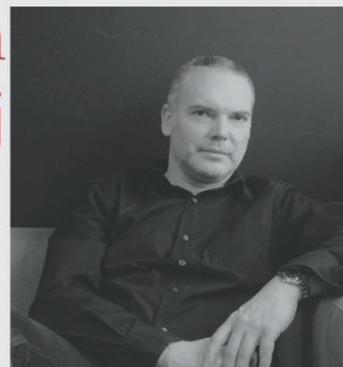


Sebastijan
Pregelj



Dear Elvis, Dear Ali

*Translated from the Slovene
by Rawley Grau*

English

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Sebastijan Pregelj: Dear Elvis, Dear Ali

Excerpt from the novel

Robert, arms spread out, is spinning in the middle of the office. The Tigar Glue has done its job. He squeezed half a tube into the polyvinyl bag, which is now lying on the floor. As he spins, Robert keeps repeating that I should try it too. Come on! he insists. It's good. No, I say firmly. Then don't be a pussy and put on some GBH or maybe PTTB, he shouts. Sure, whatever you want. I reach out, change the cassette, and push play.

A little while later, Robert is sitting in the armchair. We have it pretty good, don't we? he says, and looks at me. Before I can answer, his head droops onto his chest. I look at him and mumble that we sure do.

After the six months of training, most soldiers were sent to Kosovo. There are about a thousand of us left at the base, maybe even less. People are saying that Yugoslavia has signed an agreement by which its larger military bases need to be at least sixty miles from the border. I have no idea if it's true, just as I have no idea how large a base has to be to be considered larger. But everything points to the fact that our base is being evacuated: soldiers are leaving every week and there are no new arrivals.

We've been lucky. Most of our platoon has been posted to Headquarters. My responsibilities are writing the daily orders, which Major Stanković dictates to me, and cleaning the offices of some of the senior officers. An office is clean when the ashtrays are empty and there aren't any ashes on the desks. I empty the ashtrays every day, I wipe the desks every day, I vacuum the offices once a week, or sometimes not. I don't have any other jobs. Robert takes care of the coffee. It a madhouse in the morning – all the officers want their coffee as soon as they arrive. Almost nothing happens during the day. But Robert always has to be available. Rade is the driver for the base commander. Kenan works in the post office. Kenan is friends with the boys from the fire service. They have a plot of weed growing behind the pigsty. They can't sell the weed so they trade it for alcohol, which Kenan knows how to get. Kenan has more alcohol than any bar in town. It's very simple: in the morning he arranges the new mail and the package notices by each unit; then in the early afternoon he hands out the packages to the soldiers. Part of his job is to open and inspect each package to make sure it doesn't contain any alcohol or drugs. If the package contains only a single bottle of alcohol, he confiscates it; if there are two or more, he takes just one of the bottles and acts like he doesn't see the others. He is supposed to hand over the alcohol to the officer in charge the next morning, but Kenan is no fool. The good stuff we drink; the bad stuff he hands over. Some of bottles he keeps back for us he trades for weed. Kenan

shares whatever he has with us, which is why we all love him. If the base ever chose a Soldier of the Month, it would be Kenan, at least as far as those of us at Headquarters are concerned.

Above the pigsty there's a loft with straw and fodder, and you can have a gypsy girl there. One of the firemen makes arrangements, but we don't go there. We're happy enough with *Hot Stuff* and similar magazines.

We're not the only ones at Headquarters; there are also the guards. On every floor, there's one guard at the head of the corridor and another by the stairs. Some of the senior officers have additional guards. There's one in front of the door of the base commander, one in front of the door of the colonel in military counterintelligence, and two on the floor above who guard the office of the lieutenant colonel in charge of the signalmen, which keeps its coded teleprinters behind two bullet-proof doors. The guards change every week. We get along well with the guards. They kick at our door to warn us when the officers are coming. In exchange I lend them magazines. Some of the guards wait until the end of their shift, others wank off in the middle of it. It makes no difference to me so long as they return the mag. The library I manage I keep beneath the carpet. The magazines are placed one beside the other, so you don't notice when you're walking on top of them. I started with some mags I inherited, but the collection grew after only a few weeks. I'm not as meticulous as Sršen was in the school locker room. I store the mags and lend them out, but I never make any threats. The people who borrow them can pay with anything but money. Payment can be straightaway or, like with the guards, I can also wait for it. No one ever forgets to pay. Not the barber when I need a haircut, or the cooks when they dish out the food. The boys in the platoon can keep the magazines for a long time. Whenever a copy gets ruined, I replace it with a new one. Everything's been a lot easier since they opened the duty-free shops. And I can bring whatever I want onto the base in my duffel bag.

