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I.

*Don't say nothin'  
This is for real*

Peter Gabriel, *Digging in the Dirt*

**A**w, fuck these drops. Fuckin' drops. Hot nights. Lights – the lights 'll go out. Drops under your armpits. Tricklin' down, drive you crazy. It's the beer. Beer makes drops. On the bottle first – cold ones. Then on your skin. My skin's cold, too. Clammy. But under my armpits. Drive you fuckin' crazy.

Should I have a stretch?

Sun 'll be up soon. Balcony's filthy. Needs a clean. When we gonna do some sweepin' up round here? And what's the sun think it's doin', goin' up? Only just gone down. It was as hot as fuck. Now it'll start again. Just when it was okay to be alive for a while. Hour or so. Now, in the mornin'. It was dark and quiet. What the fuck.

Should I have a stretch?

If this ain't just a pile of shite. Is this what we were fightin' for? Yeh, the hell we were. With what? Fightin', I mean. With your prick, soldier boy, as the comrade sergeant used to say. Fuck me, the day really is breakin'. No shite. Don't let 'em mess you about, Pero. Don't let 'em mess you about. Another drop. The sun 'll be on the power station any minute. We had the power, just like that, no need to fight. Yep. Into action, *against the odds, black metal gods*. Today it's nothin' but fuckin' poseurs. Any minute, and we'll be up shit creek again. Any minute, Ljubljana 'll fuckin' well explode with light. But what the hell, you sit down in front of the telly and have a beer or two. And a couple of grappas.

But the telly can do your head in. Fuck me, the night's short, eh? and this fuckin' Formula One. And these live broad-casts, middle of the fuckin' night. Got to be really tough for

that. Up at three in the mornin'. Got to have enough beers in the fridge and grappa in the cupboard. And a will of iron. Yep. Okay, if I'd gone to bed when the race finished. But who can sleep in this fuckin' heat? Anyway, the beer really helps you sweat. Somethin' to do with some enzyme for water retention. Heard that on Discovery Channel once. Important information. If only they'd had some decent planes on Discovery last night. But no, had to watch some dumb platypuses.

Hey, I didn't know these platypuses laid eggs. Or maybe they don't – fuck it, I dunno, maybe I got mixed up. My heart wasn't really in it. I'd rather have had Messerschmidts.

But yeh, for fuck's sake, who's ever seen anythin' like it – watchin' programmes on some freaky Australian creatures out of sheer misery and then... Here we go, dawn's breakin', my heroic comrades.

But they're cool animals those, whether or not they lay eggs. I'd have one like a shot, as a pet like, if I had a house with a garden and a river runnin' through it. Okay, yeh, a river, that's a bit much. A pond. Or a well, you know?

What the fuck am I on about, who's ever seen a platypus livin' in a well?

Or even better, what about a beaver. Beavers rule, know what I mean? *Fresh college beaver*. You sit there nicely by the water, like, and the beavers saunter past.

What the hell, fuckin' beavers, what are you blabberin' on about? Like you're ever gonna have a house and garden. Sellin' newspapers for Christ's sake, even this pad is a fuckin' luxury. And it's rented from some relative for a hundred marks. In Fužine, the fuckin' ghetto, man. A garden and a well, you daft cunt, you can't even sort out this balcony.

I must be fuckin' losin' it, really.

It ain't my kind of scene anyway, it's Bertl's.

Bertl used to go on like that. Where the fuck is he? Haven't seen 'im for ages. Last time he was... what, I dunno, studyin' law or somethin'. The great defender of the poor and all. He said he'd help us out if the cops hassled us for nickin' beer crates from the student hostel. Yeh, said that some time in the first term, I think. Then there was the exams, and then the career in law was over pronto, if I remember correctly. Yeh, we were demolishin' a kitchen in the hostel and those student wankers called the cops. This cop says, employment. Bertl

says, law student. The cop says, listen lad, don't fuck with me or you'll be out that fuckin' window.

Those were the days.

Yep, those were the fuckin' days. Even when there was no place to go. We had to demolish student kitchens. Now I've got my own fuckin' place, now there's no more Bertl. No sign of 'im. Fuck it.

Some of the others, too. Flint, for example. What happened to Flint? and Vasja? Fuck me, those were the days. Or Irena. Irena my own true love, thy name shallst never be taken in vain. You only hung out with the other chicks, didn't give a toss about blokes.

Should I have a stretch? Nah, what's the point?

Bertl and Trič said you were OK. Just a bit snooty. But what they liked about you, you always laid out for some booze, even if you weren't drinkin'. That made you popular on the park scene, alright. But I drank (why shouldn't I?) and had the hots for you. For your cute little tushie. And that pseudo-punk haircut. But you were cold like Celtic Frost, *To Mega Therion* – hey, fuck it, Irena, if only we could, now I've got my own place, a romantic evening, that'd be somethin' else. These are different times, eh? I mean, that was fifteen years ago, for fuck's sake.

Day's really breakin'. There's a bus goin' by.

Been ages since I took an early mornin' bus home. When folks are on their way to work, all sullen like, and you blissful, yeh, now for bed.

Fuck it, if you didn't screw me up on purpose, that time in Piran. We dossed down in sleepin' bags up at the church. That wanker Humar kept on gettin' at you. He was bein' childish as fuck. How old was he anyway – sixteen? You must've been about fifteen. And I couldn't've been more than seventeen-eighteen, but it got on my fuckin' tits, how childish he was bein' – I mean, pushin' you, pullin' you around by the leg, like that was gonna impress a babe in a leather jacket. Until I – much to the amusement of the assembled company – stood up and fuckin' floored 'im with a kick in the mush and told 'im to bugger off to the other side of the church and leave civilised people fuckin' well alone.

It was so cool! and you looked at me – how? Not a word, full of meaning. You were fifteen, for fuck's sake! and off you

went, bugged off up the steps. I stood there by the church, everybody else lyin' around.

What's that about, givin' a bloke a look like that and then doin' a bunk in the dark? Kept wonderin' for quite a while. Took one last long slug of vodka from the bottle. *Hey, baby, love me like a reptile, love me like a reptile*, went after you up the stairs. It was dark as an arsehole up there. You must be waitin' for me, your knight in shinin' armour, sortin' out some sixteen-year-old. Are you over by the wall, gazin' dreamily out to sea so I can come up and ask: "How come you look so sad?" Sure. Or are you hidin' round the corner, waitin' to jump out, cover my eyes with your hands and say "Guess who"? Or have you taken off your leather jacket and trainers and jeans, and you're standin' there just in that cut-off Motorhead T-shirt that looked so good on you down the pub, and you say ... "Excuse me..." No, fuck it, it was nothin' like that.

