

Simona HAMER:

P O S T C A R D S

**or Fear is Hollow on the Inside and Empty from the
Outside**

Nothing in life is to be feared,
it is only to be understood.

Marie Curie

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Now I can die.

I think.

An inhale.

My heart beats like it's attending a drumming workshop in Macedonia:

Jožica Tanja Tanja, Jožica Tanja Tanja¹

A syncope.

An exhale.

Darkness in my head.

...

..... and CLICK

– Now I can die.

– Oh, yeah?

– Yeah. It's so beautiful that I can die.

– How about you wait we get back down? I'd leave your corpse here without a second thought, but the backpack ... The backpack would be a true loss. But – who'd manage to carry these five tons back to the valley.

*Tinka, aged twentysomething,
jokingly nudges
a Fiftysomething Gentleman.*

– No such hero but me. Perhaps you, twenty years ago.

– Energy chocolates I can understand; butter tea and dumplings are the pinnacle of culinary arts to a few, whereas the rest of the junk – uf! You have more extra extra thermal socks than we have feet in the expedition. No – in the entire Himalayas!

– So what! I have just prepared extra extra extra well.

– You could have as well be carrying stones. I told you nicely; those extra five pounds will get compounded with every metre of altitude and ...

– Increase to be the weight of a whale that ate an elephant.

*Laughter
and silence.*

– You know, we used to come up here barefoot. Once I took my father's

1 Translator's note: These are female names used to teach drummers the most popular uneven 7/8 rhythm in Balkan music (3+2+2/8 or long-short-short). Other names with the same stress pattern can be used, for example, Annabel Laura Laura, Annabel Laura Laura.

sandals; I was perhaps eight, nine years old – and nearly got myself killed. I slipped; I managed to save myself, the load and the left sandal, while the right one fell over the cliff some 30 metres deep. My father beat me so badly I was useless for another month ... You see, these boots I got from a German, a couple of years ago. He used to talk about death a lot, too: “I’m gonna die, I’m gonna die!” The entire route. “I’m gonna die!” When we got back to the valley he said he’d never walk higher than the fifth floor, tossed the boots into the garbage and started yelling that he wanted a beer. And then, well, he screamed that he wanted to go home immediately, because in these boondocks even beer sucks.

– Yes, when it comes to beer, the Germans lose their sense of humour.

Laughter.

– You know, you can have the best equipment and the most trained feet, but if your head begins to chafe – then ... then no shoes will help, even if they walk by themselves ... Right, I’ll go to the others.

– I’ll stay here a little longer. Dying.

Smile.

– We set off in fifteen minutes.

You turn your eyes into a sponge. The super absorbent kind. With a thousand-times more potent effect that would even suck the water from your kidneys. And you absorb.

Sluuuuurp!

You are at 5,360 metres above the sea level.

Sluuuuurp!

Sun. Snow. Acupuncture needles of glint pierce your eyes.

You close them: you are a microscope and beneath your lids all those creatures with funny names that you remember from primary school biology are throwing a party: paramoecium, amoeba, undulipodium ...

You open your eyes:

A lake. Like a tiny spit way down below.

You lift your eyes.

Rocks, mountains; brown-grey creases and folds.

Patches of snow – as if someone poured pancake batter into pans scattered through the steep slopes.

You lift your eyes. Up, up, past the mists, up. Past the clouds. Higher. The neck is revolting; it’s not used to the position of a midget. Higher. It’s used to its normal 295 metres above the sea. Higher and higher. There it is! The mountain

of mountains. Sagarmāthā. 8,848 m. Chomolungma. It supports the sky. The Everest.
It's so beautiful that you could die now.

CLICK
Greetings from Nepal!

Since I can remember I've been collecting moments.
I catch them and I keep them.
For myself.
For you.
For all those who come after us.
With my camera, I step over the boundaries of my smallness;
I zoom in fears,
I sharpen imagination,
I shed light on transience
and I chase for meaning.
I materialise the time in which I live.
Love.
Hate.
And everything in between.

- Mum, what about blood, is all of our blood the same colour?
- Of course.

says Tinka, a thirtysomething, while the eyes of her young daughter dart between the jeep driver and the landscape beyond the wind-shield, back and forth, back and forth.

- Red?
- Yes. Red.
- Why isn't theirs black?
- Because yours isn't white, either.
- Why?
- Because we're all the same species. We're all people, no? Homo sapiens sapiens. Just like all lions are lions. And giraffes. And zebras. Or puppies; Grandma's Pawpaw looks completely different from Aunt Ursula's Maltese, yet they're both dogs.
- Pawpaw also has red blood?
- Yes.

- And a giraffe?
- Also.
- And a lion and an antelope, too, and elephants, and, and, and, gnu, and a rhino, and a butterfly, and ladybirds, and fairies and Lightning McQueen, and ...
- Well, Lightning McQueen is a car.
- A red car!
- Well, true, but cars don't have blood, no? What do cars drink?
- Petrol. And ... beer!
- I'll give you beer. Better look at those antelopes over there. See how fast they run?
- Mummy, what kind of blood do Croatians have?

CLICK
Greetings from Namibia!

CONQUEROR: Hey?

SHIELD-BEARER: Yeah?

CONQUEROR: Would you care to ...

SHIELD-BEARER: No.

CONQUEROR: You haven't even listened till the end.

SHIELD-BEARER: I've heard quite enough; if I cared to – and no. I wouldn't.

CONQUEROR: You don't know what I wanted to ask ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Doesn't matter.

CONQUEROR: Of course it does.

CONQUEROR: Not to me.

CONQUEROR: I wanted to ask you ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Not interested.

CONQUEROR: If you ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Nuh-uh!

CONQUEROR: If you could be bothered ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Can't hear you! can't hear you! Lalalalala!

CONQUEROR *whispers*: When there's nobody anywhere, I'll fling you overboard ...

SHIELD-BEARER: What did you say?

CONQUEROR: Now you're interested all of a sudden or what?

SHIELD-BEARER: Geeeez ...

This is Christopher Columbus.

The great conqueror of the world ...

CONQUEROR: And women.

SHIELD-BEARER: The great conqueror of the world and women.

CONQUEROR: And their hearts.

SHIELD-BEARER: What?

CONQUEROR: You've no idea how to get wenchies! You have to be romantic. A little poetic: And their hearts.

SHIELD-BEARER: But that doesn't even mean anything. The great conqueror of the world and their hearts.

CONQUEROR: Doesn't matter. What matters is that it helps me score.

SHIELD-BEARER: You're cray-cray.

CONQUEROR: Sure I am ! Do you think anyone sane would sail into a completely wrong direction, land on a wrong continent where everybody was the wrong colour and declare he's reached his goal?

SHIELD-BEARER: Geeeeez ...

This is Christopher Columbus. The great conqueror of the world and their hearts.

CONQUEROR: Thank you. That wasn't so hard, was it?

SHIELD-BEARER: We're on Christopher Columbus's ship and just a moment ago his first assistant, his right hand, his ...

CONQUEROR: You – we get it.

SHIELD-BEARER: I. Just a moment ago I shouted Land! Land! Land!

CONQUEROR: I was the first one to see the land.

SHIELD-BEARER: No, you weren't.

CONQUEROR: Yes, I was.

SHIELD-BEARER: No, you weren't.

CONQUEROR: Fine; I wasn't, but as if I were. I'm the boss and I decide on everything.

Including who sees land first. Full stop. No, not full stop, an exclamation mark.

Three exclamation marks. Christopher Columbus's nerves are frayed.

SHIELD-BEARER: Christopher Columbus yells non-stop.

CONQUEROR: Well, when necessary, I raise my voice.

SHIELD-BEARER: And your whip.

CONQUEROR: How else is a man supposed to rule? That was the habit back in the day. That was the standard. And three exclamation marks.

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes. And three exclamation marks.

You need to know that Christopher Columbus – the great conqueror of the world and their hearts, a keen user of three exclamation marks and a whip – has another great love.

CONQUEROR: Oh, yeah?

SHIELD-BEARER: We could say an obsession.

CONQUEROR: What?

SHIELD-BEARER: Perhaps even a fetish.

CONQUEROR: What? What? What?

SHIELD-BEARER: Money.

CONQUEROR: Oh, yeah, true! And honour and glory.

SHIELD-BEARER: Of course. Because they're also profitable.

CONQUEROR: I hope so. Hehe.

SHIELD-BEARER: Because he only cares about the money, he conveniently forgot about the promise of ten thousand golden coins payable to the first man to see land.

CONQUEROR: You don't intend to stop? It was never actually meant to be paid, and you know that very well, because you're the one who came up with the idea!

SHIELD-BEARER: So what?

CONQUEROR: You fucked yourself and now you're blaming me. That's not fair!

SHIELD-BEARER: It's not fair, because I get fucked twice. I have neither the ten grand nor the reward for efficiency which any good leader would give me for even coming up with this land thing. It's because of me that the idiots stared into the horizon instead of organising a mutiny.

CONQUEROR: You're crazy!

SHIELD-BEARER: And you're crazy and stingy.

CONQUEROR: You're insolent, too. Christopher Columbus has feelings, too, you know?

SHIELD-BEARER: Geeeeez, now he'll start with this, too! In a little while, he'll drop the anchor and genocide the entire continent ...

CONQUEROR: That was normal back then!!!

SHIELD-BEARER: So what!

CONQUEROR: Don't yell. The first officer doesn't yell. He listens.

SHIELD-BEARER: Fine. The first officer is silent. And will remain silent. He won't say another thing. Not a word. Not an interjection. Or a deep exhale. Say – oofff. Not even that. He's totally silent. He won't even swallow his saliva, not even ...

CONQUEROR: Fine, we get it. You're silent, because you're pouting. I can finally tell you now that before I wanted to ask you if you wanted perhaps to remain on this new Spanish land and make sure that everything runs as it's supposed to.

SHIELD-BEARER: What? Me?

CONQUEROR: Yes, you. Who else? I'll have to go back as soon as possible, so I can bathe in glory. And you, in the meantime, will make sure that gold is dug. What do you say?

SHIELD-BEARER: The first officer hugs Christopher Columbus.

CONQUEROR: No, he doesn't hug him. Back then they didn't hug. We're not faggots, come on.

Where are you from? she asks me.

From afar, I respond.

– From afar? Is that a bit farther than Near and a little before Toofar?

I smile.

– What's your name?

– Dorna.

– What? D-o-r-n-a.

– Yes, Dorna. It means a flamingo/crane.

– A flamingo? That's beautiful.

– You think so?

– Yes. Such a gracious name.

– I'm glad that you can see my real self under all these layers of fabric.

I smile. This girl has a sense of humour. And in this heat, too. I want to say more, I want to continue the conversation, but ... My head is empty. It doesn't work. Perhaps my brain has been fried. That's the only thought that's slowly rolling through my consciousness. Perhaps my brain has been fried.

– Would you like some tea? Step over here. Nobody will see us here. I'm telling you, the month of Ramadan in our wonderful theocracy is only matched in boredom by the entertainment programme of the Iranian television.

