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**Close to Everything**  
(Blizina svega)

Stories

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Apartment for sale, close to school, kindergarten, bus station,  
observatory, peace, close to everything. (Rental Ad)



## The Bus

\* \* \*

I got a mathematical question on a psych evaluation and needed to answer how much of the father's money did the child inherit. The previously mentioned child had a mother and a brother but, as the question says, the brother and the sister died in a car accident and here's where it all gets complicated - now you need to calculate how much out of the total amount goes to the mother, and how much of it goes to the surviving offspring. However, I can remember neither the total amount nor the percentage, all I remember is that on my psych evaluation those two children died.

\* \* \*

Children go on an excursion, the bus is full of schoolboys and schoolgirls, we rush towards the Alkar Hotel; two girls get up from their seats, approach the other ones in silence: *Hey, girls, wanna break the TV with us?*

\* \* \*

A blind man came out of the betting house.

\* \* \*

When tax collectors came to the village to collect the taxes for the livestock, my father would take the cow far into the woods and stay there until the darkness that would drive out the tax collectors arrived. He was five, those were grandma's orders, he says.

I ask him: *What did you do all day?*

*Nothing, he says, I'd pick berries and search for a snake.  
Why would you search for a snake?  
To kill her.*

\* \* \*

Bus one hundred and fifteen. A friend says to the other that there's a company in America that came up with some algorithm and put it on the stock market. The algorithm searches, invests and does everything on its own, and the company is always in the black. *I'll have to get some job too*, says the other friend.

# We'll Record Everything

## Seven Days

The Bulgarians drive trucks like bicycles, parking them within ten centimeters. The trucks are full of seven-days croissants packed in boxes. If the box is cracked, we can eat - it is the rule. When the Bulgarians are not looking, we kick one of the boxes and say it was cracked, put it aside and eat. They make me sick, but, driven by the team spirit I force myself to eat it. The boxes are all the same, we don't know what's inside - the worst is when you crack the one filled with champagne. Those are so awful that you have to eat them as soon as possible before opening another box. Working hours are flexible, and I'm obsessed with wasting time on this job. One of the colleagues noticed it right away. He's about ten years older than me. Somewhere around three in the afternoon, just when we were supposed to find out whether we're going home or staying longer, he told me his assessment: *I think there's no way of us going home before six today.* I answer nothing, don't want to stir him up and make him torture me even more, but he is quite happy with this too. You can see a smile slowly folded in the corners of his lips, quivering. Hours go by, three, four and five, and we're finally done at nine in the evening.

He is happy, his victory is so great that it honestly starts to comfort me. *Fuck it, that's how you do it sometimes, there's no going out whatsoever, but it all goes away - the work reduces within a week, you'll see.* When I'm done with the work, I sit on a bicycle, drive all the way downtown and buy a liter of wine. When I drink it, I beg around for more. Throwing up, I think about the glass of champagne that stands so inappropriately on the bag of croissants. I sleep for two hours, get to work by seven. During the break, I wander around the store, deciding on what to eat and then, deciding I'll eat nothing, I buy two beers and sit happily in front of the warehouse. When I finish, I take the forklift and step on it with my right foot like on a scooter, pushing off with the left foot.

## Who is Holding Jesus

It's snowing, everything must have collapsed. I don't need to rush to work, whenever I get there will be just fine. Some of the people didn't show up, some were three or four hours late. I came in fifty minutes late. The room I work in is on the third floor of the Employment Service, named the *job center*. There are computers with printers and one phone for the people who are in search of a job. My task is to help them with using computers and supervise them in doing it right. I'm good at the first part of the job; it's the second part I suck at. People coming there are almost the same; every day someone new arrives but doesn't stay for too long - they look around, write and print the CV, take a pamphlet and leave. There are many hopeless among them. They came here because their advisor sent them to apply for this and that. It's the hardest to help them, it seems useless. They won't get the job they apply for; I wonder every time whether they're completely aware of that fact. The sentences they utter are endlessly sad; each one weighs hundreds of pounds although they say the exact same thing as everybody else. *I need to print out my application and CV*. Some even say: *You should help me write an application and a CV*. For them, finishing elementary and high school was the best they could do, and now are no longer needed. On the other hand, their problem isn't big enough to get the society's help in a concrete way. Everybody helps them as much as it's formally necessary, including me, although we're aware that it's the bare minimum. That's why you can't call it helping, just doing a job. No wonder I had an uneasy conscience just as I was telling them how to put together a CV, how to write everything that needs to be written and where to send everything that needs to be sent. On the other hand, every time they asked *Can I write an application here?* I had an urge to say: *You don't need the application, you really don't*. In that case, I'd had to go a step further, or a few steps, and actually help them, in case I really cared for them. And I cared very little, just enough to torture both myself and them with some lukewarm melancholy being helpful to no one. Those people were mostly the young ones, people in search of their place that couldn't be found, or the older ones being discarded as surplus at some point. The junkies were a special category I had no particular regret for, I was even a bit jealous of them. I reckon they took something out of this life, and the one they're living now is simply a punishment for that. Maybe that punishment isn't too excessive; maybe it's just right, maybe it's not enough. I was annoyed by those among them who like to patronize and share pieces of advice about a healthy lifestyle, saying that *we shouldn't even begin*. They annoyed me even in elementary school, coming and sharing their confessions. Back then, I had no particular opinion about drugs or alcohol. *What gives you the right to say who will start taking something and when*.



I assume it was some sort of pride coming out of them that they couldn't hide, some didn't even try to – it said clearly: *I was in a place where you'd never go. And I came back. You won't have the same luck.* Luckily, they never stick around too much.