The officers know this. Not a day goes by that one or another of them doesn't call me into his office. Behind closed doors, he presses a banknote into my hand and places an order for brandy or vodka. I slip away in the afternoon, when the only officers on the base are the ones on duty. Not far from the base there's a shop where the beautiful Vangelija works. I'd heard of her even before I was moved to Headquarters, when I was only allowed to leave the base twice a month. The other soldiers flocked in droves to the beautiful Vangelija, but I never went there. Since I've been posted at Headquarters, however, I go to her shop a lot. Not only is it nearby, it has everything I need, namely, brandy and vodka. Only I don't think the beautiful Vangelija is particularly good-looking; her charms are of a different sort.

The shelves in the beautiful Vangelija's shop are organized in an unusual way. Items aren't arranged by group but by price. The cheapest items are on the lowest shelves. The higher the price, the higher the shelf. The beautiful Vangelija can't reach the highest shelves. She needs a ladder.

And when she climbs up the ladder, there's something to look at. The beautiful Vangelija does not wear panties.

The boys say I'm lucky. Brandy and vodka aren't on the highest shelf, but they're high enough for Vangelija to need a ladder. So I get a show every time.

I go to the shop on days when soldiers aren't allowed to go into town. I arrive with empty bottles in my duffel bag and leave with full ones. From time to time I take something small for myself. Mainly things from the lower shelves. When I return through the main gate, the soldiers on duty never inspect me. I suspect they know that I'm carrying something, but they don't know who it's for. The alcohol could be for the base commander or one of the senior officers, and then they'd be in deep shit. That's how they think. But in fact no officer would put himself at risk like that. If I ever got caught at the gate, those bottles of brandy and vodka would be my problem. But the soldiers on duty don't know that.

Every time I come back from the beautiful Vangelija, I have to describe in detail how it went. At first I would tell the story as it really happened, but they didn't want to accept it; they didn't believe I was telling them everything. They wanted more, so I started adding things and making stuff up. Now when I tell them my story, the boys laugh and slap me on the back and say it's better than winning the lottery. And I suppose it is. Once, however, I told them that the beautiful Vangelija was not really as beautiful as everyone says. They went nuts. So you'd be happier if Goce took care of you? Fat, hairy Goce – with no trousers on? Come on, cut the bullshit and admit it: she's a fox and a half! Admit that you're lucky. Any one of us would trade places with you in a heartbeat. Unless you're a queer. Since then, I've always tried to come up with the best story I can with as many details as possible. And it seems to be working.

Afternoons I spend mostly in Robert's semi-basement kitchen or in the classroom with the TV. After supper we're usually in the squad room. There we clown around for a while, do some drinking and smoking, then fall asleep. Nobody comes to wake us in the morning; nobody makes us do morning exercises; nobody checks on us. We just have to be ready by the flag-raising.

On Friday and Saturday nights Rade and I go out onto the balcony; we each have our own bottle. There, from taps to reveille, we drink. It's a kind of ritual. At some point towards the end, Rade starts hugging me. He says I'm a good friend, a true comrade. He says he's a Communist with a heart, even though he's not a member of the party. He says you don't have to be a party member to be a good Communist. Just look at the Federal Assembly. Everyone in it is a member of the party, but tell me, he asks, are they good people? Fuck them, I reply.

Rade is always telling me about the women they have in Užice. So good you want to lick all ten fingers, he says. But nobody gets the best ones because they're too good for local boys. If you come visit me, they'd all be

ours, he says, as he grabs the back of my neck with his sausage fingers. They like Slovenes. You could have the best of the lot, and because I'm your friend I'll get the rest. So will you come for a visit, when we're out of the army? Sure, I nod, although I doubt it. Recently, things in the world, and even in Yugoslavia, are happening so fast one after the other you almost don't notice them; they just pile up. But it won't be too long, I think, before something cracks under the weight of all these changes.

And where will I be then?

In the second half of December, we were in a constant state of battle readiness because of what was going on in neighbouring Romania. Every evening we watched the news, and every morning, standing in formation, we would listen as the lieutenant explained what was happening in the country next door, where mass demonstrations had erupted. On December seventeenth, protesters in Timișoara clashed with the army, the regular police, and members of the secret police. The next morning Lieutenant Stojanović said we had probably heard about the disturbances in Romania but nobody really knew what was happening there. The British and the Americans were very possibly involved, he said, stirring up the people. But the Romanian army had the situation under control. Even if there were foreign agents in the country, we needed to know that the ones who joined such people were usually drunks, drug addicts, queers, and other scum who could be bought for a few filthy dollars. Honest citizens know their proper place! Honest citizens can't be fooled!

Three days later the protesters occupied Timișoara and set off for Bucharest. On December twenty-first, there were clashes in the capital, with a number of dead and wounded, and the following day the fighting spread to all Romanian cities. President Ceaușescu addressed the Romanian people for the last time from the balcony of the palace, but everyone booed him. Soon after that, the protesters stormed the palace, but at the last possible moment Nicolae and his wife, Elena, took off in a helicopter from the roof and got away.

At some point in between, when it became clear that Ceaușescu was a lost cause, the army joined the protesters; only the secret police remained loyal to the president. In the morning Lieutenant Stojanović told us that the situation was serious but the Romanian army was on the side of the people.

