

Anto Stanić

**A SAMO JEDNOM JE POGRIJEŠIO!**

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CIP

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## **A samo jednom je pogriješio!**

Svjedok sam priče koja će u narednim redovima ove knjige teći kao planinski potok, a vi se opustite i pratite tok ...

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Bože, većini ljudi si dao križ ili križić, kako bi ga nosili na svome životnom putu, a svome sinu Isusu i još nekim ljudima ne neki obični, standardni križ, nego križinu.

Bože, oprost mi na ovoj narodnoj izreci, Ti nisi zločinac, Ti ne kažnjavaš ljude, Ti si milostiv.

Bože, Ti si nam dao um kako bismo razmišljali o svome hodu po životnom putu, ako uopće možemo kontrolirati neke situacije i okolnosti.

Bože, na životnom putu ima takvih okolnosti koje proizlaze iz zakonitosti bitisanja života na kugli zemaljskoj, te je nemoguće izbjeći neke situacije koje čovjeku zagorčavaju život toliko da mu ni najveći um ne može pomoći.

1.

Jedna stara arapska poslovice glasi: Ako ti se desi jedna nesreća, ne mora druga, a ako ti se desi i druga, treća će se desiti zasigurno, pa čak četvrta i više.

Dobri moj Bože, meni se desilo puno toga; kada će stati ta dešavanja, te nesreće?

Evo moje životne priče, naime, okolnosti koje su me pratile na životnom putu. Vjerujem kako sam neke situacije mogao izbjeći, ali većinu nisam. Da sam se bavio nekim drugim poslom, možda mi se sve ovo ne bi desilo, ali to je bilo tako; nazovimo to sudbinom, mojom sudbinom. Da se to nije desilo,

onda to ne bi bila sudbina. Životne okolnosti uređuju tok tvoga i moga života.

Moj životni put od ranoga djetinjstva je bio vrlo valovit ili, bolje reći, tekao je kao planinski potok, iako sam rođen u Slatini kod Banjaluke u prilično lijepom, ravničarskom području.

Taj planinski potok, asocijacija moga života, jedno vrijeme je, odmah nakon izvora, tekao tiho i mirno, a potom se spuštao niz jedan strmi kamenjar. Voda se razbija, pršti, leti na sve strane i poslije stotinjak metara opet se spaja u potočić.

I tako, poslije kratkoga toka, opet pad niz jednu pećinu i opet se voda razbi-izdijeli u kapi, koje se pretvoriše u maglovitu masu, kišu; visoki pad, jaki udar i opet potok i opet tok i opet veliki vodopad i opet i opet ... tako do dna visoke planine.

Tekao je, tekao mali potok i spojio se s još jednim, i poslije još jednim, te postao rječica koja se ulila-spojila u drugu veću rijeku i nestala. Masa vode je ostala, ali se spojila; nestalo je brzoga i snažnog potočića.

2.

Vozeći se od Banjaluke u pravcu sjeveroistoka, poslije petnaestak kilometara dođe se u varošicu Slatinu ili, kako je još zovu, Malo Blaško.

Prekrasna varošica prostire se na blago bregovitom zemljištu, pogodnom za zemljoradnju i voćarstvo. Mjesto je poznato po proizvodnji jagoda, malina i različitih sorti jabuka i krušaka.

Na cijelom području Slatine izvire termalne vode, po čemu je Slatina i poznata ili, točnije, njene banje za liječenje raznih bolesti.

Ako se može govoriti o raj u zemaljskom, onda je to Slatina u mjesecu travnju. Priroda obuče zelenu odjeću: voće behara, cvijeće i mnoge trave cvjetaju, pa površina Slatine postane ljepša od najljepšeg ćilima na svijetu. A tek ti silni mirisi koje stvaraju behar i cvijeće, opijajući dušu posjetitelja, prolaznika i ljudi toga kraja i dajući blažen osjećaj njihovoj duši. I još tome dodati ljepotu stotine ptica, koje pjesmom pozdravljaju jutro...

Travanjska noć: pun mjesec prosuo svoju svjetlost po tom šarenilu i kupa Slatinu, a mirisni koktel od cvijeća i termalnih voda opija šetače koji se nađu u ovom čudu prirode.

U ovoj i ovakvoj Slatini rođen sam ja, Josip Bilić, 1964. godine, u travnju, u tom najljepšem mjesecu.