Are you here every day? I ask her while exposing myself to the coolness of the fan with a cup of tea in my hand. Scarves are waving around me. Black, red, purple, green ... Wool, silk, cashmere ... A miraculous forest of patterns and colours.

– Yeah. Until I get myself a proper job. I have a degree in chemistry and biology from the University of Tehran.

– Wow! That's not an easy study.

– No. But it's fun.

– And what are the job prospects like?

– Given that I've been looking for six months, I should get lucky soon.

I smile.

She returns a smile.

– How old are you?

– Depends on who you ask. Mum says I'm too old for childishness and

that I have to get serious, Dad says I'm still a child. Grandma claims age doesn't matter, my pious uncle thinks that by now I'd have to have at least three kids, a husband and a nagging mother-in-law, my brother would say that at my age I'm in no hurry and I should go for a doctorate, while the other one says that I'm in the last chance saloon to somewhere where there's no need to sneak into illegal parties. Well, my younger sister would tell you that women shouldn't be asked such things.

– And if I ask you?

– If you ask me, I'll tell you that I'm old enough to be crystal clear on the opportunities that life affords me but still not too old to believe in miracles. I'm twenty-four years old.

I – seven years ago – at twenty-four.

Full moon party.

C L I C K

Thailand.

I have wings and I'm flying above an ocean of possibilities.

I'm trying to explain to a Dutch man – or perhaps he was Belgian? Never mind ...

Jebbe. That was his name and I'm explaining what *jebbe* means in Slovenian.

Grammatically, it's a verb, third person singular, of the verb *jebati* – “to fuck”.

Jebbe – “he fucks”. The materialisation of his name that followed contributed to a significant expansion of my practical knowledge.

A baby, I say, and smile at her.

She smiles back.

– Where's your husband?

– I'm not married.

– What is this, then?

She points at the band I'm trying to domesticate on the ring finger of my right hand.

– It's a guise. Allegedly, this will help me have the least possible amount of problems.

– With whom? With our men? Haha ... They don't even dare to take a good look at you.

– No, with the vice police.

– The vice police don't bugger tourists. They have enough work with us. But next time, do find one that doesn't look like a spare part for a moped.

A fountain of tea nearly breaks through the fence of my teeth. This girl really does have a sense of humour.

- Have you ever thought of going somewhere else?
- Of course. Haven't you?
- What do you mean?
- Haven't you, in your country *Afar*, ever thought that you'd prefer to live somewhere else?

I smile. All the time. I think. Sometimes I do indeed. I say.

- The present limits me, but it doesn't define me. I keep telling myself this and somehow it works. This right now is just a small black smudge in the splendid history of the Iranian nation and we can't let it blur our vision, either looking forwards or backwards. You know, politics is not the same as people.

Politics is not the same as people.

My head is flooded with thousands of smiles of welcome. They rain on me, they drip and splash and change this ridiculous 43.6 degrees C, the month of Ramadan and all the possible and impossible commandments into the most beautiful experience of acceptance I've ever experienced.

Thanks for the tea, I say.

- What tea? We don't have tea here. Not during Ramadan anyway. Will you come to my family for dinner tonight? To see what Iran really is. The sun sets at 18:23h.

CLICK

Greetings from Iran!

It is in this microsecond, in this – CLICK - that I stop time. Just like a cartoon character.

And stop – freeze frame – the game:

The heroine freezes.

The villain freezes.

What happens when we press *Play* again?

Will our heroine knock the villain out? Will he escape? Where is he reaching with his hand? To get weapons? Perhaps for a box of chocolate bonbons that he brought her as a gift? Careful, they might be poisonous! And what happens to the terrified bystanders? Will they join the fight? On whose side will they be? Will nature intervene – the clouds look menacing. And what's with the butterfly? Is it there by accident or does it have some transformer super powers? Oh, dear – what if an evil Caterpillar is hiding behind the butterfly?

In this frozen moment it seems that everything, really everything! is possible. And that the continuation can be miraculously different.

Click!

I, the ultimate super heroine.

My magic weapon: a camera.

My enemy?

He lost me. A long long time ago, when the time was flowing differently. Drop by drop. He lost me when we were zeroing in on our snack. He left with a little mouse in his claws, I sailed on the wind and landed on the ground. For a moment or two I still saw him circle somewhere in the sky. Magnificent. A young man found me. He blew off the dust and stuck me in his hair. *The one who finds*, they then called him. We spent an entire human life together. Before his soul travelled on the Milky Way to the land of the Blue Spirit of the Sky, he gave me to his son. *White Oak* was a good hunter. His arrows never missed. On the day we parted I helped him kill a buffalo and I myself ended on the ground. Me and the buffalos' hearts. Women left them there as seeds; a heart births a new heart. A girl's hand that washed blood off me only lived three more full moons. She died of a strange disease. The first one the shaman couldn't cure. He wanted to burn me. He thought I was the one that brought on the itchy rash. Then he let me go into the wind. "Nothing lives forever. Only the Earth and the mountains," he chanted. *Blue Bird* found me. A child grows best before dawn, so she walked her belly for miles. As soon as she leaned toward me she went into labour. A boy! I accompanied him everywhere. On a string around his neck. Everywhere. Even to the mine. Even to his death. His brother and I escaped back home that very night. *Little Crow* took me with him to Washington, many winters later. "Kill one, two or ten, and ten times the amount will come to kill you," he used to say to his warriors. It didn't help. Hunger was too great. White people's empty promises too painful. A punnet of remaining land too small. They revolted and thirty-eight were hanged. *Little Crow* was slayed later. Without a rope. All that was left of him was a dream catcher into which he'd woven me. His son who was watching the massacre in hiding held me tightly and ran. He ran along with two thousand others who were corralled onto a reservation and died of hunger there. The chief gifted me to his sister. When she danced the Dance of the Earth I fell from her braid onto the ground amidst the beat of the drums. The young man who was in love with her kept me. I adorned his plume all the way till the Sand Creek Massacre. "Nits make lice!" said Chivington, the commander of the white army and slew; men, women, children, elders. The soldier who put me into the pocket of his uniform had damp eyes. Many sleepless nights later, smoking the peace pipe, he passed me to *Sitting Bull*. He, in turn, was shot by those infected with the Gold Rush. I remained with his brother until they buried us

with five hundred corpses at Wounded Knee. Darkness and soil. An archaeologist's brush saved me. A janitor's long fingers took me from a plastic box kept in the basement of an institute. He gave me to his son. He quickly forgot about me. When they held a yard sale to pay off their mortgage he gave me as extra to the buyer of the tea set, a clock, an umbrella stand and a pile of books. That uncle used me as a bookmark and occasionally to clean his ears. One autumn afternoon a gust of wind blew me into the bushes behind the bench in the park where we were snacking. A portly gentleman picked me up. He exhibited me in his shop. Next to the statues of liberty and American flags. So I'm now waiting for a new owner. For two dollars, I can be yours. Or yours. Or yours.

CLICK

Greetings from the United States of America!

The land of the free!

Enemy?

Enemies are a fucking problem.

If anyone has learnt anything from history, it's them. They're becoming shrewder and shrewder. Their current strategy is bouncing light off mirrors. A classic diversion. A time-tested military strategy.

You're trying to catching the light – flickering back and forth – hop, like a bunny – you're catching the light bunny, which – hop – jumps and jumps – hop – back and forth – hop – and you jump behind it. Hop! You keep catching it – hop – forever. You get tired. Hop! You can no longer be bothered. Hop.

And if, among all the hopping you by any chance manage to look in the right direction, if by chance you discover the looking glass – this genius weapon of the enemy – two things happen. You either go blind from the flashy light. Or you look into the looking glass and see ... yourself! Hm ... you observe, you study, you evaluate and you buy a new mascara for extra volume. The one in the looking glass instantly looks better. You continue with the mission; a new hairstyle, new shoes, new tits ... #mememe
And – hop! The one behind the looking glass remains safe.

Click.

Smile!

Click.

Even if you don't feel like laughing.

Smile!

Swine, dog, shit, skunk, devil, buck in heat, plague, guinea pig – rotten eggs! Like rotten eggs, matured in pig's manure, marinated in soured milk and mouldy

tomatoes, on the bed of fresh run over frogs, garnished with the most noble
cheese mould –
this is the smell of my armpits after five days with no shower.

CLICK

*Greetings from the 284th kilometre of the Great Wall of the People's Republic of
China!*

SHIELD-BEARER: Fuck, it's hot.

And then these mosquitoes.

Geeez!

They're gonna eat me alive, bastards!

What about you? Why don't they bite you?

CONQUEROR: You have better blood.

SHIELD-BEARER: Yay, me.

This is Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro Altamirano or ... Ouch! Stupid bitch!

CONQUEROR: What did you say?

SHIELD-BEARER: Nothing. Mosquitoes ... And the heat. Uf ...

This is ... Geeez! I can't work in these conditions, come on! Where is the fanner?

Hello?? Fanner!

CONQUEROR: He's just kicked the bucket.

SHIELD-BEARER: Unbelievable!

CONQUEROR: The second one today.

SHIELD-BEARER: These savages are dying as fast as the snow melts in spring.

Ohhhhh, snow! Can you imagine? Now I'd jump into the snow and make snow
angels. Do you know what angels are?

CONQUEROR: Mhm ...

SHIELD-BEARER: If this continues, we won't even have to slay them anymore. Which
is good, because who can be bothered in this heat ... Hey? Are you okay? Don
Cortes?

Have I already told you that this is Hernán bla bla bla, also simply known as
Fernando Cortes? The great conquistador of South America? The man who ...

CONQUEROR: Shhhh!

SHIELD-BEARER: Shhhh! What is it?

CONQUEROR: I'm thinking.

SHIELD-BEARER: You're thinking?

CONQUEROR: Yeah. Silence!

SHIELD-BEARER: Silence! Silence. Silence. Don Cortes is thinking. He's smoking a
cigarette and thinking. What is the great conquistador thinking about? The

promised Eldorado? About the piles, about the mountains of gold? Mines for precious stones? Brimming ships sailing back to Europe? Bon voyage, bon voyage! About homeland? Home? Mother? About a virgin waiting faithfully for him to put a ring made of best Aztec gold on it? To take her ...

CONQUEROR: Co-oh-rn!

SHIELD-BEARER: What?

CONQUEROR: This yellow mess they keep bringing us, we'll call it corn from now on.

SHIELD-BEARER: Corn?

CONQUEROR: Do you like it?

SHIELD-BEARER: No.

CONQUEROR: No?

SHIELD-BEARER: I mean, I like the name. Very much so. Corn! Genius! But I don't like it on the menu, that's what I meant ... Give me a fag, will you?

CONQUEROR: Here. We'll have to sell it as something exotic and then it won't even matter what it tastes like. Corn. It sounds ... sexy.

SHIELD-BEARER: Mhm ... Very sexy ... Oooh – look; perhaps they're bother by the smoke ... No! You mosquito bitch. Fuck off!