I thought there was no way of anyone coming today, not with all the snow. I was wrong. There were already six or seven of them waiting for me to open the doors, among them was one of the junkies. I'm trying not to hide how irritating they are; a lot of people in front must mean I am seriously late. I say to Damir: *What's wrong with you to come to this weather...* I open the doors and don't even look at him while he's saying: *Coomme on, tis not even snow – only ssslush.* He picked up on an exercise in autogenic training taught by his psychologist; when he uttered it, he would never stutter: *Calm down, take a deep breath, you're calm, calm.* He'd do the same thing before using a phone, but as soon as he heard a voice on the other side, the stutter would return. I pretended I saw nothing it, but he knew I was listening, at the end he'd say: *Fuck.* Each day Damir would sit at the most hidden computer and watch porn. Each time I'd catch him, I was ashamed and pretended nothing happened. After I unlocked the door, I turned the heating on and started to turn on each of the computers. Damir went by the window and looked outside for a minute or two: *This is already melting.* I thought he'd return to the computer, but he had let others take his place. He went to the phone and dialed a number. Each time someone would grab a phone I'd get nervous – if someone is surfing the internet where they shouldn't be doing it, it's quiet, no one will notice it, but any employee can come in at any given time and hear someone using the phone to call their relatives. If someone's particularly loud, maybe the people in other rooms could hear it? As much as it was possible, I tried to concentrate on the text I was reading while preparing for college the next year, but such phone calls would always distract me. Still, I never did anything about it – nothing more than a warning look people ignored anyway. Damir would arrange dates or comment on the betting tickets, but this time he called his mom and repeat, calm as he could be: *Mother, mother, mother. Bye now.* Junkie was already in the line behind him, Damir politely handed him the phone. Surprisingly, he called about a job, I was glad. *I'm calling you about the job. Thirty-two years old. Who's workin'?* He listened to the voice on the other side and gazed out over the room as if he wanted all of us sucked into the conversation, then he focused back on the telephone. *Why the fuck are you posting an ad if someone already got it!? On CES. You put it yesterday for fuck's sake.* As soon as he said that, Damir came to calm him down – I was so grateful to him. *Fuck you faggots, I run down here while it's snowing, and you tell me someone already got the job!* Damir grabbed him by the hand in which he was holding the phone and said: *Calm down, take a deep breath, you're calm, calm,* and the junkie hung up while slamming the phone and said to me: *Jesus fucking Christ, they run an ad,*

*and someone already got the job. I can't fucking believe it, man, you need to pour them with gasoline and set those fucking cunts on fire.* When Damir told him to calm down, he really listened. All of a sudden he was completely cool, as if nothing happened, until he spoke to me in an entirely different tone: *You, come here.* I got up and approached him. He pulled out his wallet, slid a finger in one of the compartments and pulled a picture of Saint Anthony holding baby Jesus. He pointed to Jesus and asked: *You know who this is?* Jesus, I said. *And this one next to him?* I say: *It's Saint Anthony.* He paused, now uncertain, and said: *No, it's his father, Joseph.* Damir looked outside the window again. *There, already melted, I tell you, nothing but slush.*

Neno was a part of that squad – always dressed in a suit, head shaved, and face as well. When I first came to this job, I found him talking on the phone. The first sentence I heard from him was: *Please, can you connect me with the president's office?* Then there was a long pause, then he was connected and then he reported all of his inventions to the president, saying nobody has enough understanding to invest in them and place them on the market. Later on, the Ministry gave him money, but nothing was enough to bring the business to life. When he entered, he energetically said *What a time, man, eh?* He said hello to Damir and the rest of the guys, hung up his jacket, sat in a chair, rubbed his head and took a look at a book on my desk: *Whatcha reading?*

*Oh, nothing, studying for my college admission.*

*Good, good, want me to examine you?*

*No no, thank you.*

*Come on, give me the book, I'll examine you.*

*No, really...*

*OK, when you want me to examine you, just say the word.*

*Sure.*

His inventions were mostly massagers and devices made to help the spine. Sometimes he'd try them on people who came to the ES, dramatically demonstrating the ways in which each device works. I remember him every time I carry bags from the store, that is, I remember his invention he called *the fingertip* – the fingertip is actually a plastic groove to put one or more bags so that the handle doesn't cut into your fingers. One morning, before Neno and Damir, even before any junkie, the head of the department arrived and asked me if I knew how much was the phone bill of the job center before my arrival? I don't know. *Two hundred or three hundred kunas, three hundred and fifty top. It's one thousand and five hundred now.*

The next day I decided to warn the first person who grabs the phone and doesn't use it for a job hunt. A blond, skinny girl approached the phone and it immediately upset me. I was hoping she would use the call for the right thing.

That could potentially solve the problem, everyone starting to use the phone the right way, on their own. I put down the text I was reading and looked her way so that she could see I noticed her taking the phone. She ignored me. With a strained, nasal voice she said *Hello! I'm calling about the job ad for a supply controller. Great*, I thought to myself. *I've finished School of Economics, I'm fluent in English, I have a driver's license, category B, I'm attractive. I've worked in sales so far, two years of experience.* I got back to reading and didn't listen any further, I felt a glimpse of pride as if it was my responsibility that she called for a job ad. The next one who accessed the phone was Riva Ključ, a jobless veterinarian whose jacket still had a scent of sausages. I felt uneasy and gave him the most official look I could, just to let him know I had my eyes on him. He forced a smile and dialed a number. We waited for someone to pick up the phone on the other side. *Hello! Heey, it's Riva, Riva. Yes, yes, I'll be short, you know what they say, don't want to take your time... The second-to-last weekend in May we're doing a thirty years of graduation party, Medena Hotel - are you here?* My heart started to beat faster. Should I stop him right now? It's stupid to interrupt him in the middle of a conversation - I'll wait for him to finish. *You're here? Great, great. See you then!* When he hung up, I turned and looked at him - he looked back with an even more cordial smile and dialed another number. I took a deep breath and did nothing - I'll let him make one more call, then I'm telling him. *Hello, hey, it's Riva, Riva. Listen! In May we're doing a thirty years of graduation party - will you be here? Medena Hotel, yes, yes. Yes, yes, great, sure, sure. Seven o'clock, seven. Talk to you about the details. Great, great. Ok, bye now, byeeee.* Half-way through the conversation I turned to him and waited for him to finish to tell him that this is it and he can't do stuff like this anymore, but this time he didn't look towards me when he hung up. In fact, he dialed a new number, moved aside, almost turning his back to me. Should I go there now and tap his back? *Hello! Riva on the phone.* He lowered his voice a bit. *Listen, we're doing a thirty years of graduation party. Thirty, thirty, yeess. Well, I wanted to check where are you, what's up with you? The second-to-last weekend in May. Medena hotel. Sure, sure, let me know. Let me know, yes, yes. Talk to you later!* Although he stood with his back turned, I could see that he crossed another person from his list - Jesus, he's going to call the whole class! I stood up to see if anyone's watching this. They were all silently looking at the computers, I felt at ease. He dialed again. *Hello! Riva on the phone. Listen. Can you hear me? We're doing a thirty years of graduation party... thirty, thirty! This is the plan - Medena hotel, the second-to-last weekend in May... You're not here? Sure, sure, just let me know, yes, yes. Who?* After he asked *who*, he listened to another person's answer for some time while shaking as if he was about to burst into laughter, and then he really did. I really must do something about it, this is not ok. People come here in search of a job, and he's gathering friends up for a grad-