Suddenly I hear quiet laughter over in the dark, and then somethin' black starts movin' against the white wall, and I see Marta, Sandra and all the other bitches are lyin' there in their sleepin' bags, and you with 'em, and you're lookin' at me and laughin'. Just look at those slags. Gawpin' at me like I'm some total git. And they're right. Mr Cool, who's just kicked some kid's ass, come for his reward. For his piece of fanny. You fuckin' idiot. What were you thinkin'?

Bertl. Haven't seen you for ages. Summat should fuckin' well be done about that. It should be remedied.

I'm shagged out. Should get up and go to bed. But I can't.

Oi, Bertl, do you remember? That time in that night club in Tolmin. We're standin' there and it's hot as hell, one single beer and I had sweat pourin' down my face – I just hate that. The locals said that this simply 'ad to be seen, that it was wild, unforgettable. We sat down, the booze was expensive as fuck but, thank god, the locals had some schnapps stashed under the table so you could get yerself a beer and manage somehow. And then, the artistic performance. Well, it really *was* wild. Up step two fat Ukrainian birds. Stilettos and stretch pants and all. Unbelievable, stretch pants, the blubber was wobblin' around like a fuckin' sea lion. And they start to kind of stagger sexily round the stage. The music total super-passionate fortissimo. I just stared, my tongue was danglin' in the schnapps, I couldn't believe it. The birds ditch the jack-

ets, dump the T-shirts, and then, well, one of 'em starts to take off the stretch pants. But they wouldn't come – wouldn't go over the stilettos. Fuckin' shame. She was occupied for quite some time, sort of hoppin' on one leg, in rhythm.

But she was an inventive type. She was strugglin' for about a minute, then she swore in Ukrainian, fuck this, threw both 'er hands in the air and sat on the floor. She stuck 'er leg out towards 'er mate – the other one was in 'er knickers by then – and that one grabbed 'er pants and started pulling 'em off. Fuckin' unbelievable. I was pissin' myself. 'Er mate dragged 'er halfway across the stage on 'er arse before these supertight pants came off. Like a condom stretched over a fuckin' aubergine. Shite, that was somethin' else – the whole place was rollin' on the floor laughing. If the owner had a nose for business at all, he'd have offered 'em a contract for life, there and then – they were past it, so it wouldn't be for that long anyway. Let the Primorska yokels come and see what heights the art of stripping's reached in the land of idiots.

Fuck it, my eyes are closin'.

Do you remember, Bertl?

You don't? Even the corpses of our nearest and dearest must remember that, for fuck's sake, that was the definitive striptease. Oh, right? Well, yeh, fuck it, you weren't really around ... then. Not on the scene. Not anymore.

Nah, you weren't around anymore. Neither was Flint. Or Trič for that matter. Just fuckin' kids, one hundred percent greenhorns. Course I remember 'em, I'm one of the fuckin' oldest.

Shite, there's no fuckin' water ... I forgot. Shite. They put up a notice sayin' somethin' about mains repairs, somethin' about shuttin' off the water. For a whole day. And me, what a moron. I didn't ... I haven't stocked up.

Fuck it. Who needs fuckin' water, anyway. It ain't like havin' the lift out of action. If the lift's bugged, that really is shite. About three hundred and forty-three stairs. I've got a fridge full of booze. Why don't I go and call Bertl ... And Trič ... And Flint ... And IRENA! Fuck, that'd be somethin' else.

Bertl is sittin' on the floor ... And Flint's pullin' his jeans off, over his trainers

Eat it, it's nice, I say to the guinea pig, and he fuckin' wolfs down the bits of rat poison from the spoon, eat, my children,

eat and multiply. OK, we've taken care of this one, I shake off the remains of the white powder from my hands, put the spoon on the table, and the guinea pig looks around carefully, wonderin' if he should do a bunk right away or piss on the couch first and then consider further action. Guinea pigs are great couch-pissers – it's a habit they don't lose, even when they master certain tricks – it gives 'em some kind of charm, gives 'em character. I just watch 'im, but as I watch 'im and his unsuspectin' glances around, I can't help goin' soft all of a sudden, I'm startin' to feel sorry I gave 'im rat poison to eat, there's a moment when I feel pressure in my stomach and I'm sorry, I'd like to undo it somehow, if I could – I dunno, can you get a guinea pig to throw up, get the poison out? No, shite, it's started to act strange, looks around with an expression of surprise now, looks at me suspiciously, his feeder, his provider; he listens to his insides, there's poison in there, works on the nerves, he suddenly twists, hops, hops again, high, real fuckin' high, higher than when he was runnin' around the livin' room with me on his tail, chasin' 'im on all fours to tickle his back.

“Will you be finished soon?” ask Janina and Mirsad with interest. They're fully dressed and standin' at the door with suitcases and train tickets in their hands, they're ready. Hang on a sec, I'll be right there, and I get back to work. I'm squeezin' Irena's throat and I slam 'er head against the wooden floor a couple of times. She looks drowsy, she doesn't look as if my efforts are doin' 'er much harm, even when I put all my strength into it, I'm squeezin' 'er throat so that my hands hurt, at the same time bangin' the back of 'er neck against the floor. She looks dizzy. She obviously has no idea what's goin' on around 'er and keeps askin' what this is all about.

“Pero, no, you're hurting me,” she says without openin' 'er eyes, a thin line of blood slowly runnin' from the corner of 'er mouth. I stare at it impatiently, faster, I say, spill over, spurt blood, die, why the fuck are you askin' me all this, “Why are you doing this to me, Pero? I just want to sleep.” By every logic she should have a brain haemorrhage by now, I must've broken the base of 'er skull, just how fuckin' long can all this take? “Cut it out, Pero, I'm going to get angry.” I can feel two pairs of eyes on the back of my neck, Janina and Mirsad are waitin' for me, the fuckin' train leaves in twenty minutes, and

Irena refuses to show any signs of the nausea typical of brain haemorrhage, nausea that inevitably leads directly to death, demise, *el morte*. And then at last! She opens 'er mouth slightly, it's bright red, like with blood, I can see somethin' black in there. I shove two fingers in and grab whatever it is, pull it out.