Kada su moji pradjedovi tu došli, ne znam, ali otac kaže kako je i on rođen u kući u kojoj sam ja rođen. Kuća je još uvijek staroga oblika, samo je nekoliko puta unutra preuređivana, a vanjski zidovi su krečeni mnogo puta, jer je kuća uz glavnu ulicu pa se fasada brzo uprlja od prašine i plinova mnogih auta koji tuda prolaze.

Moj otac Vinko je nastavnik kemije, a mama Jelenka domaćica, tako da nikada nije bilo dovoljno novaca za generalno preuređenje kuće. Otac je, kada bi se našla koja para, volio i čašicu pića, te i izlete, a mama i ja smo životarili.

Igrao sam se, trčkarao, rastao kao i svi moji vršnjaci. I tako sam jednoga dana, kada mi je bilo pet i pol godina, naglo istrčao na ulicu i - pravo pred teretni kamion! Vozač je naglo zakočio i, srećom, uspio stati, a ja sam od straha pao pred prve kotače, ali me nisu dotakli. Mama je istrčala vidjeti što se desilo i ispričati se vozaču, jer sam bio kriv. Ja sam se podigao i pobjegao u kuću, sakrivši se iza kauča kako me mama ne bi istukla. I dok je mama nešto pričala s vozačem, ja sam pored sebe ugledao komad žice, uzeo ga i počeo gurati u utičnicu od struje. Struja me jako drmnula i opekla; vrisnuo sam od bola, mama je dotrčala i vidjela me onesviještena, te me odmah s vozačem koji me je prije nekoliko minuta umalo pregazio, odvezla u bolnicu. Srećom, brzo su me probudili i vratili kući.

Bio sam prilično dobar učenik, da li zbog oca nastavnika ili sam dobro pamtio, iako moram priznati da s knjigama nisam bio dobar drug. Kao mali volio sam razne igre, a kasnije skoro sve sportske discipline, posebno nogomet.

I tako sam, sjećam se, jednu utakmicu nogometa s mojim prijateljima pobijedio klinge iz nekog zaseoka, pa je poslije nastala tuča u kojoj sam

dobio kamen u desno oko, te su me liječnici jedva spasili od sljepila.

3.

Ljubav prema policiji, i to prometnoj, razvila se u meni tijekom osmogodišnje škole. Naime, naša škola se nalazila uz glavnu ulicu, te je školska uprava, uz pomoć policijske postaje, organizirala dežuranje na prijelazu preko glavne ulice. Učenici koji su dežurali u jutarnjim satima i na kraju nastave imali su policijske uniforme, stop tablicu i pištaljku. Kada sam ja imao dežuranje, osjećao sam se kao pravi prometni policajac i dežuranje sam obavljao vrlo savjesno. Uvijek sam za svoj savjestan rad dobivao pohvale od policije i nastavnika.

I, eto, ljubav prema tom poslu useli se u mene, te mi odredi životni poziv i životni put.

Poslije osmogodišnje škole, upisao sam srednju policijsku školu u Beogradu. Odmah na početku sam odabrao smjer prometnog policajca.

Otac i majka nisu mi ništa sugerirali oko izbora životnog poziva, i to iz više razloga; vidjeli su da volim taj poziv, školovanje je bilo besplatno, a dijete će u Beogradu proširiti svoje vidike. Ta škola je za mene bila lagana, završio sam je bez ikakve muke. Tražile su se fizička kondicija i fizičke sposobnosti; ja sam sve to imao, a bio sam dobar i iz drugih predmeta. Tri godine su prošle kao tren.

Bilo je lijepo, imao sam dobre drugove; kad nije bilo obveza u školi, šetali smo, igrali razne igre loptom i maštali o djevojkama. Ja nisam imao djevojke, nekako mi je sve bilo preče od toga.

Završio sam školu vrlo dobrim uspjehom i odmah se vratio u svoju Slatinu. Posao sam dobio za desetak dana, naime, odmah po prikupljanju dokumenata potrebnih za zasnivanje radnog odnosa. Počeo sam raditi u Banjaluci, policijska postaja u centru grada, naravno kao prometni policajac pripravnik. Posao sam obavljao lagano i jednostavno, tako da mi je sve to više izgledalo kao igra, nego kao rad. Stanovao sam u Slatini, svakog

drugog dana putovao autobusom na rad, na dežuranje.