CONQUEROR: They like the smell of your sweat.

SHIELD-BEARER: At least someone does. What's our plan for today?

CONQUEROR: Nothing special. A standard routine ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Great! A small massacre, a lunch break, and after lunch a rape or two. After a roast boar a fine sow fits nicely, not too fat, not too skinny ...

CONQUEROR: Would you please watch your tongue a little?

SHIELD-BEARER: What?

CONQUEROR: You speak like a savage, not like representative of the ancient European civilisation. We're supposed to be their role model, ferchrissake!

SHIELD-BEARER: But there's nobody anywhere.

CONQUEROR: Doesn't matter.

CONQUEROR: Well, sorry ... If I get too excited, then ...

CONQUEROR: It's okay ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Well, why don't you say something?

CONQUEROR: What?

SHIELD-BEARER: Up your butt! Hahaha! Sorry, it was there for the taking ... Tell us some eternal truth or something similarly civilised.

CONQUEROR: Hm ... May I quote myself?

SHIELD-BEARER: Best if you do. Who knows what copyrights are here in this jungle.

CONQUEROR: "Spanish suffer from a disease of the heart that can be cured only by gold."

SHIELD-BEARER: Wow! I felt tingling here inside. Help! Meds, meds! The great conquistador has spoken. And he wants gold!

CONQUEROR: Yup.

SHIELD-BEARER: A lot of gold! And nothing will stop him! Neither nature, nor people. To quench his burning heart, the great Fernando is willing to thread on corpses.

CONQUEROR: Of course! That's the way it was done back then. Yours, ours – doesn't matter.

SHIELD-BEARER: We don't discriminate. The slogan of the year 1520: You're either with us or ...

CONQUEROR: Six feet under.

SHIELD-BEARER: Hahahaha! Don Cortes has ...

CONQUEROR: Balls.

SHIELD-BEARER: Haha! Don Cortes has balls and an exceptional sense of humour!

CONQUEROR: Thank you.

SHIELD-BEARER: Although few notice it.

CONQUEROR: Usually they don't live long enough.

SHIELD-BEARER: Hahahahaha! Hahahahaha! Haha .. Don't live hahaha. Hahahaha. I'll keel over laughing ... Hahahah. Ouch! And mosquitoes.

CONQUEROR: What the hell are you on?

SHIELD-BEARER: Coke. Want some? A nice upper.

CONQUEROR: Pass me some, let me try.

SHIELD-BEARER: Here. Just chew. And things happen.

CONQUEROR: Do you think we could export this, too?

CLICK

Greetings from anno Domini 1520!

laughter

THEIR NEW FRIEND: Hey, what would you be doing right now, in this very moment, if you were at home?

LUKA: Uf! Don't remind me ...

TINKA: We'd be convincing the little one it's time for bed. Every night the same war.

LUKA: You know what she's told me just before? That she can't wait to go to sleep so she can dream again what happened to her today.

laughter

THEIR NEW FRIEND: Little monkey!

TINKA: To be honest, we wouldn't be doing anything special ...

LUKA: TV. We'd be watching a film ...

TINKA: You know what this is like: this one is comatose of the couch and shows vital signs only when I want to change the channel.

LUKA: This condition is known as watching through the eyelids.

laughter

TINKA: Usually, in the evening we're way too tired for anything ... productive.

LUKA: Or reproductive.

laughter

THEIR NEW FRIEND: See, this is why I moved away from Europe. It fucks with you too much. In the non-productive sense.

laughter

THEIR NEW FRIEND: May I top up?

TINKA: Absolutely!

LUKA: I understand you all too well, but ... I wouldn't dare to let everything ... go like this. You know what I mean?

THEIR NEW FRIEND: Of course. Job, bank loans ...

TINKA: Children, school, grandmothers and grandfathers ... Hey, when it comes to his mother, I have a feeling she'd like to burn our passports, just so we don't go anywhere. Because she's so worried something might happen to us.

LUKA: She thinks the entire world is full of terrorists.

THEIR NEW FRIEND: You know how many such people there are.

TINKA: Next time we'll tell her we're going to a spa, end of story.

LUKA: She'll think a spa holiday is a waste of money. One needs to save. Pile it up. You can pour a bath at home, no?

laughter

TINKA: See – this type of thinking will eventually drive me round the bend.

LUKA: Careful you don't choose to emigrate in the end.

THEIR NEW FRIEND: Reason: a cranky mother-in-law!

laughter

THEIR NEW FRIEND: When it blows up, it blows up. And then it really becomes clear what you have to do. People like me walk out of their jobs, move to the other side of the world and start growing coconuts and passion fruits ...

TINKA: Jealous!

THEIR NEW FRIEND: And try to learn at least one of the 852 languages in use on Papua New Guinea ...

LUKA: And hide the last existing cannibal from those three tourists who make it out here!

THEIR NEW FRIEND: Obviously, I won't let hordes of nosy piranhas with cameras destroy this haven. Because from here the only place to escape to is the Moon.

TINKA: Tickets are too expensive, I've already checked.

laughter

THEIR NEW FRIEND: You know, there are some who run away from shit and some who fight it.

TINKA: And suffocate in the cesspit.

LUKA: The more you stir the shit, the more it stinks – that's what they say where we come from.

THEIR NEW FRIEND: Or they turn the shit into compost and start afresh. Bio eco direction ... Here's to the first day of our acquaintance!

TINKA: And compost!

Cheers!

TINKA: Another one for the memories. Say: coconut!

CLICK

Greetings from Papua New Guinea!

A smile! The 21st century facade.

More and more – battalions, an entire army – of snow white teeth are grinning from the front pages,

commercials,

television,

computers ...

Fresh and perfect.

Enchantingly seductive.

Alluringly self-confident.

Hypnotising.

Same.

Same.

Smile!

Now available at your dentist! Special price for the first hundred. Promotional price, so to speak.

Because we're worth it.

Because we demand only the best for ourselves.

Because we've fought for this.

Smile!

Today every photographed smile is the same.

If you have no money for aesthetic surgery, you at least have it for a decent phone.

Long live technology! Long live illusion!

Two clicks, two slides on the screen:

acne – delete

kilograms – delete

lips – add

and the magic is done!

You – just like on the cover page!

Like straight out of fashion week,

MTV,

Playboy,

Hollywood.

You – the best version of yourself. With unlimited possibilities for improvement for the price of a monthly subscription. Special offers for new users! You can even use it to make phone calls.

When my little one learnt about professions at school she told them I was a photographer. The teacher said how great, that then I must know how to take all those beautiful photos, and Neža went: Yes. But my mum also takes ugly photos. You know, teacher, the world is not like in a commercial.

oh ... for me this is so ... how to say ... ^{bup} ... oops ... ^{bup} ... excuse me ... hihihihih ... yes, tiresome ... tiresome ... no peace ... only drama ... and in this heat ... oh ... how can they be bothered ... i don't understand ... i mean, i understand ... hihihihih ... but ...hihihihih ... even passion ... desire ... attraction ... this fire ... that burns ... and ... burns ... even that has to have a limit ... otherwise ... ^{bup} ... oops ... hihihihih ... yes ... it doesn't stop ... same thing over and over ... over and over ... like in a soap opera ... caller A ... caller B ... i ... and the son of the camel groomer ... hihihihih ... and .. drama ... intrigue ... threats ... altercations ... fights ... this is so ... boring ... i am so ... bored ... nothing new ... nothing truly ... enticing ... true ... honest ... ^{bup} ... ^{bup} ... always the same competition ... ^{but} ... who'll beat whom ... measuring ... hihihihihih ... and i ... oh ... you get fed up ... of all these empty promises ... offers ... as if you were a piece of beef in the market ... "Take me. I'll honour you forever!" ... "Be mine! You'll be my queen!" ... "My love. You are my everything! ... "My dove, my black gold, without you I can't and don't want to live" ... "I want you, I need you, please, hear me!" ... "Don't listen to him! Take me. Together, we'll conquer the world!" ... "Be mine! ..." "No, be mine!" ... "No, mine!" ... "Mine!" ... Mine! Mine! Mine! ... and then we watch ... ^{bup} ... the army of suitor A ... and the army of suitor B ... massacre each other ... in my house, no less ... ~~CLICK! Greetings from Iraq!~~ ... where else ... ~~CLICK! Greetings from Afghanistan!~~ ... war in my backyard ... ~~CLICK! Greetings~~

~~from Lebanon!~~ ... in my home ... ~~CLICK! Greetings from Syria!~~ ... the clashes continue ... until ... suitor A and suitor B tire ... ^{bup} ... until they run out of money ... until there's nothing else to smash ... nothing else to destroy ... to kill ... to slaughter ... nothing ... in my home ... ^{bup} ... a clean-up follows ... the suitors are nowhere near ... logical ... who'd want to live in this ... this ... despair ... every now and then they send a little gift or letter ... so i don't forget them ... so they say ... my suitors ... their crap ... this ... shit ... shit stays for me ... i sweep ... all this filth ... rubble ... corpses ... clean up ... sweep under the carpet ... hihhi ... and then ... ^{bup} ... a new round ... oh ... this soap opera is so predictable ... boring ... and palpably too long ... don't you think ... hihhi ...

The world is not like in a commercial.

But it's even less like the world sold by the TV news; wars, crises, unsolvable snafus of all sorts – fear, nation, fear! And in the end something positive and stupid. To relax us. To help us sleep. A pacifier dunked into schnapps. So we don't, per chance, think. Or – the horror! – see through.

Photography is my alternative to all this.

My view of the world.

Capturing genuineness.

Recording reality.

Life – with no embellishments.

It's not always simple. You can quickly increase contrast, blur clarity, light the henchman rather than the victim, zoom in on a detail instead of showing the whole picture. You dramatise a dot to get the effect. You are satisfied with just the tip of the iceberg. With the same black-and-white marketing approaches like the merchants, media and politicians. Smile! Particularly if this is the way you make a living.

You can easily forget that it's not about you. You're just the frame.

The point is on the other side of the lens.

In the picture.

In the story.

People.

- Give me the money!
- What?
- Money! Quickly!
- Yes, yes. Right away. Just calmly, calmly.
- I'm totally peaceful.
- I'm talking to myself. Here.
- Two hundred bolivars? What the fuck is this?!