There's a small black lighter between my fingers. That's all.

Sweat is pourin' down my forehead, my throat's tight, "Don't you ever fuckin' mean to die?" I'd like to shout, and I keep bangin' 'er head against the floor and the table leg, I'm embarrassed in front of the other two, embarrassed in front of Irena who just doesn't get what I'm doin' to 'er and why I don't leave 'er alone and let 'er sleep. Finally I just let go of 'er so she slumps on the edge of the rug and curls up like a foetus, puts 'er hands under 'er left cheek, a shattered expression on 'er face, I get up and stare at 'er with horror, I feel a few drops of 'er blood on my chin.

"Maybe it'd be better in hexameter," I say, fuck knows why I say it, am I a total fuckin' moron, what am I babblin' on about here? and I wipe my face with my sleeve and stare at the two at the door, they look at me contemptuous like, Mirsad's lightin' a fag, Janina puts down 'er bag and fixes 'er black nylon tights, twisted below the knee, so that 'er long, straight black hair waves in the air.

"Hey, my head hurts," says Irena down on the floor. I can hear a bird singin' outside. Fuck me, when am I ever gonna get things sorted? A nightingale, a fuckin' nightingale, warblin' away, and everythin'.

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*And if looks could deceive*

*Make it hard to believe*

*I'm only human on the inside*

The Pretenders, *Human*

We sat on the rock, Jolanda and I, drops of sea water splashing our bare legs now and then, and I felt strange – like some local Venus that the waves had washed up onto the flat rock, and who was now lying there, drying, so as to be able to go up for a glass of Istrian wine and some grilled meat. Naked as the day we were born, we stretched our legs towards the waves

and the fish and the sea urchins. Sea urchins are a good sign, Adam said, they show that the water is clean.

In the mean time, at home, a horde of kids were using their combined strength to demolish the house.

Adam had insisted that Goran and I visit him for the weekend at the seaside. He and Jolanda had a weekend place at Bale, in the town – village really – in the small medieval town that had shrunk to the size of a village, in Istria, between Rovinj and Vodnjan. It was a small stone house that they had got cheap, as Bale is seven kilometres from the sea, along a rough, unpaved road. Come on, you'll see how secluded it is, you can have the beach to yourself, he said.

That was twenty years ago.

So it was like this. We go for the weekend, leaving Ljubljana early in the morning, and in the afternoon we shake and rattle along the dirt road to the rocky shore. The bay really was marvellous, sheltered by two small islands, the sea calm; it was almost deserted, with an emphasis on *almost*. There was a small, unofficial nudist camp there, and suddenly Adam and Jolanda had thrown off their clothes. Go on, Vera, said Adam, for once in your life be a nudie.

I felt very awkward. But what could I do? Should I kick up a fuss like some spoilt child and demand we go elsewhere? Should I lie like a lemon among all the naked bodies with my costume on? I undressed, closed my eyes and stretched out on a flat rock. It was a strange feeling. I could feel the hair between my legs trembling in the breeze and from Adam's gaze. I could feel him. I had the feeling that...

And now, said Adam, who had stood up with a towel and was looking towards the two of us, Vera and Jolanda should warm their you-know-what's in the sun, while Goran and I go for a beer. Okay?

I was all ready to jump up and give him what for. I was ready to lift my head and throw him a withering look. But I had the feeling that a naked person cannot produce a withering look – they lack the necessary dignity. Especially if that person is not so young and sexy – if that person is forty-five years old and is lying on a rock and already has varicose veins appearing and is lying on a rock like... well, perhaps not exactly like Venus, perhaps like a starfish that some child has pulled out of its cold depths and has left lying there, warming its *you-know-what* in the hot sun.

What if wanted a beer? Or a Coke? Perhaps even a grappa?  
That was twenty years ago.

**So far no resolutions.**

From the small table on the balcony you can see, between the balcony and the wall, a large cobweb. What can we conclude from that?

At least that there lives here a neglectful housewife for whom cobwebs are not one of life's main concerns. What else? At the very least, we can assume the presence of a spider. We can assume the possible presence of flies, on which the aforementioned spider feeds, as in their absence it would die from malnutrition. There is another possibility here, namely that it is a totally incompetent member of the order of spiders (spiders are an order, according to Adam, and belong in the same class, arachnids, as do scorpions), totally devoid of any talent for judging where flies may happen to buzz past.

But comrades, sorry, colleagues, so far we have passed no resolutions whatsoever.

A sip of coffee. I sit on my flat rock and I'm not getting off.

Anyway, how can you expect resolutions from people who evidently lack even the most basic historical awareness? How the hell? It's certainly nothing to boast about. They hold their positions in 2000, but they had their best ideas in the seventies and eighties, didn't they? Today, they try to live off... What times are we living in? Is this what we fought for? What can we conclude?

Adam also had his best ideas in the seventies. Or perhaps not – I don't really know what ideas he had later.

No precipitous conclusions, comrades.

Yes, and who actually had this historical awareness? We can assume, those who lived in historical times. For if they hadn't, how could they have functioned there (in historical times) – like headless chickens? Like me on that flat rock, which I would not get off, while the wind ruffled me.

An example of a historical personage. Let's say Jernej Kopitar. Mr Vienna from Repnje. He'll do. He so hated the Ljubljana bourgeoisie, the alienated swarm, that he had to flee to Vienna and become a state censor. Five years ago we were on a visit to the cemetery in Repnje, to his family grave. It's stimulating to lead students from one graveyard to another. Crosses, crosses, crosses – they lead us into the future, every-

one's definite future, each will ultimately acquire their own cross and will be burdened with it and will have to hold it up, so that no one grabs it and carries it home. But a saviour – Mr Vienna was no saviour. How was his historical awareness? Not so good, it seems. The way today's historians deal with him gives the impression of a lack of historical curiosity. He redeemed himself with one thing: at the very start of his career he wrote an excellent grammar, the best for a century. Just as these current geniuses redeemed themselves at the end of the eighties for all their later idiocies. Kopitar has always been a shining light for all our students.