Mama mi prigovara što nemam djevojku, a i istina je, nisam imao želje ni volje imati je, sve do subote koja je slijedila. Išao sam s drugovima na zabave, odnosno u kafiće i plesne klubove, ali, moram priznati, više me privlačilo nogometno igralište, nego piće i djevojke. Ali, naredna subota će sve to izmijeniti.

Dogovorismo se, naime, dvojica drugova i ja otići te subote u Laktaše, u jedan plesni klub. Samo što smo ušli i malo razgledali po velikoj dvorani, preletjevši pogledom po brojnim posjetiteljima kluba, ugledah jedne plave oči koje me svojom blagošću i nekom čudnom energijom okupirale i osvojiše. Poklonila mi je osmjeh i ozračila me ljubavlju. Ta čudna energija nepoznatog bića opi me, ohrabri, uli u mene čudnu snagu i volju da priđem tom biću, da ga zagrlim, poljubim i povedem kući, da mama vidi da imam djevojku.

Bez objašnjenja sam se odvojio od drugova, prišao djevojci, izgovorio svoje ime i poslije predstavljanja zadržao njenu ruku. Ispričao sam se i zamolio da mi još jednom ponovi ime. Izgovorila je polagano i jasno: Ružica Franić, šarajući po meni svojim plavim očima i hipnotizirajući me do nesvijesti. Njena ruka još uvijek je bila spojena s mojom; bile su nerazdvojive ili ih je neka unutarnja ljubavna sila spojila da se više nikada ne rastave. Njena kosa je mirisala na snove.

Poslije prvoga susreta s njom, počela su se otvarati vrata raja, sreće.

Od toga dana Ružica i ja se nismo rastajali; Ružica se, naime, uselila u mene, više me nije napuštala, nismo prekidali vezu.

Mama je bila presretna: njen sin jedinac ima djevojku! Mama je to svima pričala i hvalila se. Imala je i pravo: gdje će momku od dvadeset godina biti preča lopta od djevojke! Eto, sada se sve izmijenilo, sada je Ružica za mene centar svijeta, a ostati će to sve dok budem živ.

U vrijeme zabavljanja, odlaženja u Laktaše kod Ružice, imao sam jedan ružan doživljaj. Često sam u Laktaše odlazio sam, bez drugova, i tako



jedne srijede Ružica i ja sjedimo u jednom kafiću, zaljubljeno upijajući jedno drugo, uživamo u životu, utopili se u ljubavnu bajku, zaboravili za ovaj svijet, kad ono, bez ikakvoga pardona, priđe momak i kaže:

- Ružica je moja djevojka! - uze je za ruku i potegnu ka sebi.

U tom trenutku sam pomislio kako nitko nije jači od mene. Bez ikakvoga razmišljanja sam ga udario, i to tako jako da je odletio do trećeg stola i srušio se kao klada. Ali, prišlo mi je pet momaka i za nekoliko minuta su me isprebijali do nesvijesti, a Ružici udarili šamar i pobjegli bez traga. Završio sam u bolnici, na previjanju, a dolazeći sebi, pitao sam se što se to desi?! Jedan od tih momaka bio je zaljubljen u Ružicu, ali joj nikada nije prišao, niti bilo što rekao, izuzev nekoliko poruka poslanih preko prijateljice kako bi se želio zabavljati s njom.

4.

Mama se često žalila na bolove, ali nikad nije rekla gdje je točno boli. Išla je liječnicima, obavljala pretrage, dobivala lijekove, ali, uvijek je boljelo, nekad manje, nekad više, a otac i ja nismo je nikada zaozbiljno shvatili. Ja se zaljubio do ušiju: kada nisam bio na poslu, bio sam u Laktašima, a otac je volio društvo, karte, čašicu, izlete. Mama sama kući sa svojim bolovima, teškim disanjem i ostalim problemima.

Jednog dana za nedjeljnim ručkom, mama veoma ljutito prozbori:

- Vas dvojica se mijenjajte ili ćete me izgubiti! Ja ovako više ne mogu, uvijek sama, bolesna, tužna, nikakva...

Tata je šutio, a ja sam obećao kako ću se oženiti ako se njih dvoje slažu.

Ružicu su upoznali kad je prvi put došla u posjet mojima. Odluka za ženidbu je pala: što prije to bolje!

5.

Mama se radovala mojoj odluci da se ženim. Imala je i pravo, Ružica joj je u teškoj bolesti mnogo pomagala.