The army forced the helicopter carrying the presidential couple to land. On December twenty-fifth, a quick trial was held in the city of Târgoviște, after which the couple was executed. Three days later, when television stations all over the world were airing clips of the shooting and the dead couple, Lieutenant Stojanović said that the dictator's overthrow was justified. He didn't comment on the trial or the execution. He only added that the instability in the region was now very probably over and that Romania's internal affairs were no concern of ours. Our concern was our own country. It was our job to preserve the constitutional order and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia.

We greeted the new year with a few smuggled-in bottles of brandy. Not enough to get us drunk, but our mood improved a little.

On January ninth, there was a panel discussion scheduled at the Cankar Centre in Ljubljana on whether Slovenia should separate from Yugoslavia. Lieutenant Stojanović called me into his office after the morning flag-raising and asked me what my relatives at home said about this when we talked on the phone and also what the other soldiers from Slovenia were saying about it. I told him I wasn't interested in politics and didn't know what other people thought because we never talked about it. Well, maybe you should ask them, he suggested. Maybe someone will say something. If you hear anything, come and see me, he concluded.

In the second half of January, the 14th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia took place and the Slovene and Croatian delegations walked out. In the morning, Lieutenant Stojanović was again in a rage. He shouted that maybe what we really wanted was to join the Krauts! But the army's orders were clear and it would never allow us to do that.

Two days later we went into the field. No more watching the evening news, no more morning lectures about the state of the country. On the first day, we reached the little town of Valandovo; on the second, the village of Josifovo. In between, we did a few tactical exercises – digging foxholes, performing attacks and withdrawals – and afterwards, on both days, late into the night, we dug trench shelters, where we slept. The cold was easing up in late January, but there was a sharp wind blowing from the Vardar River.

In the town of Demir Kapija, the long column of soldiers excited the patients in the local psych hospital, who ran back and forth along the fence; some of them were barking, but the majority were saluting us with a fist to the temple, the way they'd seen it done in Partisan films. Two days later we reached Kavadarci and then Krivolak.

The next day we had a firing drill. In the morning Second Lieutenant Cvetkovski talked on and on about how in previous years his soldiers had always been the best. That's how I want it to be this year too! he said.

While we were preparing the guns, Lieutenant Stojanović walked over to Robert and me. Maybe it'd be best for the army if the two of you don't shoot, he said. I don't understand, sir, I replied. All kinds of things are happening, the lieutenant said, smiling through his teeth. You're getting six months of training from the best officers in the Yugoslav Army. And I have to wonder what we're going to get out of it. It's possible that in a few months you and I will be looking at each other from opposing sides. I don't understand, sir, I said again, although I knew exactly what he was thinking. Now Stojanović went crazy. Like fuck you don't understand! he shouted. Comrade Soldier, do you take me for a fool? Don't try to fuck with me! I did not respond. Fortunately, right then Second Lieutenant Cvetkovski came over. Stojanović retreated and Cvetkovski didn't ask any questions.

After the firing drill we cleaned our guns and waited to hear the scores. When the soldiers from Prilep finally finished shooting, it was clear that our boys had done better than anyone else. We had heard that the best squad would get a week's leave as a reward. Siniša hugged me like a little kid. He was jumping up and down and shouting: We're the best! Second Lieutenant Cvetkovski treated us to two rounds in the canteen; then Lieutenant Stojanović came over and said we'd had enough. Without a word we went back to the trench shelters.

During those days in the field, the Soviet Union got rid of the one-party system, while in South Africa, after twenty-seven years, Nelson Mandela was released from prison. Most of the soldiers had no idea who this smiling black man with the raised fist was, but they knew the Russians were our friends. What happened there mattered.

While we were in the field, I had a conversation with a driver named Darko. He had come to Macedonia from Croatia. He said we had it good. It was a fucking shambles in Croatia. He said the army was just moving from base to base. We never had field training, he whispered. A little way past the town of Slunj, he said, I stopped and went to take a crap. The officer yelled at me to hurry up. When I looked up, the hills around us were full of people. At first I thought it was the army. But it wasn't the army. They were Četniks. Fucking Serb nationalists. When I asked the officer what was going on, he told me to look straight ahead. Not left or right, not up, just straight ahead. Follow the lorries, he said. Don't fall behind and everything will be all right. I couldn't get Darko's words out of my head. Lieutenant Stojanović was talking about the Ustaše and the Home Guard, and now here was Darko talking about Četniks.

When we got back from field training, we weren't rewarded with any week's leave. The lieutenant was silent. The second lieutenant even asked him about it once, but he didn't get an answer. The six-month training period was coming to an end. We waited to see what would happen.