uation party. On top of it all he's laughing, that's really not ok. I went to him, my heart pounded, and tapped his back. He shielded the phone and turned to me to hear what I had to say.

*You can't use the phone for something that's not a search of a job. I'll dial just one more number and then I'm done.*

One of the worst nightmares is the one in which, I don't know why nor how, I become scary – the essence of that nightmare was in the fact that I'm afraid of scaring somebody, I'm afraid that someone could fear me. One time (in reality, not in a dream) Grade and I were strolling in Komiža, it was already late at night, no one around. He insisted on finding a bar somewhere, and I said I was done for the night, and I'm going to find a place to sleep. I fell asleep somewhere along the beach, underneath two pine trees that leaned all the way to the ground and hid me. I woke up before dawn. Actually, I was woken up by a conversation between two girls who were getting ready for a night swim. I saw that they didn't see me, that they didn't know I'm here, put my arms around my knees and made sure I didn't move.

## DPM

When I ring the intercom, someone from the other side answers with *Who is it?*, and I say *DPM*. I came up with the acronym myself. I reckon people won't pay attention to it, they just need to hear anything to open the door, and the acronym isn't a lie. That's the way it most often goes, people don't pay attention to the content, they decide whether they'll open the door or not by the tone. When some of them do ask questions (*What?*), I'm not sure is it because they didn't hear those three letters, and want me to repeat it, or they've heard it and want me to explain it. Either way, I feel obliged to expose the acronym: *distribution of promotional materials*. In those cases they most often don't open, those are the people who don't want someone putting trash in their mailbox.

I am fast and efficient in my job, mostly because I don't want anyone to see me handing out flyers. I worked for a year in the neighborhood, no one saw me. I had been deeply thankful for it after each job done. I was happy to put the last flyer into the mailbox, I'd stood on my way home to look at them, they looked like passengers waving from a train that's just about to leave. There were also a few people who wanted me to explain to them what's it all about after I'd utter *distribution of promotional materials*, I'd always be taken aback – I stay silent until

they hang up, they yell *hello, hello*, and when it slowly becomes bizarre, a sudden splash of a tiny happiness hits me, and I convince myself I'm not here.

### Pontoon

Pontoon looks as it sounds, a word rhyming within itself. The pontoon is a kind of rubber, wooden-metal raft onto which other identical rafts are arranged so that they'd form a path that would temporarily remain at the sea. I walk the sea in the middle of the town every morning, careful not to fall when I jump from one pontoon to the other, while at the same time, that's exactly what I'm hoping for while I hurry up spring.

### An Ugly Boy

Every day someone cries. Everything gets so complicated and the solution is nowhere to be found. On one of those days, one of the producers enters the room: *Little Fran's mom called. She wants to know if he'll be in the next season. She should know because of school.*

The headwriter cringes a bit: *Oh shit, forgot about that. No, he won't. We need to remove him from the plot as soon as possible.*

*Why? Someone asks.*

*The Germans, this new board, their boss, he says the kid's ugly and wants us to remove him soon,* the headwriter answers.

*Aha,* everyone says.

*Yes, we should think of a way to remove him from the plot, as soon as possible.*

Everyone frowns, my adrenaline kicks in and I try to come up with some solution as quickly as possible just to prove myself because I'm new to the job, but nothing.

*Maybe he could go to his father?* someone suggests and continues: *I mean, his parents are divorced and he could go to his father.*

*No, no that actor is out of the game too. We can't put him into any combination,* the headwriter says.

*What about him going somewhere with his mother then?* I suggest.

*What?*

*He travels somewhere with his mother.*

*Which mother?*

*His mother.*

*No, we can't do that,* the headwriter answers as if he won't even try to explain, and then he just lingers in a lowering tone and almost swallowing the last word: *We need her, she can't travel anywhere...*

After a moment of silence, someone adds another suggestion: *He's sick in the past few episodes anyway – I don't know, can't we just make him die perhaps?*

For the first time in my life, I have money. The shame of working on a soap opera is constantly present, but I am slightly happy. While I'm walking towards the crossroad where Grade awaits I repeat to myself: *Maybe I'm that careless guy who earns his living creating garbage and has money.* I'm ten minutes late. Grade's not mad, it almost sounds as if he's slightly sad: *A guy from work was just here... He stopped here with a convertible, you should've seen the car. If only you arrived a minute earlier, we could go in it to O'Hara.* I say *Fuck* like I don't care, but in fact, I'm really sorry – I feel even more sorry as we walk towards the sea, as if I already know that all of this will end in few days and that this is actually my last chance to earn some easy money by killing boys and to watch the sky from a convertible. For the first time in my life I have money, so I don't have any concept when I go out. I order drinks until I'm no longer able to, pass out and fall asleep. I wake up at the Bačvice beach around ten. I can't remember how I got there. The morning swimmers already set their beach towels around me – discomfort and happiness, like when I was born.