Upravo zbog mamine bolesti, nismo pravili veliku svadbu; pozvali smo samo bliže rođake iz Ružicine i moje familije. Društvo malo, ali odabrano. Bilo je veselo i svadba je obavljena u jednom restoranu bez ikakvih problema. Običaj je da se na svadbi kupi novac za mladence, pa se tako kupilo i za nas; moji roditelji su davali drugima, pa smo i mi dobili veću sumu. Po maminoj sugestiji, za prikupljeni novac smo kupili zemljište za kuću u Motikama, predgrađu Banjaluke. Mama je razmišljala: meni je bliže na posao, a i Ružica će za sebe prije naći posao tamo, bliže velikome gradu. Kuća u Slatini je svakako stara i nikakva.

Nakon svadbe, moj život je dobio pravi smisao.

Ipak, uskoro je mami bilo sve lošije i lošije, a otac je sve više pio. Ružica je sve to lijepo balansirala, a ja joj nemam prave riječi zahvale za njen korektan i lijep odnos prema mojim roditeljima, meni, a poslije i prema našem sinu, kojeg je već nosila u utrobi.

Ivan je ugledao svijet, a baka otišla u bolnice, ne mogavši više podnositi bolove. Otac je također sve više slabio, padajući u duševnu depresiju, nešto zbog mamine bolesti, a većinom zbog alkohola kojim se tješio.

Mamin boravak u gradskoj bolnici odužio se. Liječnici su pesimisti, ali se trude, pokušavaju, eksperimentiraju, bore se. Po maminom ponašanju bilo je jasno da vidi i zna kako od njenog izlječenja nema ništa. I tako, za vrijeme jednog mog posjeta, privuče me sebi i sa suzama mi priopći:

- Sine, od mene nema ništa, moja su pluća trula, ja moram putovati, a i tata s onolikom količinom pića ne može dugo. U svome pozivu, koji si sam odabrao, imat ćeš mnogo problema: ranjavanja, napada, tuča, ali ćeš uvijek ostati živ, a sinoć sanjam kako ćeš umrijeti od nekoliko rečenica koje će ti izgovoriti neka ženska osoba.

Bio sam vrlo tužan zbog maminog lošeg izgleda i još lošijeg disanja, pa joj ništa nisam odgovorio.

Ružica i ja smo počeli s izgradnjom kuće u Motikama. Radimo polako, bez žurbe, i sami pomažući majstorima. Preko tjedna stanujemo u šupi napravljenoj od dasaka za građevinski materijal. Ništa nam nije teško, u glavama su nam samo misli da mama ozdravi, ali...

Mamino srce je prestalo kucati. Veliki šok za mene, tatu i Ružicu. Sila zakon mijenja. Sahranu smo obavili po svim našim običajima i pravilima, naravno, u Slatini, na mjesnom groblju. Mamin odlazak otuđio me je od lijepe i prelijepe Slatine.

6.

Otac je još kratko vrijeme radio u školi, i, naravno, kao teški alkoholičar, na kraju dobio otkaz. Uskoro je umirovljen, što ga je još više bacilo na koljena. Pojačao je dozu alkohola i pao na dno ljudskoga dostojanstva.

Raste kuća, raste sin Ivan. Završili smo kuću, onako kako smo mogli i znali, naravno, prema svojim materijalnim mogućnostima. Uselili smo u svoju kuću i to je sada bio sasvim drugi doživljaj života. U svom, na svom! Pozivali smo i tatu da dođe živjeti s nama, ali nije bilo te sile koja bi ga nagovorila da preseli. Govorio je:

- Ovdje sam rođen, ovdje ću i umrijeti!

Od starijih ljudi sam slušao kako apsolutna sreća ne postoji, kako se ne može piti med bez žuči. Mislio sam kako ta pravila o životu ne važe za mene, već za neke druge ljude. Ružica i ja se volimo, napravili smo kuću, Ružici obećali posao, sin zdrav i lijepo raste. Pred nama je život, pred nama su vidici. Radim, zadovoljan kolegama, zadovoljan plaćom i, najvažnije, zadovoljan životom.

Mislim kako moje radne kolege nisu ni znale jesam li Hrvat ili Srbin. Uostalom, nitko o tome nije ni razmišljao, niti je to nekom mnogo značilo. Malo tko me i pitao za nacionalnost, osim kad je trebalo popuniti kojekakve formulare u kojima je bila predviđena i ta stavka.