In his own way, Lieutenant Stojanović was right: it was the army that was holding Yugoslavia together. But he was also convinced that a few Home Guardians and Ustaše, pickpockets, and queers would never stand a chance against the third most powerful army in Europe. There's still plenty of space on Goli Otok! he thundered. If the police need help keeping order on the streets, the army will step in. Then we'll have peace. Then no one will let out as much as a fart! Yugoslavia will survive!

About this he was wrong. In the months that followed everything went to fuck, including the third most powerful army in Europe.

If I had known then what was coming, on that last day I would have hugged and kissed on both cheeks every soldier I spent that year with. If I had known what was coming, I would have told them that I wanted them all to survive. I would have told them that I hoped they would never have to kill anyone. But we just laughed our heads off, had one more beer at the

station in Skopje, told each other to go to hell, and boarded the train that took us to the future.

I'm lying in bed thinking about how it's finally over. It's all finally over. Things are good.

It's good that I'm home. It's good that no war broke out when I was in the army, although even now I can't imagine who we'd be fighting against. We heard all sorts of things, but we didn't believe them. The officers talked about Slovene and Croatian separatists, about Home Guards and Ustaše returning from Austria, Germany, America, Canada, and Australia. You'll see! But the more they talked about them, the more there were pictures of Milošević hanging in the offices and Serbian conscripts reporting for duty and being sent to Kosovo. Bit by bit, the fear got under our skins. As if we sensed that a time was coming when everything would be different and we weren't prepared for it. We got drunk a lot. When we were drunk, we weren't anxious any more. When we were drunk, everything was a lot simpler, easier to figure out, clearer. At least for us. Eventually, not a day went by that, after a few bottles in one of the offices, we didn't put our arms around each other and say it would all be fine. Look: Siniša's a Serb, I'm a Slovene, Kenan's a Bosnian, Robert's a Croat, Rade's a Serb. And do we have any problems? None at all! So can Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, and Slovenes have a drink together? We can! Can we eat off the same spoon? No way, man. Yes, we can, you fucking girl. Of course we can! An unfortunate question. So fuck it. But we understand each other. We gave each other big hugs and laughed. As if we believed that, when the time came, anyone would ask us something.

I've been at home for three weeks and I'm still not entirely sure it's real. I'm still not entirely used to the toilet having a door or the hot water not running out when I take a shower. I can hardly believe there are no more bugle calls, no more sewing on buttons or cleaning rifles. No general, no lieutenant, no corporal. No more *I understand, sir!* No more *Like fuck you understand!* Every so often I get afraid that it's just a dream, although in the army I never dreamed about home. But even so. Soon the bugle will start playing, followed by the morning run and exercise, washing, making the bed, hurrying to breakfast, hurrying to the flag-raising, and then there's Lieutenant Stojanović with all his threats against the Germans and the Americans, the Greeks and the Bulgarians, the Romanians and the Albanians, the Slovenes and the Croats, separatists and irredentists, smugglers and pickpockets, artists and queers. He'll shout at us and spray us with his venomous spit, which we can't wash off because it's like tar, like a fungus you can't see at first but soon it spreads and spreads until eventually everything you see is mould, deadly mould.

The first few days I was always in town. I wanted to walk down the streets I knew, to touch the buildings and walls, the benches, the bushes, the trees. If I touched them, it meant they were really there. If I didn't, then

maybe they weren't there at all. I spent hours sitting in the city bustle, drinking coffee and listening to people talking. As I watched them, I thought, everything's all right. Everything's normal. There were no Home Guards in the city, no Ustaše or Četniks, no German or American agents. These were entirely ordinary people. Doing entirely ordinary things. Rushing here and there. Some of them weren't doing anything in particular. Like me, they just sat and watched the world around them. When it started to rain, I didn't take cover like everyone else. I let the raindrops fall on me. They seemed soft and warm to me. They seemed friendly.

I remembered how once a long time ago Peter, Elvis, and I were standing on the hill behind our apartment blocks. We were in the second or third year of primary school. We weren't in school because it was a holiday. We were waiting for the aeroplane. Every year on this day a military plane would fly above the city and drop leaflets that said: *Long live the Liberation Front!* It was cloudy and the wind was blowing. Then droplets started falling. But we kept waiting and staring into the sky. Now and then a beam of sun would penetrate the grey clouds, but even so there were more and more raindrops. A few times Peter's mother shouted to us from their window to get out of the rain, but we pretended not to hear. A little later there was thunder and it started pouring. The few people who were walking their dogs retreated to the garages to wait out the rain, but we didn't budge from that hill. And then it happened. First we heard the engine's rumble, then the silver aeroplane appeared in the grey sky. It was flying low, just above the apartment blocks, and headed right in our direction. At that very moment the sun broke through the clouds. It was raining buckets and the sun was shining. Before the plane was overhead, leaflets began dropping from its slender belly. We took off down the hill, running across the wet grass as fast as we could. We hurriedly started picking up the waterlogged leaflets and soon our arms were overflowing with them. When we couldn't carry any more, we went back to the garages, carefully laid our little stacks of paper on the kerb, and examined them meticulously. We counted them to see who had more. Elvis had the most, Peter the fewest. I was somewhere in between. Elvis took a few leaflets from his stack and gave them to Peter. Then he gave some to me, too. Right then we were the happiest boys in the city. I could feel the happiness tingling in my chest. We split up and we all distributed the leaflets in the mailboxes of our respective buildings. Whatever was left over we took home. I remember how soft, warm, and friendly the raindrops seemed that day when we were standing on the hill. But that was a long time ago. It's strange that I should remember it.