## Runi

There's a bocce tournament final going on in Kaštela. *It's some league, I don't know, Jelena will explain. All you have to do is drive the two hostesses to Kaštela and be there with them. They do all the work, you don't have to do anything. They hand out key chains, bottle openers, t-shirts... you just have to write down the score at the end and that's it,* my sister explains to me.

The entire evening I hold papers in my hand to look more official. One of the players approaches me and says: *Just write Runi on mine.* I see that he doesn't quite understand my role, but I'm not in the mood to convince him otherwise so I just smile as a sign of approval. He's not happy with this, so he repeats it a few more times: *Just write Runi. I need no name and surname. Just write Runi, everyone will know.*

## LED

After only a year we're able to pay off the LED bulbs. They save fifty percent of energy, some even save ninety. Lumens are the measure of LED bulbs – six hundred lumens provide as much light as a fifty-watt bulb, with less electricity consumed. We have warmer and colder light, that's measured in Kelvins. The LED bulb has no mercury. The lady who got the boss's orders to educate me as a newly employed knew right away that I won't stay there long, that's why explaining was extremely hard for her. It was even harder for me to act interested. At some point I started to get lost, sinking into myself. The lady, on the other hand, started to have fun, so she kept explaining it further, slightly theatrically. Although I considered this kind of behavior to be rude, I couldn't blame her. *The LED bulbs last ten hundred hours, some last twenty thousand hours, some even more. If a light bulb works for two thousand hours per year, it can last a couple of years without burning out. Energy-saving CFL bulbs are something in between LED bulbs and the regular ones, however, LED bulbs are better, they save more.* At some point, I tried to come up with some questions that will at least show I'm paying attention, but it became clear that it's better to stay silent. I was snoozing, falling into a state of hypnosis, and then, all of a sudden, the sound of a bell signaling that someone's entering the store snapped me out of it. A worker, who had obviously been here before, entered. The lady went to the cash register, and the man vigorously moved towards me. He wanted to exchange something he bought yesterday. He was angry, annoyed, but not in a threatening way – it was more like he wanted some sympathy for the problem he was dealing with. He stopped right next to me and took some pipe out of the bag, showed it to me and robustly said: *Here!!!* That meant he'd say nothing more and that I should understand everything out of this single word. I was looking at the pipe and the two holes on it. I don't know what that pipe is, nor the role of the holes. That's why I quickly decide that the hole represents a problem and I am truly surprised by it, my body makes a sound full of understanding and sympathy, somewhat similar to his: *Uf!!!* That reflex reaction brought me back to life as if I equalized the pressure in my ears after exiting a tunnel. The next day a biblical rain shower struck. Maybe it's time to give all this up? I put my jacket on, flip the laptop bag over the head and set it on the hip, wore an overall on top of everything and took an umbrella I steered around along the way depending on where the rain splashed. Walking down Adžijina Street I happened to see myself in the tinted mirror of some closed bar. Despite the rain, I stopped and took a good look. I couldn't see the face because it was hidden in the darkness of the raincoat, so I failed to recognize myself. The laptop bag at my

hip made a big bump that made me look unproportional. I could at least leave the laptop home, I don't know could I need it for. But, that *is* the point of a laptop, to be here if heeded. I bought it from Bojan less than two days ago. This is my first PC. Eight years ago I worked at a *job center* at the Employment Service and there, while in hiding, I was writing my first story I was going to send to a literary contest. I lied to people that I'm studying. I decided I'll tell the others if the story wins an award. If not, no harm. The laptop was the prize. I didn't win, but I got the consolation prize that meant the story will be published in a book with hundreds of others. I was so happy that the main prize meant nothing. I decided that was enough to show what I wrote. I said again, lying: *This is the story I wrote to win a laptop*. I was ashamed to write for nothing.

### Alley of Silence

*Good afternoon.*

*Good afternoon.*

*I'm calling about the ad for a florist.*

*Are you experienced in the job?*

*No.*

*Then we can't hire you...*

*But it says here "no experience needed".*

*Where did you read that?*

*On the website of the Employment Service.*

*I don't know why it says that. We clearly stated that you need at least one year of experience.*

*Why did they put it differently then?*

*I really don't know. They give people false hope.*

We say goodbye, I hang up. I had a false hope of being a florist in the Alley of Silence.

### Westgate

Westgate Mall is looking for a cleaning man. You work six days a week, from midnight till 6 am. The money is awful, 2500 kunas, but the working hours are appealing. Working in a mall where there are no people, in the middle of the night, it's like no work at all. Every night you go there, as if you're going to sleep,



and always dream the same dream. You drive down the endless hallways in a small car that swipes the dirt off the floor, although there is almost no dirt. The malls are clean and always smell nice, you can see stars above the glass dome. When you come back in the morning you sleep a little, completely unaware of where you've been, you're just a little sleep-deprived. *I'll apply there*, I say to Zlatarina.

OK.

*Should I state my degree? College and all of that, maybe not, it's stupid...*

*Add it, it's stupid to lie about that.*

The next week they call me and tell me I passed to the second round.

*Good*, I say to Zlatarina. *I passed to the second round.*

She says: *You're not gonna do that, please.*

### Master of His Own Body

Marija Kohn retells some fun thing that happened in a movie she starred in. She laughs while she talks, she's the only one that thinks it's funny while the others wait for some point, but the story happens from different angles and there is no point in sight. They're all patient because Marija Kohn has twice their age and she's one of the oldest at this movie set where Eva invited me to help with the lights; I'll get no money, but I can have lunch, which is exactly what I'm doing now during the break, together with the rest of them. Besides, I can keep up with everything that happens, so I'll perhaps be easier for me to make my own movie. Marija Kohn is still talking. It's still not funny, but it's cute. I see her live for the first time, but I can't connect her with any of her roles. Besides the fact that she gets lost in digressions and that she's very old and slightly tone-deaf, she seems fine. I can't connect the happiness coming out of her at the moment with the actress who played in the *Master of His Own Body* movie. This should be normal, that's what makes the actors who they are, actors, but it's still a bit weird. Perhaps it's because I've seen the movie a long time ago when I was a kid and when it's very hard to know what's fiction and what's reality. I remember those movies as experiences from my past. I remember Fabijan Šovagović especially, for whom I was convinced is not actually acting, and that at any moment he could show at our door with a plastic bottle of homemade brandy as some of grandpa's dangerous friend whom we haven't met personally yet, but we know of him because we see him on the TV and we know he's crazy. The music in those movies emphasized even more panic attacks I got while silently watching the TV. It was always too loud, too dramatic, and at its peaks, it would transcend the TV's abilities and pour