- This is all I have ...
- You're lying! Give me the money!
- I'm sorry, that's all I have ...
- Stop trying to fuck with me and hand over the cash!
- I don't have it. That's all.
- I mean it! Where are you hiding it? Give me this ... bag.
- Here. Have a look. You'll see I'm not lying ...
the bag, which more fashion-literate individuals would call a tote, is being inspected
- What the fuck ...
and tossed onto the ground
- I can take it, right ? It's a souvenir from a travel, so ...
- Hey, don't fuck with me, you get it!? Show me the pockets. Pockets, I said!
pockets are turned out
- I'm sorry, but this is really everything ...
- Bra! That's where you keep it.
- I don't wear a bra. And please don't ask me to show you my knickers. Because keeping money between my legs would be really unhygienic ...
- Stop playing a smart ass! Give me the phone. Where do you have it?!
- At the hotel ... I've told you that I don't have any more than this on me.
- You're lying. That's nothing. That's not even enough for smokes.
- That's my daily budget, so I don't think it's that little. And anyways you're too young to smoke. How old are you? Ten? Eleven?
- None of your business, cow.
- Hello, Cow, I'm Tinka. Pleased to meet you ... Look, even the dumb American fatsos know that you walk around Caracas with a couple of bills and that's it. Every guidebook tells you about security precautions. We're just a couple of steps away from them running compulsory orientation for tourists at the border.
- What orientation? Who told you this?
- Come on, I'm joking. But the bit about guidebooks is true.
- Which bit?
- No expensive cameras, jewellery, phones, credit cards ...
- Cards are useless. Nobody steals cards.
- Only cash, not more than thirty dollars ...
- You had half of that!
- Because I'm smarter than the guidebook writers. And that everything has to be carried in an ordinary bag. Like this one. So that the robbers immediately see

that you have nothing valuable on you. And you have to be careful if they have weapons by any chance. But you don't.

- I do.
- You don't. Otherwise you'd show it to me immediately.
- I have! I have a knife.
- You don't.
- I do. But I don't have it with me today. I lent it to a ... colleague. He's in the same business, so he has asked me. We help each other out.
- Oh, yeah?
- Yeah.
- So how long have you been running this ... business?
- None of your business!
- How is it going ? I mean – is it profitable?
- If you want to get smart with me, you can zip it! You haven't a clue.
- I'm sorry, I'm just interested... I've been robbed a couple of times and ...
- Where? Here?
- No. On the train to Porto Seguro, and ...
- Where's that?
- In Brazil.
- Brazilians are all idiots anyways.
- Oh, yeah? How many do you know? *silence* They seemed perfectly nice to me. Except for the one who stole my cash.
- As I've said: idiot!
- But you know what? Of all the robberies, this one will be my favourite for sure.
- Oh, yeah?
- Yeah.
- Why?
- You have a totally different approach.
- Different how?
- You know – likeable.
- Likeable, what the fuck!?
- Uf, aren't we touchy ... I wanted to say that others had a more pitbull-like tactics; barking for no reason and drama. You're more like a cat. Shrewd. And indestructible. And considering your tender age, I'm sure you have a long and successful career in front of you. How old are you anyways? Ten? Eleven?
- Old enough to do you, baby.
- Where have you learnt this original gigolo expression?
- Practice, woman, practice.

- Aha ... What's your name?
- They call me Paqo.
- So, Paqo. If we're done with our robbery here, can I go now?
- Where would you go?
- I wanted to take another spin around town. Perhaps to the Caraboro Park. And I also wanted to buy some fruit, but I am now ... hm ... without means.
- I'll go with you. These are dangerous streets, you know. It's good to have a local with you. For protection.
- Oh, yeah?
- Yeah. You'll see. Everybody knows me here. What did you say your name was?

CLICK

Greetings from Venezuela!

CONQUEROR: Do you see?

SHIELD-BEARER: No ...

CONQUEROR: There, by that tree.

SHIELD-BEARER: No. Nobody anywhere.

CONQUEROR: There, now he's moved ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes! I can see! I can see! I see two! No, three!

CONQUEROR: Three? Oh my god, true!

SHIELD-BEARER: And there are more.

CONQUEROR: There are so many. God help us ...

SHIELD-BEARER: They're a funny colour. That's why I didn't see them. They look like ...

CONQUEROR: Cavemen.

SHIELD-BEARER: Why are they painted like this?

CONQUEROR: Probably some ritualistic thing or another. In primitive peoples this is still the norm.

SHIELD-BEARER: What? To put on make-up instead of normal clothes?

CONQUEROR: It's a part of their culture.

SHIELD-BEARER: You know what, I'll say no more; I also like being comfortable when I'm home, but when you get visitors ... I don't know. To me, they look totally ferocious. Cave beasts, not cavemen.

CONQUEROR: Shhh. Can you hear?

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes ... I don't understand anything.

CONQUEROR: Something like: dgi, dgi, gigi or something. Interesting. It sounds quite undeveloped, don't you think?

SHIELD-BEARER: Look, they're waving at us.

CONQUEROR: Don't you dare!

SHIELD-BEARER: I just wanted to wave back.

CONQUEROR: You don't even know what these gestures mean to them! Perhaps they're cannibals and you've just volunteered to be their next lunch. One must be careful.

SHIELD-BEARER: This is John Cook, an English explorer, seafarer and cartographer, and that is – drum roll, please: Australia.

CONQUEROR: For the record, I gave it a different name ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Geeeeez! What if you weren't so petty now, eh?

CONQUEROR: I'm not petty, just exact. And I didn't discover it – in a way the ancient Greeks did, except they called it Terra Australis, the southern land – I appropriated it. Not for myself, of course, for Britain. And only the southern part. I called it New South Wales. She would only become known as Australia in 1817, so in 47 years and ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you, thank you for this historic excursus, let us now return to current topics! James Cook is about to detour his ship *HMS Endeavour* – struggle, in plain English – towards the shore and land in a bay he will call Botany Bay.

CONQUEROR: Do I really have to?

SHIELD-BEARER: Of course.

CONQUEROR: But I can see everything from here perfectly well ...

SHIELD-BEARER: We need to pitch in a flag.

CONQUEROR: You think they actually went and pitched flags?

SHIELD-BEARER: Of course! They even pricked the Moon.

CONQUEROR: That was filmed in the studio.

SHIELD-BEARER: Look, it doesn't matter. James Cook must land on the shores of the distant Australia and has to pitch a flag in the name of the Queen of England.

CONQUEROR: The king. George III.

SHIELD-BEARER: Whatever, the king then ...

CONQUEROR: What if I catch something contagious. They look very dirty and ... bacillicious.

SHIELD-BEARER: They didn't know about bacilli back then.

CONQUEROR: So what. Cook was way ahead of his time.

SHIELD-BEARER: Not so way ahead.

CONQUEROR: Ah ... look at them. Brrrr! They give me chills ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Come on, don't be such a pussy.

CONQUEROR: I'm not.

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes, you are.

CONQUEROR: Am not.
SHIELD-BEARER: Are too.
CONQUEROR: Am not.
SHIELD-BEARER: Are too!
CONQUEROR: Am not!!! And stop and tell the crew to prepare guns and turn the ship
towards this motherfucking continent. Clear?!

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes, boss!
CONQUEROR: Uf ... This will be interesting ... Just look at them.
SHIELD-BEARER: They look quite disgusting. We could use them to scare little
children: if you're not good, well ship you to distant Australia, New South Wales,
I'm sorry. This! A penal colony! Yes! We could set up a British penal colony here!
CONQUEROR: That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard ...
SHIELD-BEARER: Really? I think it's an excellent idea.
CONQUEROR: You were not made to think. Reconcile with that once and for all, and
we'll all be better off ... Look; their organs ... are extremely enlarged. Don't you
think?
SHIELD-BEARER: No. Mine is bigger.
CONQUEROR: Eh!
SHIELD-BEARER: Shall I show it to you?
CONQUEROR: Stop, people will start imagining ... What will we do with them?
SHIELD-BEARER: Oh, nothing – we'll put some clothes on them.

CLICK

Greetings from anno Domini 1770!

STRANGER: Here you are.

handkerchief

TINKA: Oh ... Thank you.

STRANGER: This allergy to wars. An incredibly inconvenient thing. I know how
it is.

CLICK

Greetings from in front of Picasso's Guernica.

Greetings from the Kingdom of Spain!

People.

Seven and a half billion of us.

And the majority believes that the Earth turns around them and because of them. A
rather silly thought for someone who will live for the average of seventy-five European
years and then disappear into dust.

A stupid and dangerous thought.

I get grounded by travelling.

Nothing pulls the carpet of the safe obviousness from under your feet quite like travelling does.

You see different realities.

Realities in which there are no beds, houses with central heating and cooling. Where there are no taps from which drinkable water flows or supermarkets with two shelves of different jams.

You see realities where in the morning one doesn't go to school, but to a factory, a street, a battlefield ... If you're truly lucky, you simply take the cattle to graze and you can daydream all day about ...

Realities where people disappear, where one needs to stare into the ground and where even God would – if he truly existed – cross himself and say: Sweet Jesus, let someone do something about this misery here!

And then you become clear about how fucking lucky you are to be able to sleep on your worn out mattress, which would of course need to be replaced, and in the morning – with eyes still glued together – swallow coffee from a cup you got as a gift from your child, who in the meantime is screaming the house down claiming he won't have breakfast and won't go to school.

When you peer over the fences you see that you're a part of something bigger.

And slowly you liberate yourself of the obsession with your one-seven-and-a-half-billionth-ness.

Travelling introduces you to your species.

Homo sapiens sapiens.

Your tribe.

And you.

Without photo shop.

This is why I travel.

If you want to remove weeds,
you have to pull out roots, too. This is what they'd say.

And do; removing weeds and roots. Logical. Otherwise you have done nothing. From small grows big, right? Nobody asked me anything. Classic. For a long time they didn't even notice me. Removing requires a particular type of attention. Especially when your time and means are limited. In the name of productivity, the process needs to be optimised. That's what they used to say. Although talking was long made superfluous. Everybody knew *what* needed to be done. It was the *how* that was improvised. A spade. A pitchfork. A stick. Hooks and axes.

A machete here and there. Leaves of a sugar palm; their wooden, slightly serrated part. Imagination knows no boundaries, right? And once around that time – when bullets became as rare as the hope for a better tomorrow – they noticed me. If you want to remove weeds, you have to pull out roots, too. *Tp!*² Despite the force present, the sound is almost silent. Shallow. *Tp!* Blunt. Mixed into music, electric generators and slogans that gave the meaning and goal to the darkness of the night – mostly they slaughtered at night. So that nobody could see anything, even by chance. You can never be too careful, right? Miles around, nobody. No curious soul – who would dare? Nobody anywhere. Except animals and plants. But we don't know how to talk.

We can't tell on anyone. *Tp!* That's what it did for the first time. So simple, economical, that even I asked myself how they haven't thought of that before. *Tp!* Second time. The young man seemed calm. Composed. Reliable. He reached for the next one – in that darkness, among the screaming, buzzing and singing – it seemed like it was all completely normal. Another day in the office, right? And he must be a good employee. Must. There was no other way. He brought the next one. His face – a frozen mask. Emotions are a luxury from some other time. His body tensed. From the left to the right – a swing – like cutting grass. *Tp!* Simple. Economical. And new khaki uniforms and new pair of hands are ready to swing. *Tp!* Fast. *Tp!* Simple. *Tp!* And economical. *Tp!* If you want to remove weeds, you have to pull out their roots, too. *Tp!* A little

more. *Tp!* Another – five? Five times – *Tp!* Five more times to grab

little feet. Five more swings. Five more little heads

smashing against me. The warmth of the

brains on my bark and the freshness

of the night. Loudspeakers and

generators. If you want to remove

weeds, you have to pull out roots,

too. Another five babies. Another

five toddlers and they're done.