With my mother and father I talk as if nothing has happened: Do we need anything from the store? What's for lunch? What film are they showing on television tonight and are we going to watch it together? They never ask about the army. They probably think I'll tell them if it was anything special. But I guess it wasn't anything special. Probably not.

I saw Saša the day after I got back. When I stepped through her door, we just looked at each other a few seconds, then I hugged and kissed her. A moment later Saša bit me, then she started grabbing my lip between her teeth and pushing me lightly towards her room. We crossed the front hall and went down the long corridor, discarding our clothes along the way, and ended up in her bed. God, I missed you, Saša kept repeating, until her words vanished into ever louder gasps and sighs. When, out of breath and drenched in sweat, we finally took a break, she asked me what was going on with us. What do you mean, going on? I asked back. Well, I mean, are we a couple or aren't we? she wanted to know. I don't know, I replied. Were we a couple before I left? Or were we just getting together now and then? Did you wait for me? I asked. Or did you have someone else? Actually, she said in a low voice, there was someone else. Then she added quickly: But only a few times. He didn't mean anything to me. Do you understand? I do, I said. Are you upset? No. How about you? she turned towards me. Did you have anyone? I smiled and said: I had the beautiful Vangelija. Then I told her about the beautiful Vangelija and her shop. Saša was laughing.

I see my friends in the evenings. The first one I saw was Peter. I ran into him by accident one morning. Later that afternoon we went into town. We sat outside the Golden Ship pub laughing like crazy. When it got dark, we went to the nearest phone booth and called Elvis. Elvis wasn't at home, but his Uncle Fikret, who was delighted to hear from me, said he was fine. Elvis got back five days ago, he said. Come see us some time. I will, I promised, although I didn't really mean it. Elvis came by the next day. The three of us went out together.

A few days later Rok phoned. We got together right after lunch. We sat on top of the garages and talked. Stupid shit mainly. I told him about the plot of weed, the beautiful Vangelija, and the whorehouse above the pigsty. I told him about the alcohol from the packages, and about Rade and the women of Užice. Rok talked about the Romanian women who crossed the border because they could make as much money in one night here as they did in an entire week at home. They'll jerk you off for next to nothing, he said. He told me how he drove them back to the border from Zrenjanin one winter night. The people on the other side are raving mad and the army was trying to capture the president. We patrolled our side of the border. But one night our patrol got lost. And in the morning our corporal, who's as dumb as shit, sees a road sign and figures we're about six miles from the border – in Romania. So we hid until it got dark and then started cautiously making our way back to Yugoslavia. If we heard even the slightest noise, we'd lie low and wait. We didn't want to run into any Romanian border guards or rebels or police, but, even more than that, we were scared shitless because of the landmines we'd heard had been placed along the border. But luckily, things worked out in the end and we made it back. The base was going crazy. They thought we'd been captured or even shot, but once it turned out that we were alive and well, they started suspecting we had defected to the

Romanians. Can you believe it? Rok laughed. The colonel accused us of treason. What did you take into Romania? he shouted. What did you tell them? He interrogated each one of us separately for hours, but in the end he decided it must have been something like what we said it was. The next day a committee arrived from Belgrade headed by some general. They also questioned us in detail. In the end the corporal gets a week's leave as a reward for getting us back to Yugoslavia safely! You're fucking kidding me! Who was it took us into Romania in the first place? Then Rok said he was going to the seaside that weekend and invited me join him. Thanks, I said, shaking my head. But I'd like to stay here. I just want to be here for a while.

I thought a few times about calling Matej, but I always changed my mind. He'll call me if he feels like it. I don't even know if he's back yet. My mother told me about Peter and Elvis, and Rok called me himself. But I have no idea where Matej is. And I'm not sure I really want to see him anyway. After all, we hadn't been spending as much time together as we used to. I think he must be beside himself from all that's happening. I'm sure he's joined up with some political party and may even be one of its leaders. I expect that's all he talks about. But what I want most of all right now is normalcy, ordinary stuff. My ears are still ringing with slogans: *Protect Brotherhood and Unity Like the Apple of Your Eye! The Revolution Endures! Tito After Tito!* and so on. At first, when everything was still new to us, I felt like I'd fallen into some parallel world where time stood still, where Tito was still alive and still leading the nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia, who lived side by side in brotherly harmony. Tito was still the supreme commander of the armed forces, only he no longer drove around the country in his Mercedes, which is why we never saw him. By winter it turned out nobody believed any of it. Nevertheless, day after day, the officers kept repeating the same old bullshit. It was like they took us for morons. Only later did I realize that in fact they didn't give a damn what we thought. They knew we were powerless. So now what I want more than anything is peace. No big words. What I most like talking about is what's for lunch, what film are they showing on television tonight, and what should we see at the cinema – *Godfather 3*, *Misery*, *Hunt for Red October*, or *Night of the Living Dead*? My friends and I talk mainly about stupid shit. No big plans, no big future. Until classes start in October, my time is completely my own. Until then I'll do whatever I feel like doing, whatever makes me happy. Everything else can wait. That's why Saša and I saw each other the very next morning and again the day after that.