Godina je 1992. Rat se rasplamsao u Hrvatskoj. Ni pomisliti nisam mogao da će se rat preseliti i u

Bosnu i Hercegovinu. Barem, ja, Josip, nisam to naslućivao niti sanjao. Na vijestima se moglo čuti o nekim izgredima u Hercegovini, u općini Ravno, o incidentima s jugo-armijom u Sarajevu, o postavljanju kontrolnih punktova po ulicama, sve slično onom kako su se „Nadrealisti“ šalili prije nekoliko godina. Crni oblaci se, međutim, iz Hrvatske proširile u BiH. Bili su puni mržnje i želje za osvetom za neke nepodmirene račune iz prošlih vremena. Teško je iz svijesti i podsvijesti ljudi istjerati aveti prošlosti.

Kolovoz mjesec 1993., sunce prži svom svojom toplotom, kao da želi prekinuti sve tokove života. Kolegi Simi, koji je tog vrelog dana bio sa mnom u prometnoj patroli kroz grad, zazvonila je prijemna stanica. Simo se javio i nakon nekoliko minuta razgovora rekao kako je sve razumio. Po njegovom pogledu moglo se vidjeti kako nešto nije u redu; pogledom je bježao, bio je utučen, tužan, tko zna zašto, no, nije rekao baš ništa. Nisam mogao ne upitati ga što se desilo, jer da se nešto desilo, to je na njegovom licu i u raspoloženju bilo očito.

– Josipe, komandir mi je rekao da odmah ideš kući i ne dolaziš na posao dok te ne pozovu – tužno je priopćio Simo i nastavio: – Ustaše ubijaju Srbe svugdje gdje imaju priliku, te se boji da te neko ne ubije... – promrmljao je kao da se ispričava.

To je za mene bila uvreda, ne od kolege Sime, nego uspoređivanje mene s nekim o kome nemam pojma. Što ja imam s ustašama?!

Ljutit, nikakav, jedva sam se pozdravio sa Simom i otišao kući. Ružica se obradovala i iznenadila mome ranijem dolasku s posla, no, za nekoliko trenutaka je po mom izgledu i izrazu lica shvatila kako nešto nije u redu.

Razmišljao sam o tome kako mi barem nije palo na um upitati mogu li s obitelji otići kod oca u Slatinu.

Naredne dane provodio sam kući, svakodnevno očekujući poziv za posao. Ništa nisam zgriješio, držao sam se našeg policijskog pravilnika, propisa i zakona i, mislio sam, stvarno nije postojao nikakav razlog za ovo. Greška koju će nadređeni skoro uvidjeti i pozvati me natrag, na posao.

Mi u Banjaluci rat gledamo na televiziji. U Banjaluci i oko nje rata nema. Jest se vojska slala na ratišta, progonili su Bošnjake, bilo je veliko nepovjerenje svakoga prema svakome, ali rata ovdje nema. Muči me to što ne radim, brinem se od čega ćemo živjeti. Ni s plaćom nije lako, a kamo li bez nje. Od kuće se ne smijem udaljavati, tako je poručeno, a inače bih tražio bilo kakav posao kojim mogu zaraditi neki dinar.

Dane do kraja kolovoza provodio sam s trogodišnjim sinom Ivanom i ženom Ružicom u iščekivanju poziva i povratka na posao ili bilo kakvog drugog rješenja. Prvog rujna ujutro, oko devet sati, ispred naše kuće začuše se neki glasovi. Izašao sam pozdraviti ljude i vidjeti što hoće. Čovjek nepoznata i lika i glasa osorno mi se obrati prije nego što sam uspio bilo što reći:

– Zašto, Josipe, nisi vratio službeni pištolj poslije otpuštanja s posla?

Riječi i njegov izraz lica djelovali su prijeteće. Htio sam odgovoriti kako mi nije ni rečeno da vratim pištolj, te kako čekam poziv na posao, ali me, tek što sam zaustio, dohvati njegova pesnica i obori na zemlju ispred kuće. Ružica vrisnu, suze krenuše. Narediše joj da se ne miče s kućnog praga.

Podigao sam se i šutio. Najprije su se sašaptavali, a onda onaj što me je udario glasno reče:

– Govno ustaško, najbolje je da ga odmah ubijemo!

Za tako brzu presudu dosad nisam ni čuo, a kamo li da sam je očekivao. Dok sam razmišljao o presudi, već sam bio prislonjen uza zid garaže. Čuo sam Ružicine jauke, sinovljev plač sina i rafal – triiiiiiiiiiiii! Uronio sam u smrt ili san...