Finished. For today. *Tp! Tp! Tp!*

Tp! Tp! A new round tomorrow.

CLICK

Greetings from the killing fields, greetings from the shade of the Chankir tree, greetings from Cambodia!

² Translator's note: or any onomatopoeic word that mimics the sound of "wood" on wood

– Hi! Is this still free?

Yes, of course. Here. Where are you going?

– To Berlin. An exchange for six months. See how packed my suitcase is?

– I'll only be in Bangkok for three days. I'm going on to the Philippines. Diving.

– Home. The fun is over.

– To my cousin's wedding. She got herself an American. Some big shot businessman or something. Air conditioning and stuff.

– To look for work. My uncle is already there and he'll help me.

– A symposium in Buenos Aires. Three days of smart talk. Uf!

– To the island Krk. I have a trailer in Glavotok. My wife and the little ones have been there for a week, but I couldn't get time off sooner.

Train, plane, bus, boat, moped, rickshaw, feet, bike, car, horse, van, mule, jeep, kayak, truck, wheelbarrow, roller skates, helicopter, hot air balloon, zipline, sled, skates, skis, hydrofoil ... are means that help you cross the distances.

– I don't know. I'll finish this college – more for my dad's sake than mine, and then ... I don't know. There won't be a job, so ... I don't know.

– Will you remember? After each meal, five drops into his drink – with alcohol it will work, too – and he'll love you forever.

– I don't give a fuck about the elections, get it? Nothing changes. Nothing at all! The fucking one percent continues to sponge us and it will sponge us dry, I'm telling you it will – unless we revolt. And not just the politicians. No, we have to attack capital, do you get me? Corporations!

– His name was Pablo. I could tell him everything, absolutely everything. And then all at once I never saw him again. I remember that my mother comforted me that imaginary friends leave to go with other children when they feel you're old enough you can cope without them.

– Prison isn't that bad, you know? You have five meals a day and a roof above your head. Rarely in life did I have such luxury.

The time you need to conquer the distance between point A and point B is a Bianco contract between you and the infinite possibilities.

You can read a book.

You can observe the landscape. Or the gentleman sitting opposite you and sleeping with his mouth open. A little longer, a little, just a little ...and a stream of drool leaked onto his grey trousers and morphed into a dark pool.

You can listen to music.

You can watch all sorts of Hollywood films while flight attendants diligently bring you laminated food.

You can play games.

You can sleep. If you sleep you can also dream, even though you can also dream just like that. A dry run, so to speak.

You can look around and say. Good afternoon!

And most probably someone will respond: Good afternoon!

Then you can ask: Where are you going?

And this is how conversations start.

Well, unless you're on the train Ljubljana–Maribor when a well dressed young lady, around thirty, will look at you with suspicion and say: Why are you interested? And then move and fiddle with her phone. She finds her phone less dangerous than you. The Stranger.

- This has passed in a flash! It was a pleasure talking to you. Good luck with everything!
- Sometimes you can tell a stranger more than you'd dare to write in you journal. Isn't that funny?
- Already? Shall we go and eat something?
- If you're in my part of the world, drop in. We'll be glad to see you!
- Come here, let me hug you!

Distance.

The distance between person A and person B is called closeness.

metro

BOY: We get off on the next one.

GIRL: Are you nervous?

BOY: No. Why?

GIRL: Because you've checked your watch for the fourth time.

BOY: Perhaps a little.

GIRL: Me too. I hope they'll like me.

BOY: They'll love you. Except ... I wanted to ask you if you perhaps today wouldn't talk about your mum, family, all this.

GIRL: Aha ... Ok. Why not?

BOY: Look, I'm not bothered, at all. But my folks are a little more ... conservative. And this picnic is not exactly suitable for such debates. You know what I mean ... My mother probably wouldn't mind, but my old man is more ...

GIRL: Racist?

BOY: Eh! What a thought ... He just doesn't like it when people don't assimilate. But you have You know what I mean? You've studied here and all ... Here,

this is our stop ... What – don't tell me you're insulted? I didn't mean anything like that, come on ...

silence

BOY: We're getting off here, babe.

GIRL: I'm not.

BOY: Please, don't do this to me ... We'll talk later in peace. Come, they're waiting for us.

GIRL: Leave me alone.

BOY: Don't be so childish. Please, let's go.

GIRL: I'm not going anywhere!

BOY: Stop making a scene and move.

GIRL: Fuck off.

BOY: Please, come on!

GIRL: Tell them I'm sorry, but that I don't feel well. Came down with one of those immigrant diseases. Or tell them I was deported.

BOY: Very funny, really. Come! The door's about to close. Amy!

GIRL: Emina. My name is Emina, you jerk!

metro

without the boy

TINKA: A real jerk.

EMINA: What?

TINKA: I'm sorry, I heard you and ...

EMINA: Yeah ... I guess I really know how to pick them ...

TINKA: Don't worry too much. It's not like it's written on their forehead ...

EMINA: Fucking spoilt son of a bitch. He'll tell me! He doesn't have a clue ...
Idiot! I can't believe it ... I'm really stupid ...

TINKA: If anyone's stupid here, it's him ...

EMINA: I haven't even thought that ... We've just started looking for flats together, and now ...

TINKA: You've done the right thing.

Tinka, the experienced fortysomething hands a tissue to Emina, the vulnerable twentysomething.

EMINA: I know ... But I really liked him ... Oh, sorry ... I'm bothering you ...

TINKA: Don't worry.

EMINA: What a mess ... I'm sorry.

TINKA: Hey, Emina? What if we had a cup of tea, eh?

EMINA: Screw tea, let's go have some raki ...

TINKA: Hahaha. Smart!

EMINA: I know a great café. We need to get off in two stops.

CLICK

Greetings from London!

Greetings from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland!

SHIELD-BEARER: Fuck, what an explosion!

CONQUEROR: And the goddamned rock is still standing ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Unlike them apes. So much about the black man's speed. Hehe.

Perhaps these were training for a marathon, not a sprint. Hehe. Hehe? Have you heard me? Hey? Oh! You've gone deaf. Horrible. He's deaf! Henry Stanley is deaf.

What a tragedy, what a pity! What a ...

CONQUEROR: Can you scream a little less ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Can you hear me?

CONQUEROR: All too well.

SHIELD-BEARER: What have I just said?

CONQUEROR: What have I just said?

SHIELD-BEARER: No, tell me what I've just said.

CONQUEROR: I just have.

SHIELD-BEARER: No, you said ...

CONQUEROR: Stop it. I'm not deaf ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Fine. Just as long as you're okay ...

CONQUEROR: I'm not! This is proceeding too slowly. Far too slowly.

SHIELD-BEARER: This is Henry Morton Stanley, the famous adventurer. We're in the year 1879 ...

CONQUEROR: Is it necessary to tell the year every time?

SHIELD-BEARER: Can't hurt, can it?

We're in the year 1879 in the heart of the black Africa.

CONQUEROR: "In the heart of the black Africa." Can you say a more tired sentence?

SHIELD-BEARER: Geeeeez! How would you put it?

CONQUEROR: Definitely using something more dramatic and poetic.

SHIELD-BEARER: Of course. Because the adventurer Henry Stanley is also a journalist and a writer. A man of the word, so to speak!

CONQUEROR: *How I Found Livingstone, The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State, My Dark Companions and Their Stories, Through the Dark Continent*; with maps and illustrations, and then the autobiography – if I only mention the bestsellers.

SHIELD-BEARER: Hey, we have to teach these apes how to read ASAP. You know

how you'll expand your market with that.

CONQUEROR: Eh! This lot are useless ... And besides, lately I've been having troubles with keeping my journal.

SHIELD-BEARER: Journal? Seriously? What do you put in it? Dear Diary, today the naughty rock wouldn't shatter?

CONQUEROR: No, I write about how I ordered ten blacks to drill their huge cocks into the ass-hole of my aide.

SHIELD-BEARER: Haha, funny.

CONQUEROR: You started it ... Careful! Cover your ears. I hope this time it'll work ... Here; ready, steady, go!

SHIELD-BEARER: Fuck! What a bomb! Oh, my stomach is quivering ...

CONQUEROR: But the bitch blew up.

SHIELD-BEARER: And the guy beside it too.

CONQUEROR: Fuck it; misfortune never sleeps.

SHIELD-BEARER: He gave his life on the path to progress. Oh, that was dramatically poetic, no?

CONQUEROR: Perhaps for obituaries or a monument.

SHIELD-BEARER: I've just about had it! What's the matter of you? You're cranky like a broad with PMS.

CONQUEROR: Sorry ... I'm nervous because we're progressing too slowly. The French are so close that I can smell them, and apparently the Portuguese are growing an appetite. And let me not start about the Germans ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Don't be nervous. It's not good for you.

CONQUEROR: I know, but I can't help myself. I'm worried. I worry non-stop that I won't make it. That ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Ah, don't start with this again.

CONQUEROR: That someone else will be faster, that I'm not ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Shhh! Stop. It'll be fine, you'll see. You're the best. The best. Calm down. Breathe. Like this, yes ... It'll be all fine. You'll see, everything will be fine. Inhale. Exhale. You just have to believe in yourself. You're doing well ... Well – I believe in myself. I trust myself. Repeat after me.

CONQUEROR: Repeat after me?

SHIELD-BEARER: Not that. Repeat: I believe in myself. I trust myself. Well ... You don't have to be embarrassed; there's nobody anywhere. Just me and you. Well; I believe in myself. I trust myself.

CONQUEROR: I believe in myself. I trust myself.

SHIELD-BEARER: Good.

CONQUEROR: I believe in myself. I trust myself. I believe in myself. I trust myself.

SHIELD-BEARER: You're doing great. Go on.

CONQUEROR: I believe in myself. I trust myself. I believe in myself....

SHIELD-BEARER: I apologise for this ... For this intermission and I'm asking for your understanding. You know – you go on –

CONQUEROR: I believe in myself. I trust myself.

SHIELD-BEARER: You know, our Stanley has been under a lot of stress these last days. Really, the pressure and expectations are immense. Enormous. I could say inhumane ... You're doing great, Stanley ... In the midst of this wild ... in the midst of this barbaric Africa he has to build roads and merchant stations, snatch the land from the natives and set up a plantation system of producing rubber, he has to gather slaves, search for mines of precious stones and such things – in the name of the majority financier of the expedition, the International Organisation for Africa, to bring civilisation and progress into these ...

CONQUEROR: Boondocks.

SHIELD-BEARER: Boondocks. You keep going. It's helping, no?

CONQUEROR: I believe in myself. I trust myself.

SHIELD-BEARER: This humanitarian mission is amply supported also by the Belgian king Leopold II, Stanley's boss ...

CONQUEROR: My partner in crime ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Stanley's good friend who in ten years will declare this piece of land his personal protectorate called the Congo Free State.

CONQUEROR: I believe in myself. I trust myself.