What of our dear students? Our pride and our hope? A redemption somewhat too feeble to bring real joy, thank you. Which students were clear, twenty years ago, that the study of the Slovene language was a *political* study? That you had to be engaged if you wanted to get involved in linguistic issues? That it was necessary to reflect on language, and on another level, if

When all's said and done, why should I care? I sit on my flat rock and I'm not getting off. The problem is, my costume is in the bag, down on the other side of the pebble beach, and Adam and Goran are no longer around because they've gone for a beer. And I should get up and

For example: in the eighties, when Yugoslavia was starting its fight against national rights – when they wanted to ban headphones from the federal assembly – the slogan was, in Serbia they sell Slovene *Radenska*, but they won't allow us to sell *Knjaz Miloš* mineral water in Slovenia. And I ask my students, who already look totally apathetic, do you know what *Knjaz Miloš* is? They stare at me as if I am a total idiot. Another example: why did Roman Jakobson leave Prague at the end of the thirties? They all gawp, then one bleats: because of the Prague Spring? I thought I'd have a stroke.

Vera, Vera, calm down... You said when you retired you'd stop worrying about certain things. Let's move on.

This girl student comes to see Dušan... Enough. What shall I wear this evening? That's important. That's much more important.

First impressions are important.

God knows what he'll think. God knows what he thinks already. But I shall not think about that now.

I'll think about

**Car park saga continues**

Parking is a big problem in Ljubljana. I learnt to drive when I moved to Fužine, fifteen years ago, and then I realised what a problem parking is. One of the first things I did when I got divorced, when we sold the house, was to learn to drive and to buy a two-bedroom flat in Fužine.

He must be near seventy now. Who knows how that kind of age shows on... He was always so thin.

**Acts, but no perpetrators**

And I receive a letter. I come home, open the post box, and inside is a fat, a really fat, envelope. I take it into the lift with me. I start to open it. One of my neighbours from the floor below is in the lift, with a bag of shopping in his hand. Also some spotty adolescent. I slightly tear the edge of the envelope and peer in. It's packed full of small, flat objects, but I can't make out what. I push two fingers in and get hold of something, pull it out.

Between my fingers are three bright purple condoms.

Oh yes.

I just didn't get it. I stared at them, then looked at my neighbour. But he was looking away with an indifferent expression on his face, pretending he hadn't seen anything. Oh God. I wanted to shove them back in, but my fingers started to tremble and two of the condoms fell on the floor. Now the kid really did look down. The trouble with these immigrant kids is that they're always so willing to help. He was about to bend down but I almost pushed him aside and dived on them. He straightened up and stared at the doors.

How I racked my brains, trying to work it out. The envelope was addressed to me. It contained three hundred and forty-three condoms in different colours, shapes and flavours. Was this Goran's act of revenge, because in our last conversation before the divorce I'd mentioned... No, of course not, this was too low even for Goran. Had some student sent it? Which student would buy, for a practical joke, three hundred and forty-three condoms, and send them to a teacher? That would take a whole term's grant. And who knows, I might be pleased, and what kind of practical joke would that be? Perhaps it was some neighbour who had taken a dislike to me? Verbinc perhaps, who rented his flat to Sokič? But we hardly

know each other, what could I have done to offend him? A warning from some psychopathic Fužine rapist? There was no accompanying letter, not a word.

Two days later, Ana called.

She was beside herself. She had found under the table the letter she'd intended to send.

"Why did you send me three hundred and forty-three condoms?"

She was taken aback.

"Did you count them?"

"Do you think I have anything better to do?"

There was a simple explanation. Ana's husband, at the age of forty-five, had had a vasectomy. They already had three children and had decided that was quite enough. She'd always had a large stock of condoms at home, because she got them at work, wholesale... And when she heard I was getting divorced she decided to send them to me. For a laugh, to cheer me up, to say let's look on the bright side, now there'll be more opportunities for... The bright side.

And she put them in an ordinary envelope. If the postman had torn it pushing it into the mailbox and they had tumbled onto the floor, he would... he'd probably have thought that I'd got a new sideline and that I'd ordered the basic accoutrements from a catalogue.

### **How to reduce the number of refugees**

Three hundred and forty-three condoms. If I was Snow White I could service each of the seven dwarfs every day for seven weeks without any of them getting jealous.

Once, on New Year's Eve, I inflated fifty of them and hung them around the flat, and then drank champagne in front of the television. But it didn't feel very festive. And I was worried all the time: what if the doorbell rings, someone come to wish me a Happy New Year.

And I have to go to him with such a request. For whom? For some students. Not even mine. For some students who don't give a damn about studying. Not what I'd call students!

A student, all dressed up and shining, a big smile on her face, comes to see my assistant Dušan and says that she has come to him for a seminar theme for sociolinguistics. The girl wants to study sociolinguistics and she doesn't know that the seminar is led by Assistant Professor Dolenc. And this

girl, who doesn't even know who's been teaching for the past month, wants to adopt an opposing position to that taken by the participants at the conference *Slovene in Public*. Can you believe it?

For such students I am supposed to get dressed up and, wreathed in smiles, go to see someone I haven't seen for fifteen years.

I don't know if he'll be able to appreciate that things are as I present them. That's the worst thing. It will seem too absurd to him. He'll try to find some other reason. Some particularly stupid reason why I came.

When I tell him, he'll think that I'm making it up. Dear colleague, dear former neighbour, you could put some pressure on your Dean of Chemistry – you're still in touch, aren't you? – so that the poor...

Why do I have to solve other people's problems?

Well, I have the feeling I'm being of help, at least from a distance. That I'm being of help to someone. That perhaps somewhere it will be recognised.

### **No alcohol at night**

How will he look? He will think that I wasn't able to resist, and that I had to somehow come and see him, to admire the charming, wise, retired professor. And what can I say to convince him? To create the right train of thought in his mind? Am I capable of that? I'm becoming scatter-brained.

I should be able to find the right words. I have researched language all my life.

This exhibition, for instance, the one I'm going to today – that should show what you can do with language. *Slovene Grammars*. The National Library has such interesting ideas sometimes. It is already four hundred and sixteen years since the first grammar – an eternity. How many have been written? These books show that language can do many things. Well, you know? That is to say that a grammar, let's say the one by the poet Vodnik, shows what language can *do*. At least he knew about language, didn't he? So did he tell us how that language functioned? Of course not. He knew very well what bricks he was building with. But how to undertake such a description – how? It's like leaving sketches of fragments of a flying machine. Much worse than Leonardo's. How does this work – where do I press? A guide on using fragments, their

function derived on the basis of their – what? Shape? Size? Beauty? If we tried to describe the purple condoms in this way: their colour is indicative of – what? What can we conclude from the sumptuous taste of blueberries? It would be difficult without a devilishly strong theory.