out as a threatening, apocalyptic distortion. However, it was just right for the amount of sadness those movies had in them. In the *Master of His Own Body*, Marija Kohn plays a limping girl that a young man has to marry because of the dowry and his father's command. The girl wants the young man, but he doesn't want her, he's dreaded and wants another girlfriend. The entire intertwined turn of events is very complex, but at the same time childish simple, that's why it's so sad. I can't remember the movie's ending. I eat pasta because that's the simplest. In occasions like these, I chose my meals by practicality. While I eat, it's more important not to attract attention and to enjoy the food. Nevertheless, people start to lose patience for Marija Kohn's story, so someone kindly interrupts with a question: *And who's the director of that?* She suddenly stops, but she didn't understand the question so she asks the person to repeat it. *Who is the di-rec-tor of that?* The person repeats. For a moment it seems like the question will have to be repeated, but Marija somehow gets it and just says: *Well, who isn't!*

### Crème de la crème

*Although you have no experience, you've passed into the second round. I'd like you to come for an interview on Tkalčićeva Street. Our bar is not there, but we're currently renovating it, it will actually be a wine bar.*

*Great*

*Hello.*

*Hello.*

*I see only now that you're from Split!*

*Yes!*

*Crème de la crème!*

*Why?*

*What?*

*Why Crème de la crème?*

*Well that's our bar in Spli.*

*Oh...*

*You've never been there?*

*No, but I've heard of it - Crème de la crème, yes.*

## A Letter

In a room with a low ceiling and crazy light, a lady hands us out English tests for some job in the state administration. I don't even remember the names of all those positions I applied for, it's impossible to memorize them. While the lady hands out tests, I look around, there are not as many people as I'd expect, and then I slowly realize that every last name she reads out loud starts with the letter S.

## A Saint

The director of a marketing agency, at the final, fourth round of testing asks me: *What would you do if you had enough money that you didn't have to do anything?* Is this a trick question? Is the best answer the one in which I say I'd work in a marketing agency regardless of the money? It certainly isn't, it's too obvious. Therefore, in that case, I would both lie and answer wrong, so I say: *I'd make movies.*

*Movies?* She is surprised but doesn't seem unhappy with the answer. *What kind of movies?*

*Well, all kinds of it... depending on what I'm in the mood for... movies, documentaries.*

*Aha.*

Is this just a personality assessment, was I supposed to say something nobler? I guess not, I wouldn't be here if I wanted to do something noble. I said the right thing, I said the appropriate thing - even if I had all the money in the world, I wouldn't do anything special, which is very close to this job of a copywriter I apply for. I got the job, I'm happy, there were no mixed feeling like when I was doing a soap opera, all until someone said, by the way, we have a deadline to apply all of our projects to the festivals. I googled *marketing festivals* straight away, there's a bunch of them, they're very popular. Of course they are. I never really thought of them. What now? Is there a way of doing this job, and dodging an award? I could be bad at it, which is almost impossible, it would be too hard and insane. I could do the most boring projects that would never go public and could never compete for an award, so when someone googles my name I don't turn out to be that guy that made cookie commercials. How to say that, and to whom? There's no way. Most of the people have a great time here, especially copywriters, they find happiness in many things, in some even passion. In the office next to ours, divided by glass, worked a girl who, day by day, amazed me. Her superiority was obvious to everyone, although we never talked about it. She would write assignments on a piece of paper and then crossed them out, one by one. This was

almost everything I saw of her, but she was doing it as if she was enjoying some delicious meal. She was also one of the ten people invited to work on a secret project. I didn't understand the secrecy behind the project, I was doing in like any other, but I shared the excitement of other colleagues who on Friday gathered at the meeting room. The excitement became stronger due to the fact that the company would have to fire all of us who came last if the project didn't become successful. First we signed some documents about the confidentiality of the project, obliging not to say anything about it, not even our colleagues included in it, and then the account manager briefed us. Car insurance needs a new campaign - it's important to come up with the scenario for a commercial of thirty seconds, and then, out of the commercial, make posters, T-shirts, key chains, badges, lighters, everything. The meeting is over. It's Friday, two o'clock; we can go home early today, and the new meeting starts on Monday at 11. I won't come up with anything on Monday from 9-11, I have to come up with something during the weekend. I go home by bike, I fall asleep, wake up at seven. Car. Security. People drive cars, accidents happen, car insurance saves the day. Zlatarina asks if I'm awake. I'm awake, but I'll stay in bed a bit longer. It's summer, it's still day. A couple of people wait at the bus station next to our house. I see their heads only. If I could come up with something good or at least with something to present at the meeting, I'd be peaceful all weekend. A car lies under the sea. So what? I don't know, but the image is good. A car in space. No. a car driven by children. Too dangerous. A boy plays with a toy car/ car toy and gets in an accident, the car crashes. The father fixes the car. The father is the insurance. Bullshit. A car as a tank. No good. A man drives in the car, his eyes are closed but he smiles anyway. Nope. I tell Zlatarina I'll go for a couple of beers down at Majić and Stipe at the bar, I really need it. She says ok, she has to work anyway. I ride my bike downhill. There are cars all around me. I try not to think about it anymore. a clearway, two cars almost crash into each other, the coward's game, the guy whose car is under insurance doesn't care. No, too brutal, no good. Tiny cars raining from the sky. What does that even mean? An old lady in the car. That's cute. What next? She drives the car, smiling, a policeman pulls her over... He wants to see her driver's license... she doesn't have it... she doesn't have insurance either. That's not good... A car, all alone in this world. No one in sight, traffic lights are all green. Or better yet, they're all off. No, it's not good if they don't work, not a good association. The roads are big, but there are no traffic lights, that's good. Everything opens up in front of the car, wherever it turns. The driver is smiling, cheerfully, the wind caressing his hair. We experienced it once, in the late ninety-eight when the Pope came to Split. I can't remember if we ever came to see him at Žnjan, but I do recall someone suddenly realizing that the traffic was blocked, meaning our

childhood fantasy finally came true. All cars were gone. We ran home and returned each with our own bike, climbed at the top of Velebitska Street and got down with the wind in our cheeks in the middle of the road. The Pope was later canonized.