SHIELD-BEARER: Viva humanism! Viva altruism! And ... all this on the shoulders of a single man. Henry Stanley, ladies and gentlemen, Henry Stanley!

CONQUEROR: I believe in myself. I trust myself.

SHIELD-BEARER: You're doing great. Feeling any better?

CONQUEROR: I don't know ...

SHIELD-BEARER: How about we blow up another rock, eh? This always cheers you up.

CLICK

Greetings from anno Domini 1879!

check

TINKA: I'll be white.

LUNGELO: You already are.

colourful laughter

LUNGELO: Wouldn't you try black for once?

TINKA: Is this some sort of indecent proposal?

colourful laughter

LUNGELO: Absolutely not. Imagine the children. Like zebras.

colourful laughter

LUNGELO: You know what sort of problems that would bring. Fine, he could have a double name, but what about the rest of it? Would you send white stripes into a school for whites and black stripes into the one for blacks?

colourful laughter

TINKA: These lowly attempts to press on my collective guilt sentiment will not work. I will be white and the first move is mine.

LUNGELO: Are you sure? Because the history of oppression of my chocolate race is reeeeeeally long.

colourful laughter

TINKA: Fine, have them, if you're going to be so annoying.

LUNGELO: Thank you. I'll stick to my own. My strategy has been perfected for attacks from the second position.

checkmate

CLICK

Greetings from South Africa!

I – the traveller.

I gnaw on distances. Alone, in twos, with the family, with casual acquaintances ...

I travel from A to B and all the other letters of the alphabet.

A camera – obligatory equipment.

My entry and exit visa.

A litmus paper of closenesses.

Photography is the illuminance of souls.

Disclosing those most vulnerable bricks that make up a man. They need to be dealt with carefully, respectfully and above all fairly.

The give and take principle.

If not, you're stuck with masks. And you cannot form a friendship with a mask.

When I travel, I leave my mask at home. I am careful that it doesn't sneak into my luggage, skulk in the pocket of my shorts or wait to ambush me from my medicine box.

This is its favourite place. It knows very well that it can most easily sink its claws in me when I'm already a little worn out from all this breathing with my lungs full.

At first, it's funny to walk around without it. Like the first time at a nudist beach; you drag yourself around rocks, folded in two, red in the face, staring into the ground, just the ground in front of you ... And then: Hallelujah! Water! Freedom! Freedom!

Freedom! How beautiful the world is in its true colours ...

And then it's time to go back home.

Of course, my mask comes to meet me at the airport. It springs into my arms and tries to stick to me like a drain plug plunger. Its mission is clear: draw all the worst out of me. It can't wait to inform me of all the current panic and refuses to listen when I try to tell it how different the world is when you don't look at it through the glasses of fear. Fear is hollow on the inside and empty from the outside

Give me another one! To warm me up. It gets cold at night. Some kind of humidity comes from the river ... Uf! The Old Man³ has to warm up, there's no question.

Here – to your health!

Oh! It's better at once. There's nothing like home-made medicine. It cures all. Even the ugliness of women, he he.

Ouch, blast! A cramp. It'll pass. Uuuuu ... it'll rain. If I ever have to change jobs, I could become a weatherman. Really. The Old Man never fails me. Okay; it's over. Nothing, give me another one and then on earth peace to Bosniaks on whom his favour rests ... I hope that today is peaceful. Yesterday I nearly collapsed. Shots – boom, boom, boom! All of a sudden, in the middle of the night. But it was just fireworks. Beautiful. Five minutes. And the crowd took photos and recorded. Beautiful, beautiful, the tourists clapped. Beautiful up yours – I totally shat myself. Oh – listen to this one:

A grandpa is telling his grandchildren about his time in the partisan resistance:

– Cold, darkness. Me on sentry duty. Nobody anywhere. Suddenly, out of nowhere, four Germans appear in front of me. Kids, I shat myself.

– Why did you shit yourself, Grandpa, it was just Germans?

– No, I shat myself now, back then I ran away.

He he he ... Yes, it was all different back then. But really the same. You know, sometimes I think – when I can't sleep, and when even this medicine doesn't help – I'm thinking if it wasn't me who fucked everything up after all. If it weren't better if I'd told them back then: fuck off to wherever you came from, the Old Man won't play this game no more. And fling myself – splash – into the Neretva River myself. With style, I'd do a nice pike, or a double somersault. I've been watching these boys here, every day, for centuries; surely I've picked up some techniques. But no, I – with my hard Turkish head – I persevered for so long. The ninth of November 1993, at 10:15 in the morning. Boom! Boom! Boom!

³ Translator's note: "Stari" – the Old Man – is the affectionate nickname for the old bridge in Mostar. The author encourages creativity with the name when staging the text. The translator likes "the Dude", but it's already taken.

But they've patched me up pretty well, no? You can hardly see it. The Old Man is even better than before. But I ... Ouch! What is this today, goddammit! Ouch! Raki!

I remembered another one:

The Muslims and the Croats are slaughtering each other in the Mostar battlefield. Five Muslims die and six Croats. An American journalist comes past and asks a Serb:

– What's the result?

– 11:0 for us.

Cheers!

I loved life too much. Since always. They say that my architect dug his own grave, because he thought I wouldn't hold up. But I did. Labour and delivery were successful.

The biggest arch in the world. Six hundred years ago; you wankers, toddlers.

Give me another one. Here – the only one that never lets me down. Cheers! Uf, I'm beginning to feel quite warm. Perhaps I'll even sleep some today ... if not, I'll play some cards with Tara and Helebija. Tara gets off at six, and Helebija is unemployed in these peaceful days anyway. She smiles at tourists, that's what she does. Yeah, my guards ...

This last war fucked them up, I'm telling you. They don't get all this us – them. Ours – yours. Catholics – Muslims. Croats – Bosniaks – Serbs. A stone is a stone. No heart. No blood to shed for its nation, for lofty ideals. How can we grasp the point of these shoot-outs? If you ask me; the only fight that makes sense is the fight against cretins. And cretins come – fuck knows – in all different nationalities. Uf, I've seen so many cretins in all these centuries. Really now; I'll down one more, and go ... Oh! and another joke. May I?

In the Paralympic football world championship the Bosnian team wins. And of course they start giving thanks to all who helped them to come this far: the sponsors, the families, friends ... and from the bleachers a Croat yells. Or a Serb. Or ... It doesn't matter. From the bleachers, a Croat yells:

– But of course, no thanks to us, right, who made you like this in the first place?

Cheers!

But, when it blows up next time – and it will blow up, trust the Old Man – I'll really fling into the water myself. Enough was enough. Even stone has a breaking point.

CLICK!

Greetings from Bosnia and Herzegovina!

“Fear is hollow on the inside and empty from the outside” my mother used to say and this is what I tell my daughter. When the room lights up and she stops yelling “I'm scared! I'm scared!” we look around and see that there's no bogeyman anywhere. That her toys haven't changed into monsters and that there's not a single hair of a starving

lion who wanted to munch on her for his dinner. Nothing from the outside. Nothing from the inside. This is what this fear itself looks like.

By travelling I turn the lights on for myself.

I switch off the horror story that they're playing for me on an endless loop.

I discard the mask.

I loosen it, and loosen and hope that one day it'll disintegrate completely. Travelling make me alive.

It gives me back the pulse of normality.

At home, the autopilot takes charge.

Who programmed it is an unimportant question, the important thing is that it works.

ACTION!

While you're dealing with bills and mortgage, cranky bosses and lazy co-workers, shopping lists, coupon clippings, loyalty points and special offers, endless waiting lists at the doctor, children and their after school activities, with yourself, your partner, the dog ... While you're so very busy with somehow – like a horse with blinders on – ploughing through the day, you – boo! – become scared. Really scared. Adult scared. In living daylight. Sometimes you don't even have to turn on the TV. Panic everywhere, panic, panic!

It clutches you, it suffocates.

Everywhere dangers, everywhere enemies, everywhere monsters, everywhere bogeymen.

Horror story.

Live.

We – their heroes.

Our secret weapon?

– Lunch! says the guide.

The van stops.

The first ones out are the Americans.

– Oh, my God, it's hot!

Oh, my Got, shut up! I want to tell her for the hundredth time, but I bite my tongue. For the hundredth time.

The Dutch couple, smelling of sun block, jump out after their flaxen haired offspring.

The German student and Luka continue to debate cameras.

I climb out. It really is hot.

– Right, in this direction, please ... Do you have everything? The van will be parked over there in the shade.

I stretch.
I let the sun tickle my underarms.
– Of course you can – I hear him respond to the American – the wall is at its most photogenic here.
What a sense of humour our guide has. I have to ask him where he orders it from.
The sounds of Dutch gargle past me. Like vampires. The sun might melt them.
The Americans finish their photo session.
– It’s amazing! We’ve got some beautiful pictures.
Wonderful! I smile at them. They’re quite nice. So – enthusiastic.
What? Of course! Luka has forgotten his backpack.
He always forgets something.
– I’ll go get it. Be right back.
He kisses me.
I walk my eyes behind him.
Inside me, a flood of love ...
He turns around. As if he knew I was looking at him, that ...
– Look there!
– What?
– Look there.
I follow his hand. His index finger. This landscape ... So still. Sleepy. Dried grass. A wall in the background. A hill on the other side. Houses ... What am I looking at?
– More to the left! Can you see?
Oh dear!
The man on the ladder?! In the middle of nowhere – a man on an actual A-ladder!
What ... Why ... Is he looking over the wall?
He must have gone bonkers!
Luka?
At the van talking to the driver.
The man on the ladder is shading his eyes with one hand and looking over. Over the wall.
Crazy.
I wouldn’t be normal, either, if I lived here, but still ...
Ops! He’s back on the ground.
He folds the ladder.
Flings it over his shoulder and ... Leaves!
The people here are going crazy. Going crazy for real.

- Have you seen that?
- Yes. Horrible. Poor man. I think he’s gone insane.
- The driver said he’s looking at olive trees. They built the wall right down the middle of his grove. Can you imagine? Half on this side, half on the other! So that he doesn’t need to mess with the check points and soldiers, he climbs the ladder and checks if they already need watering.
- Are you messing with me?
- No. The driver knows him. He says the man is a teacher and that olives have been his family business for ever.
- And he brings a ladder ... and ... looks over ... at the olive trees?
- Yeah. Better lazy than tired, right? Look – you can see they really know each other. Come, I’ve forgotten my backpack anyway.

CLICK

*Greetings from the West Bank,
greetings from Palestine!*

CONQUEROR: Here you are.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you.

CONQUEROR: Take another biscuit.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you.

CONQUEROR: They say they’re tasty.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you. Perhaps later.

CONQUEROR: You don’t have to be embarrassed. Take it.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you. I will. After I’ve had my coffee.

CONQUEROR: You can dip them. Try.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you. After coffee. Thank you.

CONQUEROR: Okay, as you wish ...

Well, here.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you, really. But I can’t now. I’m straight from lunch. And I have heartburn.

CONQUEROR: I meant, here, you start.