### **Best when they started to be overwhelmed**

I just hope the exhibition won't depress me too much, professionally. There are so few things left these days worth seeing. I don't go to the opera. The theatre – this year's programme at the National is, you might say, something of a letdown. I don't go to the Youth Theatre anymore since that idiot Živadinov and his gang for one evening's performance drove us with rifle butts into a freight wagon and then leapt around above our heads for a good hour and, enthused by their heroic tales, scattered dust and cobwebs in our hair. I'm not against such ideas per se. I like it if someone has an idea. It was that he changed us into little more than serfs. I've got nothing against ideas, but it was damn uncomfortable. At some point I began to toy with the notion of giving one of those pretentious apes swinging above our heads in their sacerdotal robes a sharp poke with an umbrella. Let them see how it is if the oppressed raise their heads.

### **Prague or Krakov**

Wasik. Evening in Krakov. Would you like to go for dinner with me? Yes, if you know some good... Of course, this is my home town. We sat in a small side room, red table cloth, candles. The post-socialist renewal was then in full swing. But from where did a Polish university teacher get the money for dinner in such a restaurant? Wasik didn't seem in the slightest bit ill-at-ease, as if he was the most important person there. Beetroot soup. Salmon with herb butter. He had silver hair, which must once have been very dark. He laughed when I said I liked speaking Polish. I thought I had good pronunciation, I'd spoken quite nasally for some time.

Then we spoke of linguistic literary stylistics. There's very little of that in Slovenia, I told him. He looked as if he'd be interested in whatever I told him. After dinner he drove me to my hotel. He had a new Beetle, which again struck me as impressive for a Polish teacher, but also gave me an odd feeling of unease. Would I like to go back to his place for a coffee? He could show me the new Polish syntax we had discussed, he had a review copy. It's not far from the hotel.

What gripped me then? What in heaven's name was it? That I didn't have my three hundred and forty-three condoms with me?

"Oh, it's so late already," I said, "and I've got to give my paper in the morning."

I sit on my flat rock and I'm not getting off.

**Novak's deep defence fatal for champion**

Wasik smelt nice.

At that point I did still have all three hundred and forty-three condoms. I remember now. It was for *that* New Year that I inflated fifty of them. Perhaps for Wasik. Fifty. That offered the illusion of a *good* year.

The last time I went to the Faculty of Education library to read the *Journal of Applied Linguistics* I saw some graffiti on the wall next to the main entrance: FIRST DEFINITELY CHURNING, THEN MAYBE LEARNING. I copied it into my notebook – all this material will come in handy one day, the linguistic characteristics of graffiti – with somewhat mixed feelings. Who am I collecting all this material for if young people care more about 'churning' than studying? Not to mention that I don't even know what that is. Maybe I should ask the neighbours' girl, Janina, next time we meet in the lift. If I really want to deal with this academically, I should forge better links with informants. I just know that it is something more important than learning.

**We are seeking to employ a warehouse clerk**

Want to run an attractive profit centre?

Why does no-one ever publish an ad saying: do you want to become a warehouse clerk, in a company importing alcoholic beverages? A heady position. Definitely CHURNING. We shall have to wait for that.

Today I shall see him again.

In thirty-eight years the end of the world? Who knows. In three hundred and forty-three, perhaps?

\* \* \*

*Take me to the river and drop me in the water*

*Dip me in the river, drop me in the water*

Talking Heads, *Take Me to the River*

Well look at the little faggot, what's he up to? Look at him standing there! Bleeding cops. Just my luck, turning in here! Where the hell am I supposed to stop? What now, you think I'm going to go racing off over these humps, or what? Little shit, nothing better to do. That really is too much.

Fuck it, I turn straight after him onto Brodar Square, and so he doesn't think he can screw me straight away I go a bit further towards the parking area. Little bastard's trailing along behind me, like some school kid. There's a space right near the beginning. I turn into it, he follows. When I open the door he's already standing there, staring.

"Planning to drive off, or what?" he says, and we both try out a cynical smile.

"What?" I say. "Hang on. I'll be right with you." And I return to what I'm doing. I search through the glove compartment for a pair of sunglasses. Just enough so he doesn't think he can jerk me about. He looks at me oh so superior, like an arse that thinks it smells sweet. "If I'd wanted to get away, you wouldn't have seen me for dust," I tell him. "I'd have turned into the emergency access, then round the back, given you the slip."

"I suppose that's true," he says, a bit more humbly. Yes, I'd say it is, just so you're clear what's what, you little prat.

A warbling sound comes through the window. Birds, the little shitters, can hardly wait for you to park under the trees. Anyway, then the usual formalities. Licence and registration. For fuck's sake, here. Licence and registration. Why should I give a toss if someone wants my licence and registration. I haven't stolen anything. Let him look. But it takes forever. For Christ's sake, I'm in a hurry.

He gawps at them for ages. Illiterate moron. Should I read it out for him? Igor Ščinkovec. Pregl Square 12. Three hundred metres from here. But no, that's not enough for him. No, he's determined to fuck me about, he wants to look in the boot.

"Hey listen, I'm in a hurry," opening it in any case. It'll be over quicker. "I'm here on business."

"Ah?" he says, staring into the boot as if he'd never seen one before. "Where are you going?"

It would never have entered my head to answer him, if I hadn't wanted to shake him off as quick as possible. And it really got on my tits, I mean, the way he asked. As if he thought I was some piss artist or something. How dare he, bloody clown in his blue outfit. Nowhere special, officer. I'm taking a client to view a flat. Some of us have rather more serious work to do. In any case, more serious than standing on the corner waving a lollipop like some little faggot.

"Ah-ha," he says, finally giving me the documents back. Thanks for nothing. "Say hello to your client from me. Good luck," he says, and goes back to the corner.

I just didn't get it.

"What did you say?" I call after him. But nothing, he's already standing at the corner waving his lollipop.