## The Job

We were driving to Stenjevac to visit Zlatarina's grandma, they repainted the walls of the underpass. I could write a micro-story about it, expand the image a bit. A couple of weeks ago, Luka invited me to write for Booksa's section of very short stories, I had no idea what to write about. Would it be fair to refuse the offer? I won't refuse it, I was flattered by the invitation, I'll write, come up with something. *We went to the end of Zagreb. We took a tram to Črnomerec, a bus to Stenjevac, and visited Zlatarina's grandma. That's where Ante Kovačić "ended his days." Grandma asked us if we were happy. The walls of the underpass, otherwise covered in graffiti, are now repainted into white. That was a couple of weeks ago and they're still untouched. No Dinamo, no hooligans, no nothing. It carries the same fear and empty weariness as garages in the malls. There are people coming out of the underpass and it is clear that they don't use the mirror when putting a hat on their head. They don't care if the sign on the hat is in the middle of their forehead. It's winter for them.* I used winter in the title of the story, sent it to Luka, and he said the story misses at least some point, he won't publish that. *There's no point, but there's progress,* I defended myself. *With each sentence, you see a bigger decay.* The second story was about a moment before Christmas when my grandma broke the head of the Saint Joseph's figure, and the point of the story was that the monuments need to be beheaded to become saint again. The point was now overemphasized, he said. It really was overemphasized, it wasn't good. Ružica already wrote three good stories and I've got none, I won't give up. All I need is a good concept, when I figure the concept out, the stories will align themselves. Maybe I should write about an uncle I never met – short stories based on what I know, while fantasizing about what I know nothing about and can't reach it anymore, which could be good. Will I really drag my dead uncle around, week after week for fifty kunas? Sure I will. Why not. Luckily that idea got turned down. The story about a married couple waiting for an eviction while the husband just wants to have his coffee was accepted. The next one was accepted too, and the one after, that's good, now if I could only get a job.

## The Wright Brothers

The daughter of Zlatarina's boss knows a guy who runs a gym, he has a chain of them. He needs someone to do the marketing. I like to imagine I got out of the previous marketing job on my own, but the truth was completely different, a couple of projects didn't work out, and they didn't extend my contract. Therefore, I was sort of proud I got out of it, although I had no actual credits for that, and I'm once again wondering will I accept another job in marketing. Yes, I will. The gym is alright; the people come here to exercise and be healthier, it all makes sense. Marketing is just a form, even if you're selling a good thing; it's still a good thing. This gym is good. I'll call him. *How would this deal work, how much money are we talking about?* The daughter says: *He's hard to negotiate with, he's awful actually, but at the end of the day, he's OK.* The gym is in one of the newer buildings in Zagreb, and right next to it, there's an office in which we're having a meeting at the moment. There are a lot of bald people at the table. I'm not sure if they're all bald, or some of them simply shave their heads. They all look like they're really hitting the gym. Is it necessary to go to the gym in order to make a commercial for it? No, of course it's not. However, I feel uncomfortable because I'm the only one who looks like a person who doesn't go to the gym there. I'm putting my sleeves over my wrists while trying to sit as comfortable as possible in the chair and look at the phone as if I'm amused by something, it amazes me how well I do it. I'm trying to release some contempt for the people in the room, it seems that's how I'm less scared of them, but then I feel some remorse and I immediately become miserable. Luckily, it all quickly ends because the director enters the room and turns on the additional lights. He doesn't look like the rest of the people, it encourages me. Perhaps he has more than sixty years, he's skinny with a black ribbon on his head, preventing the hair from going into his eyes. He gently smiles towards us: *Hi everybody, I'm glad you're here. Here's the thing. I was thinking of playing a video that would serve as an inspiration for a new season to all of us, and then have a small talk. In short, I want us to be a why company – I mean, I want us to be the company that starts with the question of why, and then how, and at the end of course – what. But, better that I don't babble now, it's best that I play the video as I said, and then you'll understand it all.* Someone turns off the lights, and the director turns the projector on. When the image on the screen becomes clear, he points at the paused video where a middle-aged man in some sort of a business shirt looks at the audience. On his head, he has an attached microphone, a wire heading from ear to mouth, and in his hand is a marker. The director takes a look at us and clicks the mouse, the video starts. The man is still looking at the audience, then he starts walking on the stage and says in English: *How do you explain when things don't go as we*