We get together every workday just after eight in the morning. Since I always wake up at five, waiting until eight is like an eternity. But that's all right. When I remember that I'm lying in my own bed and don't have to get up, the whole world seems incredibly beautiful and simple. Saša likes to sleep a little longer, so I wait until eight. Also, I prefer to wait until our parents leave for work. I don't want either her parents or mine to know about us. At least not that we see each other every day. A little after eight,

and no later than eight-thirty, I ring her doorbell. We don't waste words, we don't play games, we just get right into bed. We fuck like the end of the world is near. Sometimes we don't even make it to the bed. Sometimes it happens right in the front hall. Once it happened on the kitchen table and twice in the bathroom. One more time and everything will be gone. But soon we realize that the end of the world hasn't happened and there's still time for cuddling. So we start hugging and stroking and kissing until eventually Saša crawls on top of me or I pull her beneath me. Finally, we take a shower and go our separate ways.

Ever since I got back, my father keeps saying that everything is about to change. When he tells me that Slovenia is going to separate from Yugoslavia and then everything will be different, he looks like he believes it. There's no way they can stop us now, he says, shaking his head. They might try to use the army, but America won't allow it, and the Russia that might have once supported Belgrade doesn't exist anymore. It's possible that the army will try to take over. I'm not saying it will, but it's possible. And we might have to fight back. I'm not saying we will have to, but maybe we won't have a choice.

A few days ago my uncle told us about how some army lorries had shown up one morning in the company yard. The soldiers, under the command of Nikolić and accompanied by military police, cleared everything out of the offices. They took away all the computers and all the files. We were able to hide a few things, but not much – it was a surprise for everyone when the army arrived. Now the offices are empty. We still go to work but mainly we just stare at each other. The director has promised to get us new computers, but they won't do us much good without our files. That's a year's worth of work down the drain!

So what about you? My uncle pulled out a pack of cigarettes. All three of us lit up. How was it? I tell him it was nothing special. Could've been worse. They could've sent me to Kosovo. Something could've happened, but it didn't. You see? My uncle touched my shoulder with his right forefinger. That's good. You were lucky. And what about ours? Have they called you up yet? What do you mean *ours*? I didn't understand the question. The Territorial Defence, my uncle explained. That's our army now. I shook my head. No, they haven't. He's only just got here, my father said. That's why I asked, my uncle nodded. They mainly call up boys who've just returned. Last month Martin spent fourteen days doing military exercises. Some try to avoid getting called up. They go into hiding. But I don't think that's right. Who's going to stand up to the Yugoslav Army if it comes to . . . well, if conditions keep getting worse. We need to show them we're not afraid.

I'm lying in bed thinking that a lot of changes happened when I was away. I'm hearing new things. Things that were whispered a year ago are now said out loud. Some sound good, others not so good. I feel like nobody really knows what comes next.

Litteræ Slovenicæ 1991–2020

1991, Issue 79 (XXIX/1)

Contemporary Slovene Short Stories (English)

Authors: Drago Bajt, Andrej Blatnik, Branko Gradišnik, Drago Jančar, Uroš Kalčič, Jani Virk, Tomo Virk, Aleksander Zorn

1992, Issue 80 (XXX/1)

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Authors: Drago Bajt, Ines Cergol Bavčar, Andrej Brvar, Milan Dekleva, Boris A. Novak, Boris Pahor, Jože Pogačnik, Denis Poniž, Marjan Rožanc, Dimitrij Rupel, Tomaž Šalamun, Marjan Tomšič, Aleksander Zorn

1993, Issue 81 (XXXI/1)

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Authors: Drago Bajt, Andrej Blatnik, Igor Bratož, Lev Detela, Drago Jančar, Milan Kleč, Mart Lenardič, Lela B. Njatin, Boštjan Seliškar, Jani Virk, Tomo Virk

1993, Issue 82 (XXXI/2)

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La poésie slovène contemporaine (poetry, French)

Authors: Aleš Debeljak, Alojz Ihan, Brane Mozetič, Boris A. Novak, Jure Potokar, Tomaž Šalamun, Uroš Zupan.