I'd really like to go over there and ask what exactly he meant by that, my client and good luck. Good luck to me? Do I need anything from you? Or my client? I'm supposed to say to him the police say hello. For fuck's sake. What kind of luck does the guy need? Are you really trying to fuck with me? Is there some kind of misunderstanding here? Would you like to go and see if my client is waiting for me, perhaps? What a little shit. If you ask him straight he pisses off. If your gob's big enough to get something like that out, then it's big enough to explain more precisely what you mean. That's what I say. I tell you what, I feel like going over there and sticking one on him. At least he'd have something to mouth off about at the station, what a dangerous place Fužine is. But it's a pointless game. It's not worth getting into a fight with the police. At least not first thing, before work.

Zoki and I are supposed to meet in the bar. I'd like to get another one down me before the viewing, get the circulation going, I'm still half asleep, it's eight o'clock. What allowance do you get for a viewing at eight o'clock? Zoki said it was some weirdo. I can believe him, although Zoki likes to lay it on a bit thick. I mean, I think to him everyone's weird. If anyone told him he was weird he'd be deeply offended.

I stood for a while watching that cop. He bleeding well knew I was watching him. He was all slimy and chummy with the next one he stopped, guy with a moustache in an old Mercedes. Okay, right, I think he got what I was trying to tell him. Ščinkovec is not going to kow-tow to some twenty-year-old kid. I quickly crossed the road to the Oasis.

Zoki's not there yet. He's always fucking late. Some time we'll have to have a serious chat about work habits.

Zoki is actually okay. Bit lazy when it comes to work – but he's got drive. In that respect, you've got to hand it to him. Always on the hunt for information. His speciality is second-hand car prices. A potential money-maker at the weekend he's always saying to me – the car market. It's easy peasy. You look for some poor little sod who's peering around as if somebody's going to jump on him any moment. You go up to him, he's asking three thousand, you slag off the bodywork, lift the bonnet, slag off everything in sight, offer one thousand, go round again. After three rounds you buy it for one and a half thousand. Next week you fix it up and sell it for four. Easy peasy.

I really fancy the idea. And I trust Zoki one hundred per cent, he's got things under control. But where would I find the energy after tramping round strange flats all week. He's got the drive. Whenever you see him waiting in some bar he's got the paper open in front of him, studying the ads. I don't know anyone who knows more about it. Look how he screwed Beno when he bought that Uno. Last time I saw him he had the prices of old cookers and washing machines written down, you know? Although I'd probably call that a waste of energy. Whatever, if business ever goes down the plug hole then at least I know what Fixed Properties Ltd can turn its hand to.

I drink my coffee and whisky at the counter by the window. I never sit down in the morning because then the whisky goes straight to my legs, and the coffee to my head. I just stare out and play with my black lighter. The cop's still standing on the corner, only now he looks a bit bored, as if he's not sure whether to stop someone or if he'd maybe rather go for a beer.

And then I see the bleeder. Fucking Mirković!

He comes marching out of the block of flats. My cig even falls out of my hand. Damn the bastard. I lean across the counter and watch. Shit. It has to be now. Just now, when there's a cop standing on the corner. Bloody hell, he's a lucky one, though you can see he's just a dumb peasant. And he was coming straight towards me. No, it's not possible. That would be too beautiful.

If he'd gone past the cop and across the road past the Oasis, I'd have been straight outside and I'd have had him. Collared him. I'd have given him something to think about, the little

shit. If the fucker ever turns up in the Dynasty, he'll get what's coming to him! I'll teach him not to fuck with me.

Nah, I knew it, not my lucky day. Instead of crossing over he stopped in the car park, a few feet in front of the cop.

He unlocks his car.

At least that's something. At least I know now which is his car.

He bleeding well knows that I'm selling flats in Fužine. And what does the bastard do? Two months I'm selling this flat for Režonja, take along a young couple, some old dear, some tramps who won on Who Wants to be a Millionaire, families with kids and some strange Mafia types. And this Mirković, he appears out of nowhere and tells the guy that his colleague from work or his cousin or some such dick-head will buy the flat. And whoever it is goes and talks to Režonja, puts down a hundred and fifty thousand marks, just like that, no commission. As if I've never been involved. Then Režonja buys Mirković a bottle of whisky. I'm just here for decoration, or what? Two sodding months, for fuck's sake!

Režonja gets rid of the flat, of course, and buggers off to Jevnica or somewhere. And Mirković has the cheek to wander round Fužine, so I have to keep seeing his ugly mush. I mean, fuck it, it's just not on.

Zoki. Zoki's standing outside tapping his watch. I look at mine. Shit, five past eight.

"I've just seen Mirković," I say as we hurry towards the entrance to the flats. Zoki is creasing the contracts folder under his arm.

"Mirković," he says suddenly. "It'd probably be better if you left Mirković alone."

What the fuck do you mean, leave him alone? Surely Zoki's not going to shit himself now, is he?

While we're on the subject, Zoki, as well as being smart, is also a chicken.

He explains. Ha. He says that the guy who Mirković sorted out the flat for is Pašković's brother. Not a colleague from work or a cousin or a dick-head. Pašković's brother.

So what? Pašković is my neighbour. Pašković is just a nobody with some crummy little job at the Petrol company. He wouldn't hurt a fly. He's got a daughter, Janina, fifteen or sixteen I reckon, a right juicy little piece. Pašković wouldn't

dare say boo, even if I offered to give her one for a tenner. His wife would scratch my eyes out first. But according to Zoki, the brother is a different kettle of fish altogether. He's into very different games. He's a big noise in Koseze, has the whole area under his control. There are some funny stories circulating about him. And now he's moved into Režonja's three-bedroom flat in Fužine.

So he's moved to Fužine. As if we didn't have enough home-grown fucking hard cases here already. I wonder how long he'll last before his front door takes a few shots? A Pašković?

"Can a Pašković really be such a tough guy?" I ask.

"As far as I can understand," says Zoki, "if the older Pašković is an Old English Sheepdog, then the younger one is a Rottweiler." Alright, Zoki, take the piss if you have to.