7.

Budio sam se, vjerojatno buncajući; sve je bilo tako nestvarno i nepovezano da nisam mogao shvatiti ni tko sam, ni gdje se nalazim. Cerada od „tamića“ nije dozvoljavala da svjetlost prodre i obasja mene i ostale nesretnike strijeljane istog

dana kad i ja. Kasnije ću doznati da smo dovezeni u vojarnu zvanu Mali logor.

Mrtvaci oko mene već su spavali vječnim snom. Vidio sam desetak tih nesretnika u polumraku, ali još nisam bio siguran jesam li živ, je li ovo java ili možda ružan san? Nakon što je „tamić“ stao, a motor se ugasio, začuli su se glasovi. Nekako sam se uspio pridignuti na bok; strašno je boljelo, što je bio dokaz da sam ipak živ i kako sve što vidim nije nikakav san, nego stvarnost, crna stvarnost!

Netko je podigao ceradu sa zadnjeg dijela auta i zagledao mrtvace, istodobno zapovjediвши nekim ljudima da odvezu i zatrpaju nas koji smo ležali na kamionu. Prenuo sam se kada je prodorni glas vrisnuo:

– Što ti, lijenčino, radiš među mrtvima, zašto izbjegavaš obaveze?

Shvatio sam da je vrisak bio upućen meni. Htio sam reagirati na zapovijed vlasnika glasa da pođem s njim, ali nisam mogao. Jaka bol ponovno me oborila na mjesto na kome sam dotad ležao. Izustio sam bolan jauk, koji se čuo daleko od auta. Prišli su neki ljudi kako bi vidjeli je li to netko na kamionu još uvijek živ. Meni poznat glas naredio je da me odvedu u ambulantu.

Liječnik je konstatirao veliku ranu u predjelu trbuha, s lijeve strane. Trideset dana sam ostao u ambulanti. Cijelo vrijeme se netko brinuo, imao simpatije prema meni, pomagao mi preko drugih, ali nikada nisam otkrio o kome je riječ.

Pet mjeseci sam ostao u Malom logoru. Prvih nekoliko mjeseci nisam radio ništa. Boravio sam u zatvorenom prostoru, a hranili su nas toliko da se ne umre. Nikoga ništa nisam smio pitati. Oni koji su se usudili, istog trena bi dobili bezbroj uvreda, teških psovki, a često i udaraca. Zato je najbolje bilo šutjeti i nikog ništa ne pitati.

Preko „Crvenog križa“, čiji aktivisti su nas dvaput posjetili, slao sam Ružici poruke da sam živ, no, odgovora nije bilo. Radio sam koliko sam mogao. Tukli su nas, i to često, što je bio njihov način uvjeravanja da moramo i možemo više. Omalovažavali su nas, svakodnevno u nama

ubijajući preostale mrvice ljudskog dostojanstva. Na mom i tijelima ostalih zatočenika nije bilo centimetra koji batine ili šake nisu dotaknule.

Jednog dana, nakon čitave vječnosti, upitaše me želim li razmjenu? U Mostar? Prihvatio sam. Bilo gdje, samo da idem odavde. Za nekoliko dana bio sam u Mostaru.

Slobodan, ponovno rođen, ponovno živ!

8.

Rafal ispaljen u Josipa prestrašio je i onesvijestio Ružicu. Susjedi su čuli rafal, ali se nisu usuđivali prići Josipovoj kući dok se „tamić“ i patrola nisu udaljili. Sin Ivan izašao je iz kuće i ugledao majku kako leži na zemlji ispred kućnog praga. Ljubio je majku i budio je, cijelo vrijeme plačući.

Ružica se nije budila. Pristigli su i susjedi, koji su je jedva uspjeli povratiti. Kontrolirali su puls, živa je, to je tog trenutka bilo najvažnije! Masirali su je i zalijevali vodom. Čim je došla sebi, vrisnula je:

– Gdje mi je Ivan, gdje mi je Josip???

Ivan je bio tu, privio se majci oko vrata. Toliko jako ga je stezala uza se, da su susjedi mislili kako će ga povrijediti.

Ružica je zašutjela, njen se život pretvorio u prah; iz usta nisu izlazile riječi, izgledala je kao da je nijema. Ljubila je Ivana plačući, ridajući bez prekida.

