No one was thinking about Džop Ljubas anymore. From time to time, someone, in the absence of a more sensible explanation, blurted out that everything had gone downhill when he returned to town. No one took the bait. There was no mention of Jelena Gašpar either. “Pardon me, but they’re fuckin’ each other’s brains out all day long, like rabbits. The whole town knows. They’ve got no time to plot against us,” said Niko Kolak to his wife Ružica, daughter Nada, and son Ivan. It was Niko’s seventy-fourth birthday. They were drinking coffee after having Nada’s strawberry cake. Ivan soon retired to his room.

“People are askin’ why you aren’t at the protests. Ljubas and Jelena aren’t there anymore,” Ružica said to her husband. It was not so much an accusation as stating a fact.

“I went when it mattered. Turns out that was a fuckin’ mistake, but alright, I don’t regret it,” Niko said. “And now what? I should help that fool rise to power? No way! I’m done with protests.”

“What fool?” Ružica asked.

“Blaž Lukač. He’s a complete fool!”

“Unlike Jozan?” Nada cut in.

“We got used to him. And to be fair, he wasn’t all that bad. At least we knew what to expect. With this clown, we don’t know what will come of him. Nothing good, that’s for sure.”

“And the windmills?”

“What about the windmills?”

“Are you for or against?”

“If there was any wind, only that wretched Stana would’ve been against. But now, everyone’s against. It’s just how folks are: goin’ whichever way the wind blows. Apparently, the wind doesn’t have to blow at all.”

At dawn, Ante Kožul, dressed in his civilian clothes, was saying goodbye to the friars and nuns in the monastery dining hall. Some blatantly tried to catch his eye as if to read the reason for his reckless behavior; others looked at him, genuinely expecting answers, and some stared at the floor, as if uncomfortable. He would walk home to Široki Brijeg, a solid fifty kilometers, part along the road, part through meadows and forest shortcuts. Lord willing, he would arrive before dark. Some tried to talk him out of it: he’s not young anymore, fifty kilometers are no joke, it’s not wise to travel alone… “I left home and entered the friary on foot, I shall leave the friary and return home on foot,” he resolved.

The town had not yet woken up to see yesterday’s Guardian heading South, a military rucksack on his back. He walked slowly, head high, wanting to capture a mental image of every façade, every tree crown, but also careful that his departure did not look like a thief’s escape to any passerby.

At the edge of Duvno, where the straight road to Herzegovina begins, a lukewarm stream of wind licked the back of his neck and head. He stopped. He looked to his left, then to his right, as if he might actually see what had touched him just now. What was it? Was anything there, or was he imagining it? He did not move, hoping it would happen again. He took a step back and stood still. He waited, outstretched his arms like Christ over Rio. And who knows how long he would have stood like that had Drago Landek’s cab not pulled over.

“Is everything all right, Father?” Drago asked, puzzled.

“Everything’s fine, it’s fine,” Ante flinched, as if caught doing something indecent, then quickly moved on. He did not stop again until he was out of the territory of Duvno municipality. He knew Drago would hurry to tell everyone what he had seen: that man never kept anything to himself. Fra Ante sat down against a tree by the road only once Studena Vrila was far behind him, a place where land turned red, where the light flickered and the air grew thicker — a place where wonders begin.

For two or three days, Blaž Lukač hesitated and resisted. “No way,” he waved people off, “I can’t do it, not at this age… No way, no way!” He was acting like he did not care but was really waiting for the perfect moment to give in to the call of power. “Why should I bear

that burden?" he asked, but no answer came. He let them beg and plead, try to convince him nobody was better suited for the job, that nobody else could save the town. "Well, all right," he said, turning his palms upward as if learning to recite the Fatiha prayer, "If you insist, it seems I've got no choice... But just to be clear, I'm not doin' this for me."

He appeared at the window of the municipal hall. The townspeople applauded him for quite some time, chanting his name. "Thank you for your confidence, my fellow townspeople! Thank you, together we have won a great victory!" Blaž began his speech. He set the megaphone aside and took a microphone. "We'll have elections, that I can promise you, but for now we have more important and more urgent matters to attend to."

"No e-lec-tions! No e-lec-tions! No e-lec-tions!" shouted the people.

"We'll see, we'll see," Blaž tried to calm them down. "Before we can even think about elections, we must first save ourselves from the Lord's punishment. If we—and our Duvno—perish, there won't be any elections. And how do we save ourselves? How, my dear friends?"

It took the crowd a few seconds to organize and harmonize. "No wind-mills! No wind-mills!" shouts echoed through the air.

"Today, on behalf of all of us, I'll order the designated town authorities to nullify the concessions for the windfarms. Every single one of them! Those already in operation, and those yet to be put in operation. All of them!"

"All! All! All!" the town agreed.

"We've had enough of authorities who think only about themselves. It's time the power belonged to the people, to put the wellbeing of the people first. Power to the people! To the people!"

"Peo-ple, peo-ple, peo-ple..." the crowd cheered.