SHIELD-BEARER: Oh ... No, no. You start, please.

CONQUEROR: No, you.

SHIELD-BEARER: No, you.

CONQUEROR: You’re more of an expert in this field ...

SHIELD-BEARER: And you’re the boss ...

CONQUEROR: This is in fact a true, yet in the given situation a completely irrelevant piece of information. I’ve asked your opinion first, because ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Which I truly value ...

CONQUEROR: Because I value it ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you. I also value that you value my opinion ...

CONQUEROR: Oh! This political correctness will be the end of us all, I'm telling you.

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes, but we have to adhere to a certain level, no? We're no longer
in the Middle Ages.

CONQUEROR: You can substantiate everything so well. You see, I value this, too.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you. I also value this ...

CONQUEROR: Enough! Spit it out already.

SHIELD-BEARER: Okay. My opinion is that ...

CONQUEROR: Stop. Check six o' clock.

...

Good. Nobody anywhere.

SHIELD-BEARER: This is Adolf.

CONQUEROR: And this is Himmler.

SHIELD-BEARER: We're in the year 1938 and, yes ... Poland.

CONQUEROR: So we've agreed?

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes. Aeons ago.

CONQUEROR: And I agreed?

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes, you agreed. We said we'd begin on 1 September ...

CONQUEROR: The first day of school.

SHIELD-BEARER: True, true.

CONQUEROR: Are we okay with that?

SHIELD-BEARER: Hm ... I don't see a reason not to be. You?

CONQUEROR: I don't know ... Such a meaningful date.

SHIELD-BEARER: People will remember it more easily.

CONQUEROR: Fine ... So this is solved.

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes.

...

CONQUEROR: We're set, then.

...

SHIELD-BEARER: Yes. Set.

...

CONQUEROR: Do you want a biscuit?

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you.

...

This is Adolf.

CONQUEROR: And this is Himmler.

...

SHIELD-BEARER: And this is the silence between them, filled only by the crunching of a biscuit.

...

CONQUEROR: And?

SHIELD-BEARER: Nice.

...

CONQUEROR: Take more, if you want to.

SHIELD-BEARER: Thank you, that'll do. I have to keep my measurements in check, you know.

CONQUEROR: Stop. Check six o' clock.

...

Good. Nobody anywhere.

...

And – otherwise?

SHIELD-BEARER: Nothing, same old. Busy, you know.

CONQUEROR: Aha ...

...

Listen – Poland, for real? Shouldn't we take a less ... Pathetic country?

SHIELD-BEARER: That's the point. Nobody gives a damn about Poland.

CONQUEROR: Okay ...

SHIELD-BEARER: Deal ...

CONQUEROR: This will be interesting.

SHIELD-BEARER: This will be epic, you'll see.

CONQUEROR: Oy, oy, oy – listen to this: The first day of the new educational system.

SHIELD-BEARER: Bravo, well done! Hehe. If I may quote myself...

CONQUEROR: Go ahead!

SHIELD-BEARER: "The best political weapon is a weapon of terror. Cruelty commands respect. Men may hate us. But, we don't ask for their love; only their fear."

CONQUEROR: Well said. Truly well said. Now, my turn! "If you want to shine like sun, first you have to burn like it."

SHIELD-BEARER: I say! T-shirt worthy.

CONQUEROR: Such luck that people don't think, right?

SHIELD-BEARER: You've quoted yourself again?

CONQUEROR: More like recycled. Stop. Check six o' clock.

...

Good. Nobody anywhere.

SHIELD-BEARER: Hey; you've not had a chance to go over my proposal for the Jewish question, have you?

CONQUEROR: Gave it a quick look ...

SHIELD-BEARER: And?

CONQUEROR: Flaming.

CLICK

Greetings from the anno Domini 1938!

A big stable.

Cattle to the left.

Cattle to the right.

Beside me, a tiny wrinkled woman is scurrying. She must be over eighty. She's telling me about kittens that already drink milk by themselves, and the weather.

She says something about the rain, I only half hear her.

I'm looking at the huge pile of muscle.

His tongue is sweeping the floor.

Between me and the horns, a thin fence and nothing else.

A fencette.

Nothing.

– Beautiful, no?

– And immense. How much does it weigh?

– Over eight hundred.

The wrinkled woman walks to it and scratches his head.

– And he never ... runs away?

– No.

– How? All he has to do is lean against this fence and ...

– You know, he doesn't know what sort of power he has.

He doesn't know what sort of power he has.

He heaves and wags his tongue.

The grass is almost all gone.

CLICK

Greetings from Georgia!

Fear is a very greedy creature.

Greedy and omnivorous.

It eats and eats and eats and gets fatter and it almost seems it will explode, that it will be blown up, but it doesn't stop. It stuffs itself and gobbles and you're afraid to take its plate away. What if he gobbles you up, too? The little fear is belching and burping ...

Can't even behave! You observe him from a safe distance – you hope nobody will notice you – and you ask yourself how can he not be sick yet. Oy! I hope he doesn't vomit in public! That would be a disaster. Because it really doesn't look good.

When little Fear eats enough insecurity, he grows into Hate.

Now everything is ready for the grand finale.

The table is set for the Last Supper.

All we need is the target. A culprit. Someone at whom all our forces will be aimed.

Someone who will allow us to become the Saviour.

He.

The television points their fingers.

They.

Newspapers nod in agreement.

They. They. They.

We also nod.

Few feel the need to make sure first hand. Particularly with such good Photoshops.

They. They! They!! They!!!

Hatred has one truly ugly quality. It's giving. The whore of emotions, so to speak. And so it gives birth non-stop. The world is littered with these brats. Little-isms. You can tell by their last name that they belong together.

These rascals eat Sunday lunches with us, watch television, go to birthday parties.

They're with us in the shop, at the gas station, when we go for a beer with friends. They grudgingly wait for us to finish work, to stop talking to our mother, to pay the mechanic 150 euros for 5 minutes of work on our car ... Slowly we get used to them. We're not bothered by their occasional tantrums. Children. They'll grow out of it. And sometimes they're even right, no?

Like Darwin. The fitter survive, and the weaker ...

We – the creators of horror stories.

Each one of us in our own fenced-in kingdom. One-seven-billionth.

Fear is king.

Hatred queen.

And we jesters.

GRANDPA: I lift my gun, he lifts his – some ten metres are between us, not more – I'm about to aim, and so is he ... I still don't know what happened.

What came over me ... He made this with his arm:

he slides his wrist quickly over his nose as if to wipe it

And I ... I saw Jožek, my brother. You don't remember him, he's been dead for nine years – God bless him. I saw – so true as I am standing here now –

him, how he runs into the house: It's snowing! It's snowing! looks at me and does the same:

he slides his wrist quickly over his nose as if to wipe it

his image popped up first, and then my mother's. She cries with laughter because I hid into a bale of hay and frightened her. And then me - fishing in Ščavnica ... Like images, you know. I saw a life, my life – as if it happened again, you know. It hit me, like the lightning bolt that stroke this linden tree – see up there, it's split in half? This is from the lightning. I wasn't on the Russian front anymore. A soldier. A number. Cannon fodder. A Windischer ... Yes, in life you have to know how to pick your battles.

TINKA: And then what happened?

GRANDPA: Nothing. I couldn't shoot anymore ... I deserted.

TINKA: You what?

GRANDPA: I escaped. It took me four months to come home. This is why I go places so unwillingly these days, you know? So ... What if we sat down a bit, eh, Tiny? My leg is giving me grief again.

And they sit down on the bench under a linden tree.

GRANDPA: And don't go telling your mum or your grandma that I've been telling you about the war.

TINKA: I won't.

GRANDPA: She says we must forget it, not go on talking about it. She's right. Look what a beautiful day it's turned out to be. Tomorrow we'll have to go hill up the potatoes – now that the soil has been so nicely soaked.

TINKA: Grandpa, what happened to the other one?

GRANDPA: The Russian?

TINKA: Yeah.

GRANDPA: I don't know.

TINKA: Do you think he died?

GRANDPA: I don't know ... You know, very many died back then. Too many.

TINKA: Perhaps he escaped, too?

GRANDPA: Perhaps.

TINKA: Why didn't you go together?

GRANDPA: Why? What kind of question is that. Because we each went into our own direction. I went home and he went home. Enough about this now.

One of those pleasant silences envelopes the grandfather, the granddaughter and the linden tree ...

TINKA: Grandpa, I'd also like to go to Russia once.

GRANDPA: Why would you go there, it's too cold.

TINKA: To Africa then.

GRANDPA: What now? Russia or Africa?

TINKA: Both.

GRANDPA: Do you think your Mum would let you?

TINKA: I don't know. But I can escape. Just like you.

CLICK

Greetings from the homeland!

SHIELD-BEARER: Ready?

CONQUEROR: Yes. Check if my tie is straight.

SHIELD-BEARER: Hm ... Like this. Now you're spick and span.

CONQUEROR: Am I all winkled or what?

SHIELD-BEARER: No.

CONQUEROR: Then why have you called me a Spick? Oh! I get it. Next time you can flatter me using a more modern expression. Like I'm advertisement ready – for example. Or catwalk ready. Oh my god, you have dandruff ... Have your assistant check with mine to see what she buys me. It helps, one hundred percent. Here, better. What do you have here?

SHIELD-BEARER: What?

CONQUEROR: A little smidge. Toothpaste, perhaps. Wait ...

SHIELD-BEARER: What is the matter with you?!

CONQUEROR: Relax. Saliva is a natural antibiotic.

SHIELD-BEARER: What if somebody sees us?

CONQUEROR: Eh! Nobody anywhere. If I took care of anything, I took care of security! A man must have his peace, no? Besides, this is trendy now; male bonding and shit.

SHIELD-BEARER: We are here and now. This is ...

CONQUEROR: Boo!

SHIELD-BEARER: Aaa! Can you stop that?

CONQUEROR: Hahahaha! Every time you fall for the same trick. Hahaha.

SHIELD-BEARER: Geeez! Can you please concentrate for a second so we can coordinate our statements and get through this properly? I don't have all day to dry hump the audience. We have ten more minutes.

CONQUEROR: What's with you and the anal phase?

SHIELD-BEARER: What anal phase?

CONQUEROR: This "dry humping".

SHIELD-BEARER: That's not anal phase.