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1995, Issue 85 (XXXIII/1)

Vilenica Desetnica 1986-1995 (selection of prose and poetry, English/German/Italian/French/Spanish)

1995, Issue 86 (XXXIII/2)

Edvard Kocbek (selected poetry, English)

1995, Issue 87 (XXXIII/3)

Poesía eslovena contemporánea (poetry, Spanish)

Authors: Aleš Debeljak, Milan Dekleva, Alojz Ihan, Milan Jesih, Kajetan Kovič, Svetlana Makarovič, Brane Mozetič, Boris A. Novak, Jure Potokar, Tomaž Šalamun, Dane Zajc, Uroš Zupan

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- 1996, Issue 88 (XXXIV/1)
Rudi Šeligo: ABBA. Auswahl aus Novellen (short prose, German)
- 1996, Issue 89 (XXXIV/2)
Nouvelles slovènes (short prose, French)
Authors: Andrej Blatnik, Berta Bojetu, Andrej Capuder, Drago Jančar, Vladimir Kavčič, Feri Lainšček, Lela B. Njatin, Boris Pahor, Jani Virk
- 1997, Issue 90 (XXXV/1)
Contemporary Slovenian Drama (English)
Authors: Evald Flisar, Drago Jančar, Dušan Jovanović, Ivo Svetina, Rudi Šeligo, Dane Zajc
- 1997, Issue 91 (XXXV/2)
Kajetan Kovič: Poems (English/German/Spanish/Italian)
- 1998, Issue 92 (XXXVI/1)
Žarko Petan: Aphorisms (English/French/German/Italian)
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Srečko Kosovel: Integrals (poetry, English)
- 1999, Issue 94 (XXXVII/1)
Veno Taufer: Poems (English/French/German/Italian/Spanish/Swedish)
- 1999, Issue 95 (XXXVII/2)
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- 2000, Issue 96 (XXXVIII/1)
Dane Zajc: Scorpions. Selected poems / Scorpions. Poèmes choisis (poetry, English/French)
- 2000, Issue 97 (XXXVIII/2)
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Authors: Aleš Berger, Andrej Blatnik, Aleš Debeljak, Milan Dekleva, Niko Grafenauer, Alojz Ihan, Andrej Inkret, Drago Jančar, Dušan Jovanović, Miran Košuta, Marjan Rožanc, Tomo Virk, Uroš Zupan
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Authors: Andrej Blatnik, Aleš Debeljak, Evald Flisar, Drago Jančar, Dušan Jovanović, Uroš Kalčič, Lojze Kovačič, Kajetan Kovič, Marko Kravos, Tone Kuntner, Svetlana Makarovič, Boris A. Novak, Maja Novak, Tone Pavček, Tomaž Šalamun, Rudi Šeligo, Veno Taufer, Dane Zajc, Uroš Zupan

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Authors: Primož Čučnik, Jurij Hudolin, Miklavž Komelj, Barbara Korun, Taja Kramberger, Peter Semolič, Brane Senegačnik, Lucija Stupica, Aleš Šteger, Uroš Zupan

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Feri Lainšček: Instead of Whom Does the Flower Bloom (novel, English)

2003, Issue 102 (LI/1)

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Authors: Andrej Blatnik, Aleš Čar, Dušan Čater, Polona Glavan, Mohor Hudej, Tomaž Kosmač, Mart Lenardič, Andrej Morovič, Maja Novak, Jani Virk

2003, Issue 103 (LI/2)

Boris A. Novak: The Master of Insomnia / Le maître de l'insomnie (poetry, English /French)

2004, Issue 104 (LII/1)

Tales Growing up into Secrets. An Anthology of Contemporary Slovene Youth Literature (English)

Authors: Milan Dekleva, Mate Dolenc, Niko Grafenauer, Miroslav Košuta, Polonca Kovač, Feri Lainšček, Svetlana Makarovič, Marjana Moškrič, Desa Muck, Bogdan Novak, Boris A. Novak, Maja Novak, Slavko Pregl, Andrej Rozman-Roza, Primož Suhodolčan, Peter Svetina, Janja Vidmar, Dane Zajc, Lenart Zajc, Dim Zupan, Vitomil Zupan, Bina Štampe-Žmavc

2004, Issue 105 (LII/2):

Dane Zajc: Fuoco e cenere (poetry, Italian)

2005, Issue 106 (XLIII/1)

Fragments from Slovene Literature. An Anthology of Slovene Literature (prose, poetry and drama, English)

2005, Issue 107 (XLIII/2)

Glas v telesu: tri slovenske pesnice / La voix dans le corps: Trois poétesses slovènes / The Voice in the Body: Three Slovenian Women Poets

(poetry, Slovene/English /French)

Authors: Meta Kušar, Maja Vidmar, Erika Vouk

2006, Issue 108–109 (XLIV/1–2)

On the Airwaves. An Anthology of Contemporary Slovene Radio Plays (English)