Blaž did not know what else to say, but it seemed the crowd had no intention of dispersing. Was that it? What should come next? Was our part done now that Blaž Lukač had taken a seat in the municipal hall, and destiny placed in his — and the Lord's — hands?

"The windmills should all be ripped out! That's the only way we'll be safe!" shouted someone from the crowd. People briefly agreed.

"Come on, who on earth could rip 'em out? Did you see those things? Must weigh a hundred tons!" someone else snapped back. Silence followed.

"If there was a way to plant them, there must be a way to rip 'em out!" another man got involved.

"Sure there's a way, but we can't do it with our bare hands. How do we get excavators and heavy machinery?"

“Who’s gonna pay for that?”

“Whoever planted ‘em should rip ‘em out! Out of their own pocket!”

Blaž watched the whole thing from above like a chair umpire. He was supposed to make the final call but could not risk angering anyone. It was too early to make enemies. “People, people!” he called out. The crowd fell silent; eyes turned toward the open window of the municipal hall. “Let us first nullify those concessions, then we’ll see how to proceed. I won’t do anything you don’t agree with. But let’s deal with it one step at a time. One step at a time.”

At first the applause was tentative, but then it suddenly swelled, growing louder. Blaž raised his hand and waved to the gathered crowd. He closed the window and slumped into Jozan’s chair. He pulled out his phone and called Stana Mandić. She did not pick up.

(...)

The wind raged like a hungry, wounded beast. It brought swollen bags of clouds as swiftly as armies bring cannons, ready to strike. The darkness was no longer merely dark: the town was soaked in black ink. Fra Mijo Nevistić did not dare give the order to ring the bells meant to disperse the clouds. He was not yet officially named the Guardian, and not meddling was a smart thing to do; the envious could twist anything to drag his name through the dirt before the bishop, who would already be cautious and distrustful after what happened with Fra Ante. When torn between two choices, it is safest to make none.

There were no more gusts, no breaks between the strikes aimed at trees, power lines, chimneys, roofs, picket fences, bins... The wind grew ever more forceful. Rain poured down in every direction. Not rain—the sky strafing the earth with swarms of hazelnuts. An eerie howl rose with every moment, interrupted only by the crashing, tearing, snapping of trees and the shattering of car windshields under falling roofing tiles and beams. Flat roofs peeled off from the houses and buildings, transforming into flying carpets that crashed into facades, streetlamps, church bells, truck trailers, and finally landed in gardens and on garages, crumpled like silver-paper chocolate wrappers. Streams overflowed the hillside mahallahs, water gushed from storm drains. The flow carried snakes, swept chains from dogs’ necks, submerged bird nests, swallowed the roads.

“I told you, I warned you! God’s punishment has caught up with us. I thought we could escape the worst, but I was wrong. We have sinned too long. We have been provoking God for too long. We should have stopped before it was too late. Let us pray to the Lord for mercy!” Blaž Lukač posted on his Facebook profile shortly before the power went out. Wind and rain wreaked havoc, deepening fear: nobody and nothing would remain; everything would be broken, demolished, gnawed away, swept.

“The devil’s takin’ it all away. So be it!” said Niko Kolak. He was standing by the window, and it seemed he was cheering for the town’s apocalyptic invasion. Fear had left him, he had said his goodbyes; if this was doomsday, he would not regret it for a second. He had given up. “Yes, yes! Go crazy, devil, strike harder, harder, crush everything!” Niko hissed, while his wife Ružica knelt before the image of Miraculous Madonna of Sinj and prayed, a rosary around her fingers, and Nada and Ivan clung to each other on the couch, as if they were the last two people on earth.

“Shut up, you old coot,” said Ružica in pauses between two Lord’s prayers. “It’s gonna blow off our roof, flood the entire house. What then?”

“You just go ahead and pray… All the kneelin’ and prayin’ sure helped us so far, didn’t it! It sure brought us good luck, didn’t it!”

Most households had their own Niko Kolak. Most of them were men. The first kind were summoning disaster, in the absence of a better way to chase away fear; the second wanted someone in the house to hear them, to pick a fight, to take out their helpless rage on someone; the third were genuinely fed up with life, crushed by disease, drained by poverty, beaten down by family tragedy and disgrace, ready to embrace anything that brings release from earthly sorrows; the fourth had always been against common sense, or what was held by most people as common sense; the fourth were reciting names and justifying reasons for God’s wrath…

The wind and the rain had not ceased for a moment. There we go, *Pripušćalo*! *Pripušćalo* — that was the word the townspeople of Duvno used for a storm that evoked the apocalypse. Some said God had *pripušćo*, as if the storm was his deed, but most avoided attributing the traits of an avenging evil to Him; most did not dare think that God had turned His back on us, that we had fallen out of His grace, that our impatience and doubt had angered Him, that He had a say in this and let it happen. *Pripušćalo* was a higher, unspecified force that lifted heavenly barriers and windscreens. We had been abandoned, extradited, left hanging in the wind. We would be thanking our good God if he spared us, once again, the darkness of dreadful judgment.