CONQUEROR: Yes it is.
SHIELD-BEARER: Is not.
CONQUEROR: Is to.
SHIELD-BEARER: Is not. Do you even know what anal means?
CONQUEROR: Yeah. What your mama calls you. Hehe.
SHIELD-BEARER: You can be so childish ...
CONQUEROR: At least I don't dry hump, I get them all wet. Hehe.
SHIELD-BEARER: Well, with this statement you went below your standards.
CONQUEROR: Oh, yeah?
SHIELD-BEARER: Don't start again ...
CONQUEROR: Oh, we're so laced up today.
SHIELD-BEARER: Seven more minutes.
We're here and now and this is ...
CONQUEROR: Let's make this country Slovenian again!
SHIELD-BEARER: What?
CONQUEROR: Let's make this country Slovenian again. This could be the slogan of
this campaign.
SHIELD-BEARER: Let's make this country Slovenian again ... Hmmm ... Not that
stupid at all ...
CONQUEROR: Right?
SHIELD-BEARER: A classic diversion. We're not racist, but patriotic.
CONQUEROR: True.
SHIELD-BEARER: We welcome multiculturalism, but not at the price of our own
identity.
CONQUEROR: Exactly.
SHIELD-BEARER: First us, then others.
CONQUEROR: Hallelujah!
SHIELD-BEARER: Let's make this country Slovenian again! This is ... genius!
CONQUEROR: I can already see the advertisement: some sort of mountains in the
background ...
SHIELD-BEARER: Triglav⁴!
CONQUEROR: That Triglav is so overused ...
SHIELD-BEARER: Pohorje?
CONQUEROR: A mountain, dude. Not a hill.

⁴ Translator's note: Triglav is the highest Slovenian mountain and a patriotic symbol (there is a saying that if you haven't been on Triglav you are not a real Slovenian.)

SHIELD-BEARER: If you don't want Triglav, it's best we go shoot in the Dolomites. Or on the Grossglockner. Have you seen what the Austrians have done?

CONQUEROR: Not yet.

SHIELD-BEARER: An exceptional campaign! It's just that this national costume of theirs ... I don't know, it does nothing for me.

CONQUEROR: When one does you at the Oktoberfest it'll grow on you. And this was not an anal but a sexual joke. Anyway; we need a mountain and ... something green!

SHIELD-BEARER: A linden tree. It must definitely be a linden tree. And a picnic under the linden tree. A family: a husband, a wife, two to three children. Uh – a pregnant wife! Yes! With that gestating glow; with the aura of bliss ...

CONQUEROR: Or they can shag behind the linden tree, so we also have the post-watershed version. Hehe.

SHIELD-BEARER: Twat.

CONQUEROR: What? Two birds with one stone – we encourage patriotism and the birth rate.

SHIELD-BEARER: Pointless. We'd better ban contraception and you'll hear children screaming from every Slovenian room. Efficient and legally impeccable.

CONQUEROR: You brains you! With a crust of dandruff, but we'll take care of that. Oh, I know who to tip off to open a company for nappies. Will 7% be enough for you?

SHIELD-BEARER: Aaaa!

CONQUEROR: What? What?

SHIELD-BEARER: Nothing, I thought there was that ...

CONQUEROR: What?

SHIELD-BEARER: Nothing; it was just your shadow ... No panic.

CONQUEROR: Relax, dude. Have some bubbly or grow a pair.

SHIELD-BEARER: Really funny. Where were we?

CONQUEROR: At nappies?

SHIELD-BEARER: Can you stop fucking around? You're at work. Five more minutes to the press conference ... So, let's coordinate our statements. What will you say?

CONQUEROR: That we're doing everything exactly as we were instructed to do? Hehe. Relax, come on. You know I shine in front of the cameras. I'll tell them that everything works above expectations and that I'm pleased. And that our priority – no, our only issues – are the safety and benefit of our citizens. Is that too much?

SHIELD-BEARER: No, no. It's great. Tell them also that this is an extremely sensible

investment.

CONQUEROR: Eh, you can bore them with numbers. I take a different approach. A-u, A-u, A-u.

SHIELD-BEARER: What are you doing?

CONQUEROR: Warming up my mandible. Try it. It helps with cramping. Better safe than sorry.

SHIELD-BEARER: Fabulous. Tell them this, too.

CONQUEROR: What? About safe and sorry?

SHIELD-BEARER: Yeah.

CONQUEROR: No problem! Better safe than sorry. Nutter, butter, nutter, butter, nutter.

SHIELD-BEARER: Geeeeeze ...

CONQUEROR: Why do you worry so much? We're navigating through this crisis fabulously. Foreign political powers publicly praise us, folks at home are appropriately scared so we can sell them anything ... A win-win situation.

SHIELD-BEARER: I know ...

CONQUEROR: It works!

SHIELD-BEARER: Yeah. For now ...

CONQUEROR: And if not, we have a back-up plan.

SHIELD-BEARER: Yeah. A wall, machine guns and rat-a-tat-tat-tat.

CONQUEROR: Opa! I knew you had balls.

SHIELD-BEARER: Ready? They're waiting for us.

CONQUEROR: Ready Let's make this country Slovenian again!

SHIELD-BEARER: Shhh! Do not utter that anywhere. This needs to be prepared, placed properly. You know.

CONQUEROR: OK, OK ... But it was an ace idea!

SHIELD-BEARER: Absolutely!

CONQUEROR: Oh! Accordion! There definitely has to be an accordion. This is solid Slovenian identity. Even more spritely! ... Do I have anything between my teeth?

SHIELD-BEARER: No.

CONQUEROR: Ok, then smile and ... action!

CLICK

The door opens.

*Two ironed out men on one side,
a crowd with photo-cameras, cameras, microphones, dictaphones, telephones ...
on the other.*

An invisible wall between them.

Greetings from anno Domini 2016!

Now I can die.

I think.

An inhale.

My heart beats like it's attending drumming workshops in Macedonia:

Jožica Tanja Tanja Jožica Tanja Tanja

A syncope.

An exhale.

Darkness in my head.

...

click

another madhouse day today.

click

So many different events I no longer know where my lens is. And always the same sour faces. The same glittering smiles. Booring!

click

I was created for more sublime motives, not for these poseurs.. This ... vulgar predictability! One of these days my lens will crack, you'll see ...

click

I mean, I get you – you have to work – but I don't get it! Money is one thing, but the artist's mission is something else. You're not the stupid, apathetic mob. Some loftier goal, some moral responsibility – one has to have that, no? Hold a fucking mirror and stuff.

click

Hey, you know what I've been thinking? What if we did a small artiy exhibition, hm? In a tiny little gallery. To detox from this work pulp. So that I pat my film a little, and you your soul. What do you say? A gourmet, exclusive artistic manifestation.

click

I already have a concept. Wait for it: local. Get it? Today, everybody's doing these global things, like, no borders and stuff ... But we could radically cut this with an exclusively local scene. Engaged art and bollocks. I've already figured it out. We've enough material ready. We need some 10 photos, no more – niche, right? We'd start with the lonely guy. You know which photo I'm talking about?

Blue sky, curly clouds. A tree, in its shade, a bench.

A white head. Gnarly fingers clutching a cane.

The gaze is counting daisies in the meadow.

And nobody anywhere.

click

This could be the first one. An easy intro; a blurred emotion and politicality, but subtle. A big like, if you ask me. Then, I'd go for that one from the street.

A mummy with a pram and a small dog. Four teenaged girls; same trousers, same t-shirts, same hair. An elderly lady is dragging her shopping bag behind her. A boy with sunglasses and a phone. A man in a suit. A young woman in a suit on the phone. A couple with a camera. A girl with a ponytail and a large shopping bag. A woman in grey. A young man with a bald patch. Someone on a bike. Two people holding hands. Someone entering a shop. Somebody looking to the right. Somebody eating a sandwich. Somebody in a hurry. A boy with his knees on the ground.

A McDonald's cup in front of him.
And nobody anywhere.

click

Hm ... It's quite literal, isn't it? Perhaps too much. Totally in your face. This no longer works. Today, subversion rules. Although ... Well, let's keep it in mind and we'll see if it fits with the concept of the entire event. Alrighty? Next ...

A boy and a nose and blood. Legs gearing up for an escape.
Two pairs of raised fists above him and a shoe approaching his belly. A closed circle of teenagers and telephones. A large building behind them.
Paper snowdrops and primroses in the windows.

And nobody anywhere.

click

We've really aced this one. The B&W is truly genius. Far more dramatic. More apocalyptic. Remember how we toiled over the zoom. And the lens on, and off, and another ... Crazy! But it was worth it. Brutality par excellence.

Four beds on the left, four on the right. Bodies on them, covered with sheets, surrounded by machines and IV drips. A face. Convulsed.
Eyes wide open screaming for the end.

And nobody anywhere.

click

Baby, this composition is a jackpot; static, static, static and then this focalised intensity. Form = contents and vice versa. U – *Danger! High voltage*. This could be the title of the exhibition. No, it's like, whatever ... or *CLICK Greetings from Slovenia!* No, disaster. Forget it.

A cut lip. An eye with a bruise looking through the window
while the bus is looking at her.
And nobody anywhere.

click

Definitely one of my top five. *A Still Life on the Bus*. Hey, what if we gave all the photos such half-joking – half-serious subtitles? Would that be too much? No, it's better to leave things open to interpretation. We don't want to speak repressingly about repression, do we? Fuck, how eloquently I formulated that. Sharp. I don't have the EF 24-70 f/4 LIS lens for nothing. Hehe.

Stairs into an old block of flats. Six men.
A see-through shopping bag with bread. A red sticker – 50 %.
Two open tins and a construction helmet.
And nobody anywhere.

click

This one is my favourite. For the invitation #willworkforfood Hey! We could add # for every photo? This is now ultra trendy, you know? What else have we got? Ohhhh, this one slays ...

A little boy is holding a little girl's hand and walking.
The little girl is holding a pink teddy bear and walking.
A woman is smiling at her and walking. She's holding a box in her hands. On it, a red cross. A chain of backs is standing and waiting.
And nobody anywhere.

click

That's what I said; locally engaged art. This one has a cathartic potential. The softies will weep, you'll see.

Standing, sitting, squatting, lying ... fence. A police officer and a soldier.
Between them, a cloud of exhaled warmth.
And nobody anywhere.

click

This detail with the breath is nice. It adds something. But ... When I think again, it's a little passé. Isn't it? I mean; everybody does that. We have to find a new, sexy theme. Political, of course. But not this broadcasting bullshit. People are fed up already. You're already immune. We have to be drawing attention to something else ... You know what I mean? One needs to show something that will touch people. Move them. Literally and metaphorically. We have to hold them a real mirror ... Otherwise, nobody will buy this. We have to cover the costs, at least. Fuck, I'm quick learning human logic, right? Okay, what else do we have ...

A lifted arm. A wrist wiping nose. Distance: ten metres, no more.
A razor wire balancing along the golden ratio.
And nobody anywhere.

I ... the ultimate coward.

Hidden under the bed I wait for the ghosts' party to be over.

Breathing with gills.

My eyes hurt from being shut closed.

An inhale.

My camera ... A mirror? Workplace: house of terror in a fun fair.

It's so distressing that I could die.

An exhale.

...

..... and CLICK

It illuminates me like an X-ray

I - from the inside out.

And again.

CLICK

In my head, an image.

It glows.

A comet in a night sky.

And another one.

Growing like Aurora Borealis in the polar cold.

And another one.

Postcards from my travels.

Stations.

Fellow travellers.

People. My tribe.

An inhale.

In life, you have to know how to pick your battles.

I think.

...

I put down my camera.

I enter the photo.

Turning darkness into light.

A positive.

Translated by Barbara Skubic.