*assume? Jesus, I think with contempt, but I don't think too much because I'm trying the best I can to pay attention to the video, just in case there's a discussion afterward. The speaker keeps adjusting his glasses to the top of his nose. Three and a half years ago, I realized something that radically changed the way I do things, the way I think about business and life in general. This realization is very simple. He turns his back and draws a circle on the board, and then another one inside of it, and another, smaller one, in the small circle. He writes why inside the smallest circle, how in the next one, and in the biggest circle he writes what and then continues: This has proven to be the pattern by which the most successful people function, regardless of what they do. However! The key direction is – most people think in the direction of what to why. Therefore, most people usually know what they're doing, the lesser part of them knows how the thing they're doing functions, but only a small number of people knows why they're doing something! The most important thing is that we need to start with the question of why. In doing so I don't think about the money only, or on the profit, that's just the result, I think about the purpose – what's the purpose of the thing we're doing? I cross my legs and think to myself: Fuck it, this guy knows what he's talking about. I agree with everything. Why in the world did I have this fascist arrogance to judge a man based on his shirt? He cheered up a little (and obviously caught some extra attention from his audience) and continued: If you take a look at any of the most successful people, you'll see the pattern I'm talking about. Martin Luther King. There were other great speakers who knew what to say, however, those people didn't lead a civil rights movement. The Wright brothers. There were many people who wanted to take off by a plane, had more advanced technology and yet they failed. Or let's say Apple. Why are the most innovative ones every year? Others have an equal source of knowledge, talented people and data. The answer is simple – because people don't buy WHAT you do, people buy the reason WHY you do it. The goal is not to find people who need something, the goal is to find people who believe in something. Suddenly I become a little bit uncomfortable, and the question of why I'm sitting here appears above my head, do I really believe in the gym. It's not that I don't believe in it. I have absolutely nothing against people who work out. Yes, I believe in the gym. When the meeting was over, the director invited me into his smaller office to get to know each other better and make a deal. Ivan will send you the materials so if you have any questions, feel free to call me. Basically, we'll handle the issues as they arise. The most important thing is to have the concept for the first video done by Wednesday, and then we'll talk further. He uttered sentences that aligned without any punctuation, so I had no chance to say anything in between until he asked me a question:*

*Do you do any sports?*

*I ride a bike. I used to ride more, now only when I have some free time. I tried to answer as energetically as possible.*

*Listen, if you want to come to the gym, it's, of course, all free for you, whenever and wherever you want.*

*Thank you, I'd love to, but I really don't have the time, thank you.*

The first and the last two tasks I did weren't connected to the promotional video they talked about at the meeting, it was postponed for some other times. It was the end of November 2014, so they decided it was more appropriate to come up with some New Year's cards. The second task was to write a newsletter created for dentists especially, presuming they should go to the gym because their back probably hurt. This was easy and I was happy, and the card took me a while only to come up with some joke with a girl who bends over and as she bends over so does the card. I asked Ivan if they could pay me in advance before we continue, and he sent me to the director. We were once again in that small office. He made a move with his hands, like a penguin, the move meant *damn it*, and looked at me:

*Let's not complicate much, this is what I have to say - we don't work like that. I can pay you whatever we agree on, but that's just not it... You were at the meeting - there were at least five people there from this and that kind of television station - my idea was to connect you with them, I thought that was your idea too. Too bad, you're creative.*

*I think to myself fuck you and your creativity, we don't build planes, you sell a lousy gym membership, but at the end I say: I see, but I really need the money.*

We talked twice after that to negotiate the price, at the end I said he can pay me whatever he thinks I deserved, and if he thinks I deserve nothing then so be it. This attitude got me a good deal. I thought it was a tactic I should use in the future too, as it turned out - it wasn't.

## Torino, Venice

The night ferry slowly goes from Split to Rijeka, I'm lying on the deck on a sleeping bag, I put a backpack underneath my head as a pillow. Igor invited me to a film workshop in Casalborgone, a small place next to Torino where each year dozen of international film crews gather and each of them has to make a short film within a week. I was supposed to be a narrator in an improvised adaptation of Šoljan's novel, *Short Trip*, and I would also participate as a co-writer. I was on the island of Prvić when I first got his mail which at the same time excited me and made me upset, so I answered: *Dear Igor, please don't be mad, but I'd rather not. the idea of a trip and hanging out is very appealing to me, but I really don't want to be in front of the camera. better yet, the form of a relaxed improvisation is the worst thing I could do.*



*I could maybe fit into some concept (regardless of this movie) that's firm and that I can control all the way, only then I'd be comfortable in front of the camera. it's completely expected that the short trip is something semi-autobiographical, but I wouldn't be interested in improvising in front of the camera. I hope you'll find someone who can do it, and I can always give you a friendly advice on the script... bye!* Now, as I was sailing towards the destination, I was more inclined to give up, but it was too late. Why did I agree on that? I can't act; and regardless of the acting, the camera makes me scared and confused; regardless of the camera, I have shame attacks due to which I can't fit into concepts and that don't respond well to the challenge and the complexity of the situation. Besides, we talk about an adaptation of a novel whose main character drinks and parties with the rest of the characters. That was the silver lining - I can practically be drunk all of the time, that's exactly what I'm going to do. At that thought, I finished the first out of four cans of beer I packed to help me fall asleep on the ferry and then opened a new one. Some Slovenes came in a circle at the deck and sang songs that are played in clothes shops in Zagreb. The sky was a beautiful black abyss, I fell asleep. The next evening we arrived in Casalborgone, settled with a small family and went to dinner at the festival's director estate. I didn't expect everything to be so rurally improvised, I amaze myself, I didn't expect anything yet I'm still surprised. I watched the people sitting under the tent, and the people who I came with, everything really impressed me. At some point, I got up to take a piss and realized I'm already really drunk, so I decided not to search for a bathroom and took a turn to the next tree but I couldn't even hold it for so long so I started to pee as soon as I found some shadow; it was pitch dark in the village, and I was lucky, I felt something streaming down my palms and getting out. I looked ahead, beautiful black abyss again, it lasted until the morning when the clapping of Igor and Hrvoje woke me up, they were stacking the equipment.

*Are we going to film right away?* I asked.

*We're just going to drive around a bit and scout for locations when Danko wakes up, maybe we'll film something too.*

With the two of them and Danko and me, there was also Mladen who really was an actor and was supposed to play Roko. The deal was that Mladen would take over the active acting part, and my role would focus more on a *voice over*. I was a bit scared of it when a couple of days earlier Igor sent me a movie in which Mladen played and wrote: *Here, so you get the idea of Mladen, you can see his dick here too* ☺. I was afraid of how I'll match that crazy-actor-guy, but the fear disappeared the moment I met him, he really was crazy, but not in a threatening way. I didn't like this "maybe we film, maybe we don't" idea. However, it would be stupid of me to ask them to give me a concrete answer just so I could get drunk at 10 am.