Ever since my wife got me an Old English Sheepdog and he saw me with it at Fužine Manor the prick's never let up about it. As if it's anything to do with me. Bitches and dogs, eh? She said what a wonderful dog for kids. I said, who's going to take it out for a piss – the kids are so little that it'd drag them around in circles. Obviously I will, she said. Who else? Of course. And now, naturally, she's always out and about somewhere, and leaves the fucking dog behind. She's got to go into town, she's got to go to the hairdresser's, she's got to go to her bleeding mother's. Take him with you, I said. I can't, she says, he'd flake out in the car from the heat. What do I care, I thought, you'll see, and the first time I left him in the flat and went out for a drink. When I got back there was dogshit everywhere. Okay, she cleaned up the mess, I mean it was her fault, but the bleeding flat stank like a latrine for the next two days. So the next time she went trolling off, I took him out. I felt like a walk anyway. Then Zoki saw me. I thought he was going to piss himself. I looked liked a total – I don't fucking know – like some bloody schoolteacher with this Old English, or so he said. If it was at least a real dog, an Alsatian or Stafford Bull Terrier or something. Now I keep having to listen to the same crap. One day I'll sort that sodding dog – a rope and a rock, into the river with it. I need peace and quiet to be able to function. When am I going to get things sorted, for fuck's sake. Get things as they should be.

"I'm glad to be here in Fužine," says the guy in shorts and a battered straw hat who shakes our hand at the door. That's

the way. Not like those pricks who, when you tell them you have a well-appointed two-bedroom flat in Fužine, look at you as if you're mad. They daren't even come for a viewing, as if, I don't know, someone's going to jump them as soon as they get out of the car. "These flats," says the guy, looking up at the tenth floor where we're going to take him, "these flats were built when I was in Polje."

Zoki and I look at each other. I think about it for a few moments. Well, I mean, perhaps I misunderstood what he said. Of course I have. After all, Polje's quite a big place, maybe he doesn't mean the loony bin. If it was true, it'd hardly be the first thing he'd want to mention when he went to see a flat. Unless he really had escaped from somewhere.

The guy happily signs a form agreeing that he can buy the flat at Brodar Square 7 only through the good offices of the company Fixed Properties Ltd. We know all these tricks. If only Režonja had signed something like that. We'd have him up in court now, and that dick-head Mirković alongside him.

Fucking Mirković. I can't get what Zoki said out of my head. Mirković. Pašković. Old English Sheepdog Pašković and Rottweiler Pašković.

Zoki's comparison gets on my tits. It's hard to see Pašković as some kind of Old English Sheepdog. Not that they're all that different as far as build goes. Just the face. Pašković is a stocky type with a moustache, whose wife has got him under her thumb – she just blinks and he comes running. When he goes down to check the post he has to go in his slippers, so that he doesn't scoot across the road to the Dynasty. Pašković has a black moustache, a black chest rug and a black look on his face, as if to compensate for being such a pussy. He certainly doesn't look like some drugged-up shaggy dog with its tongue hanging out. Where did Zoki get this Old English Sheepdog idea? It's just so he can show off how he knows the names of all the breeds, the prick.

On the tenth floor, Iršič answers the door. He's wearing a tracksuit and looks half asleep. Where he gets the dosh for a new flat is beyond me. Mangy long-haired git, whenever I see him he looks half asleep. Eight in the morning. When we've talked he's never mentioned any kind of job. He's most likely selling drugs. But not in Fužine, he's not tough enough for that. Probably around the schools.

While Zoki takes the guy round the flat, I sit at the kitchen table. I could really use another bloody coffee. It would be nice if Iršič offered me one, but he just stares. Leans against the wall and stares into space. As if he was high, the creep.

“Ready for the footie this evening?” I ask, just to get a conversation going. Though Iršič doesn’t exactly look the football type.

“I’ll probably go to the Oasis” I’m surprised to hear. Then he brings up something else altogether: “The water’s probably off round your way today, isn’t it?” I have to give it some thought.

“So I hear,” I say. “They’ve got to fix some pipes or something.”

“A really good time, in this heat,” says Iršič. Yeh, a really good time. Thank god there’s plenty of drinks in the fridge.

Zoki and the oddball return to the kitchen.

“It’s pretty quiet way up here, isn’t it?” says the oddball. It’s only now he takes his hat off and holds it in his hand. He’s got quite long greasy hair. At least he’s got something in common with Iršič.

“Yeh, it is really,” replies Iršič. “In this part of town it’s worth something being high up.” Good job he doesn’t mention that if you’re so high up the sun’s like a furnace, the mangy git. “Some people get worried about being so high up,” he says, as if he already knows what the guy’s going to ask next. They’ve got quite a routine going. “But in all these years, it’s never happened that at least one of the lifts isn’t working...”

“It’s important to me, that it’s quiet,” says the oddball. “I’m living with my mother at the moment, in Dravlje, just above the ring road. When I lie down in the afternoon, worn out after my injections, there are lorries roaring past my window.” So, I was right in the first place. “That accent – you from Koroška?” he asks. “That’s my neck of the woods.”

“No, born in Mozirje,” says Iršič. The guy looks at him kind of suspiciously, as if he thinks he might secretly be from Bosnia or somewhere.

“Ah,” he says. He looks past Iršič, somewhere towards the cooker. “I’m from Mozirje, too,” he says so suddenly I almost choke. Fucking hell, this is more serious than I thought. Iršič doesn’t even react. He looks at him kind of thoughtful like, as if he can see right through him. What’s this all about, eh?

Some sort of weirdo strategy to get the price down or what? Act so crazy nobody dares answer back.

“But there aren’t too many Yugoslavs on this floor, are there?” he says then, and Zoki and I look at each other. I grin at Zoki, so the oddball doesn’t see me. When all’s said and done he’s a Yugo too, though he’s fully house-trained. I usually don’t even think about it – only when someone says something like this guy. I’ve nothing against southerners, if they’re civilised like Zoki is. If they speak good Slovene and don’t have one of those wa-la-la singers booming out of the car stereo under my window.

“You know, it’s not true what they say about Fužine, that you never hear Slovene here,” I say. Someone’s got to salvage the situation. “This used to be public housing, way back, but the last ten years it’s all private...”

I look at Zoki, but he’s keeping schtum, as if he’s decided he’s not going to be dragged into this discussion. Good job, too. We want to make some money out of this, after all. But the guy carries on as if he hasn’t heard me, goes bravely forward like a tank.

“I looked at the names on the buzzers at the end of the corridor,” he says, “and I don’t think there are any Serbs or Bosnians there.”

Well, you’ve got to hand it to him, the guy’s brain may be raddled by all the injections, but his patriotic spirit is still intact, solid as a rock.

“Yeh,” says Iršič, his eyes suddenly narrow, “thank god those skinheads next door have sorted them all out.”