Authors: Andrei Hieng, Saša Vuga, Pavel Lužan, Vladimir Kocjančič, Frane Puntar, Rudi Šeligo, Franček Rudolf, Igor Likar, Goran Gluvić, Andrej Blatnik, Lojze Kovačič, Milan Jesih, Metod Pevec, Feri Lainšček, Evald Flisar, Ervin Fritz, Matjaž Kmecl, Tanja Viher, Peter Semolič, Vinko Möderndorfer

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Milan Dekleva: Slepa pegica časa / Blind Spot of Time (poetry, Slovene/English)
- 2007, Issue 111 (XLV/2)
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- 2007, Issue 112 (XLV/3)
A Lazy Sunday Afternoon. A Collection of Short Stories by Slovene Writers Born after 1960 (English)
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- 2007, Issue 113 (XLV/4)
Andrej Skubic: Fužine Blues (novel, English)
- 2007, Issue 114 (XLV/5)
Vlado Žabot: The Succubus (novel, English)
- 2007, Issue 115 (XLV/6)
Slavko Grum: An Event in the Town of Goga (drama, English)
- 2008, Issue 116–117 (XLVI/1–2)
Svetlana Makarovič: Samost / Aloneness / Alleinsein (poetry, Slovene/English/German)
- 2008, Issue 118–119 (XLVI/3–4)
Feri Lainšček: Muriša (novel, English)
- 2008, Issue 120–121–122 (XLVI/5–6–7)
The Dark Side of the Mountain. A Collection of Genre Short Stories (English)
Authors: Maja Novak, Miha Mazzini, Jani Virk, Gorazd Trušnovec, Vinko Möderndorfer, Andrej Morovič, Milan Kleč, Zlatko Zajc, Marijan Pušavec, Mate Dolenc, Tomaž Kosmač, Aleš Čar, Edo Rodošek, Lenart Zajc, Mojca Kumerdej
- 2009, Issue 123 (XLVII/1)
Decametron. Dieci poeti sloveni contemporanei (poetry, Italian)
Authors: Cvetka Bevc, Ivan Dobnik, Maja Vidmar, Cvetka Lipuš, Miha Obit, Primož Čučnik, Lucija Stupica, Jurij Hudolin, Miklavž Komelj, Andrej Hočevar
- 2009, Issue 124–125 (XLVII/2–3)
Boris Pahor: A Difficult Spring (novel, English)
- 2009, Issue 126 (XLVII)
Milan Jesih: Стихи / Pesmi (poetry, Russian)

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Ivo Svetina: Scheherezade. Una opera occidental-oriental, 1988 (drama, Spanish)
- 2010, Issue 128 (XLVIII)
Tomaž Šalamun: Ko vdre senca / When the Shadow Breaks / Lorsque l'ombre force (poetry, Slovene/English/French)
- 2011, Issue 129 (XLIX)
Mate Dolenc: Sea at Eclipse (novel, English)
- 2011, Issue 130 (XLIX)
Lojze Kovačič: Basel. Drittes Fragment (novel, German)
- 2011, Issue 131–132 (XLIX)
Šestnajst slovenskih pesnic / Szesnaście poetek słoweńskich (poetry anthology, Slovene/Polish)
Authors: Alja Adam, Miriam Drev, Kristina Hočevar, Stanka Hrastelj, Alenka Jensterle Doležal, Barbara Korun, Taja Kramberger, Vida Mokrin-Pauer, Ana Pepelnik, Katja Plut, Barbara Pogačnik, Jana Putrle Srdić, Lucija Stupica, Nataša Velikonja, Maja Vidmar, Lučka Zorko
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Evald Flisar: Tres obras de teatro (drama, Spanish)
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Marjan Tomšič: Südwind. Geschichten slowenischer Ägypterinnen (short prose, German)
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Katarina Marinčič: Trois (short prose, French)
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Josip Murn: Lonesome Poplar Tree: Selected Poems (poetry, English)

2017, Issue 143 (LV)

Kristina Hočevar: Auf den Zähnen Aluminium, auf den Lippen Kreide
(poetry, German)

2017, Issue 144 (LV)

Veronika Simoniti: Teufelssprache (short prose, German)

2018, Issue 145 (LVI)

Ivan Cankar: Images from Dreams (short prose, English)

2018, Issue 146 (LVI)

Jana Putrle Srdić: Diese Nacht kommen Käfer aus der Erde gekrochen
(poetry, German)

2019, Issue 147 (LVII)

Jure Jakob: Werkstückchen (poetry, German)

2019, Issue 148 (LVII)

Sebastijan Pregelj: A Chronicle of Forgetting (novel, English)

2020, Issue 149 (LVIII)

Veronika Dintinjana: Gelb brennt der Forsythienstrauch (poetry, German)

2020, Issue 150 (LVIII)

Nataša Kramberger: Blackberry Heaven (novel, English)

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Tomšičeva 12, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Phone: +386 1 251 41 44
Email: dsp@drustvo-dsp.si
Website: <https://litteraeslovenicae.si/>



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