I found a bottle of some white wine that was opened last night, took a glass and poured myself a half of it, brought some water and took a sip. Jesus, I can't drink on an empty stomach. Since the trip, I had one-liter plastic bottle in my bag, I spilled the rest of the water in the sink, poured wine into half of it, filled the rest of it with water and put it back in my backpack. I took the other sip after two hours, when we were wandering the forest. Danko was supposed to take portrait shots of us to see how our clothes look on camera and to know if we need to find something else to wear for the shooting. While he was shooting, I felt some layer broke, the world became softer, it seemed I could do whatever I wanted to, as if I could be sober all week and shoot, but there was no need for that. My mood wasn't spoiled when Mlado and I got sick from the water on the stream the next day. We were lying on the bed, light and pale from shitting and vomiting the entire day, the hosts were bringing us chamomile tea. A local doctor said to Igor: *They will feel awful today, but they should be fine tomorrow – still, if diarrhea and vomiting continue, you should call me and we'll take them to a hospital in Torino.* I fantasized in a slight fever that the water from the stream was seriously poisoned and that tomorrow we might not wake up. In that case, Hrve and Igor would make a film that would certainly have a sentimental value and that would track our final day, the moment when, trying to satisfy our thirst, we swallow the water which will kill us the next day. However, this was no such stream, nor such movie, at the end of the day we didn't go to Torino; but when Saturday arrived, the final day of the festival, our film was announced as the best one, and as a reward, they gave us MacBook Air laptop.

*How much money can we get for this laptop, someone asked, how much does this thing cost?*

*Six, seven thousand at least, thousand and something for each person, maybe it costs even more, seven, eight, I don't know.*

So, if I act each week in some movie where I can be drunk and not talk much and that each of those movies wins a laptop that brings us around thousand kunas, I'd have around five thousand kunas a month. On the last day, we split and clean the house before we leave. I chose the bathroom, took one of my oldest t-shirts, wiped the floor and threw the t-shirt in the trash. There was a slight drizzle on our way back. The village road was narrow for some time. Someone kept recognizing the parts we've gone through. *Here's where we filmed the tunnel. Here's where we filmed the snails. This is where the vice-mayor's girlfriend stood. Here's where we filmed Fabrizio.* I didn't recognize a thing. When we finally got to the open road, there were a couple of large road signs, and Hrve said: *Hm, I wanna go to Italy, I haven't been here since forever. Since when?* someone asked, and while she was talking, it occurred to me that this is the very first moment I'm in Italy, I said: *I've*

*never been to Italy so far, I mean, I am now. Igor burst out in laughter: ha-ha-ha, when we're talking about the places we've been to we all say - Rome, Padua, Florence... or at least Trieste, and all you'll be able to say is, yes, I was in Italy, in Casalborgone. Ha-ha-ha, well I guess we can stop by in Venice on our way back. Do you guys have time for that? Sure. Let's go. We can go.* The road got crowded later, we didn't stop by.

## Dear, We'll Record Everything

Đuro and I are shooting a young cartoonist in a house near Zagreb. At some point Đuro says: *let's film you while you're drawing.*

OK, he says and takes us to his computer.

*Do you draw it on your computer?*

*Yeah, yeah, everything is on the computer.*

*I mean ok, but it would look better on camera if you could draw something on paper... could you?*

*Sure, sure,* he says and looks for something to draw with.

He can't find anything on his desk, he's a bit upset. He looks around the room. How is it possible that he has no markers, pens, nothing? He looks around the house too, nothing. Everything looks too tidy for anything to show up unexpectedly.

*Never mind, we'll film you on your computer.*

Later we sit at the desk, Đuro asks questions. I'm trying to think of something to ask so that it doesn't turn out I'm here for nothing. He mentioned his crew, friends, I'll ask is he, as a cartoonist, the ultimate fun guy in the crew, I know he'll say that the fact he works with humor doesn't mean he's funny in his private life too, but I don't know what else to ask, we'll have more audio material this way.

*Are you, like, the funniest guy in the crew, ha?*

*Nooo,* he says, *it doesn't have to be...*

We pack the equipment and rush back to Zagreb through new tree line next to new houses, like in the American suburbs. This was easy, we'll edit the sound in the afternoon, and maybe the next day we'll even finish the video. We're in a good mood, we talk about a documentary series on social entrepreneurship that we're already writing and waiting for the final signatures to start with the production part. It's not necessarily a topic I feel very close to, but I think it will give me a year worth of money; what we don't know at the moment is that someone on HRT is just typing the mail that says they're canceling the project, meaning

I can't afford my rent anymore, I'm moving out from Zagreb, we're returning home.

*Dear all, we must inform you that we have decided that we are currently unable to accept your project. Considering the situation, we also cancel our meeting scheduled for Wednesday. Nevertheless, we must add that we really like your approach to the subject. We also want to encourage you to apply any of your future projects. Also, we suggest that you pay special attention to fees because, according to the estimated cost you sent, we think that the largest part of the budget is spent on it. Thank you for your understanding, best regards!*

\* \* \*

*Shall we go to your parents or mine?*

*Durđevac is closer to Zagreb, and Marijana can give us her room.*

*But it's getting warmer, and the summer is here soon, it's maybe better for us to go to the south first, basically it's like going on a vacation, you know, and then we move to Đ. in the fall and wait for a chance to return to Zagreb.*

*Do you know what we could do?*

*What?*

*Make a movie out of all of this, about how we have to move...*

*Sure, we'll do that; we'll record it, that's what's going to save us.*

## Durđevac

little max tells his dream:  
some grey darkness comes from space  
and starts to cover the grounds  
and to destroy everything in front of it  
what is left is durđevac  
then it covers durđevac too  
and it all disappears

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**ANTE ZLATKO STOLICA** was born in 1985 in Split, he lives in Bistra and works in Zagreb. He graduated Croatian language and Philosophy. He is author of several short documentary and feature films; coscreenwriter of *Kratki izlet* (*A Brief Excursion*), a film awarded with the Golden Arena for Best Film in 2017.