Here we go. How can you do business with such people? Zoki is a southerner and says nothing, while this one is now suddenly a fighter for their civil rights. Bleeding nutters.

Iršič and the other guy are made for each other. I remember the tales he spun when he showed me round. The place has its own little history – but not the kind for fucking commemorative plaques.

I remember saying that the wall next to the bed in the spare room wasn’t very well painted, that there were stains showing through. But he just stared at it and said it’s better not to tell the buyer some things. Ha-ha, you dick-head, I thought, but at least you tell the agent, you’ve got to trust your agent. Where do we end up otherwise? My lips are sealed.

Except of course to the crowd in the Dynasty, if there's anything worth telling.

So he tells me about it. A couple of years before he had a lodger, a student of philosophy or theology or anthropology, I don't fucking know, one of those spiritual things. Profoundly spiritual. The guy seems to have knitted his own underpants. Out of wool. Don't know why, some sort of penance or something. To drive away impure thoughts. Though if I had woolen underpants on my naked balls, there'd be impure thoughts, all right – I'd be scratching my groin on every street corner, for fuck's sake! Anyway, this guy slept in the spare room. And like all students he was a little skiver, preferred to gallivant about than study his spiritual affairs. And one night, when Iršič was already asleep, he came home at two in the morning with some sixteen-year-old bit of skirt who'd run away from home and had nowhere to go... And she'd found a good Samaritan – our poor, profoundly spiritual Janez... well, let's just call him Janez. Our Janez had taken pity on her and said that she could spend the night in his room, he'd sleep on the floor.

Anyway, she could have had more fucking sense than to spend the night with some guy she'd never set eyes on before. And that some weirdo who knits his own fucking pants. But she was a sly one as well. She told our Janez she had an ampoule of some drug, I don't know which, and that she would sell it the next day and give him the money, because he'd been so good to her... Anyway, all seemed to go as agreed, she slept on his bed, and he went to sleep on the floor – didn't try to jump her or anything. He was a deeply spiritual lad.

But not so spiritual that he actually went to sleep. It was a bit hard, after all, so that for some time he spun around like a chicken on a spit. Then he had a clever thought. He remembered that the girl was going to sell the ampoule and give the dosh to *him*, which meant that the ampoule was actually *his*, and he could do what he wanted with it. All very logical, if you can't sleep. He decided to break open the ampoule, there and then, and swallow whatever was inside it. He probably didn't know what it was. Probably didn't care too much. But the trouble was, he was already pretty pissed, he'd picked the skirt up in some disco, after all, and they'd been drinking all evening. So that when he broke the ampoule open – in the dark and in a hurry – he cut his hands badly and blood started to spurt all over the place.

Fuck me, I could just picture it when Iršič told me. But that wasn't all. As the blood ran from his hands his spiritual side suddenly came to the fore. It came to him in a flash just how grateful this lassie was to him, because he was such a good person. He was such a very good person, to rescue the poor soul from the cold streets, bring her into the warmth, give her his bed and lie down on the parquet, like some kind of saint. Even better than a saint, for fuck's sake, like Christ himself. And then, smashed and spiritual as he was, it came into his head that he was Christ. That, I don't know, he'd risen from the dead or something.

Well, then things went on as you might expect. He stripped down to his underpants and started to smear blood all over himself, so that he ended up looking like he'd just been dragged from the cross. And as the climax to the whole affair he decides to wake the girl and tell her the good news that Christ has risen... I tried to imagine how it was for the poor bitch to wake up in the middle of the night in a dark room and find some naked guy, covered in blood, hanging over her and blood spurting everywhere.

Iršič jumped several feet in the air when he heard the shriek. He goes running in and the girl's squeezed into the corner, wrapped in a blanket, shaking and staring, and in such a state of shock that she couldn't scream any more. And this fucker Janez, he's trying as hard as he can to soothe her, that it's alright, that everything's hunky dory, that the world will be a different place from now on, a fucking paradise, milk and honey, and all the time he's bleeding on the bed like a stuck pig.

I tried to imagine what I'd do in such a situation. But I couldn't quite. Apparently Iršič threw our Janez out of the flat in the middle of the night, with all his stuff, including his spiritual books, plus a couple of bandages for first aid. Clear thinking, I'd call that. I can just see the young bloke, slouching around Fužine all night, naked and euphoric, bleeding hands, looking for someone to tell the good news to. Then Iršič, who in any case looks half dead to the world all day, had to spend the whole night up with this girl, who daredn't go to bed any more, trying to repair the damage, having to listen to tales from her very efficiently fucked-up life. Blessed are the poor in spirit. If I'd been in his place, I'd have definitely tried to comfort her with a bit of pussy stroking. Women go for that, even if they're fucked up. Soon calms them down.

Anyway, this blood was almost impossible to paint over. It kept showing up through the paint as if it really was Christ's. Which it can't have been, otherwise we'd have heard more about it.

And now our benevolent Iršič judges this poor sod so harshly because of one comment on our southern cousins that he's prepared to bugger up the sale of the flat. It's good that the guy takes it as some sort of joke. Fucking strange one, but still a joke. I don't know, maybe these louse farmers have some sort of thing between them, some other way of communicating than normal folk do.

Then, thank god, we're leaving. In the doorway the oddball turns round again.

"Something else I wanted to ask," he says, "I've got a dog, do you think it'd be a problem – with the neighbours, I mean?"

Iršič shrugs.

"I wouldn't know," he says, "I've only got a cat. I've never had any problems."

The oddball's still looking round the flat.

"Well, that's okay then," he says, absent-mindedly, "I've only got a cat as well." He puts his hat on his head. Now Iršič is looking at me strangely, like he's trying to find fault. As if I'm the one to blame. But what can you do? All sorts of people sell, all sorts of people buy, what can I do about it? The art is in getting the two together – one who wants to sell, one to buy – and striking a deal, so that money changes hands. "I'll call you," says the oddball. Yeh, okay, you call. Our lines are always open.

The lift seems to take forever to travel down. That's all I'd need, to get stuck between two floors. I think I'd go bonkers.

\* \* \*

*Will the scaly armadillo  
Find me where I'm hiding  
Pink Floyd, Julia Dream*

Jeesus, *u pičku materinu*, I'm so fucking hung over, and I didn't even drink all that much last night. Hey, if I really had knocked it back... nah, it's all that fucking smoking, too many motherfucking fags. I mean this partying, middle of the week, like do I really need it?