Kasno uvečer našla je snage pitati susjede gdje je odvezeno Josipovo tijelo, no, nitko nije znao odgovor. Netko ju je oprezno posavjetovao da ne pita mnogo i da ne prosvjeduje, može je snaći i gora nevolja, ipak je tu i dijete, njega mora sačuvati, zaštititi.

Danima nakon toga, Ružica sa susjedima, izuzev s Jokom, najboljom prijateljicom, nije progovorila ni riječi. Razgovarala je sa sinom dok su bili sami, a tako je najčešće bilo, jer su susjedi nerado zalazili i u dvorište, pomalo se plašeći Ružicine reakcije. Vijesti o mjestu Josipovog pokopa nikada nije dobila.

Dani dugi kao godine. Sve više se otuđivala od ljudi, od susjeda, više nikome nije vjerovala; već u rano popodne zaključavala se u kuću, ne otvarajući vrata nikome osim Joki. Zalihe hrane polako su nestajale, ali ih je Joka nekako popunjavala, naravno, onoliko koliko je mogla odvojiti od svoje djece.

Tri mjeseca nakon Josipova strijeljanja, Joka je na lokalnoj radiopostaji čula poziv da se „Crvenom križu“ prijave svi oni koji se u sadašnjim uvjetima ne osjećaju sigurnima tamo gdje trenutno borave. Oprezno je to prenijela Ružici, plašeći se da ne bude krivo shvaćena. Ružica ju je odmah zamolila da je prijavi za odlazak, i to, ako je moguće, u Švedsku. I doista, nakon kraćeg vremena, Ružici dođe poziv da donese svoje i Ivanove osobne dokumente. Ta vijest ju je podigla iz mrtvih.

Otišla je na razgovor i odmah predala dokumente potrebne za odlazak. Službenici su bili veoma ljubazni i nisu mnogo pitali o strašnim zbivanjima pred kućom.

Izlazak iz Banjaluke Ružica je iščekivala radosno, iako joj je bilo žao ostaviti uspomene, sva ona mjesta na kojim je udisala život, kao i grobove predaka. Ipak, samoj sebi je već na početku kazala: „A što ću ja tu kad više nema moga Josipa?“

9.

I, jednog dana je napokon došao autobus Crvenog križa, u koji se ukrcalo četrdesetak osoba, staraca, žena i djece. Krajnje odredište: Uppsala u Švedskoj. Svejedno mi je bilo kad ćemo doći u Švedsku, samo da pređemo Savu, pa neka to traje koliko hoće. Sve do hrvatske granice pogledala sam iz autobusa da ne stigne patrola ili neko drugi, pa da ne kaže: nazad u Banjaluku! Prešli smo hrvatsku granicu, a to je bio moj drugi rođendan. Sva ostala zbivanja do Uppsale nisu bila toliko bitna.

Po dolasku u Uppsalu, Ivan i ja smo smješteni u jedan mali motel. Dobili smo jednu prilično veliku sobu, a ostale prostorije bile su zajedničke, ali su pristojno izgledale i dobro funkcionirale. Morala



sam odmah početi pohađati tečaj švedskog jezika. Nije bilo teško. Bilo je dobro biti zauzet bilo kakvim obvezama kako bi se što manje mislilo na prošlost. Novčana primanja bila su prilično velika, pa se moglo solidno živjeti.

Nakon kiše uvijek dolazi sunce, pa makar i nakratko, to se oduvijek zna. Moj četverogodišnji Ivan i ja došli smo do sebe. Josipa nikad nisam i neću zaboraviti, ali se i bez njega moralo živjeti. Oboje učimo švedski jezik, i to dobro i brzo. Meni je ponuđen posao, koji nisam odmah prihvatila, jer još uvijek nisam imala dovoljno povjerenja u svoje fizičke i psihičke sposobnosti.

Po nagovoru novih prijatelja, poslije dva mjeseca boravka prihvatila sam čistiti kuću kod nekih bogatih Šveda. Bili su zadovoljni mojim radom i dobro su me plaćali.

Ivan i ja smo kao jedno biće: navikli se u Uppsali, stekli mnogo dobrih prijatelja, dišemo punim plućima, odbijamo od sebe misli koje nam kvare raspoloženje. Josip počiva u miru Božjem i u našim prekrasnim uspomenama.

Kontaktirali smo i s drugim našim ljudima, zemljacima, mada prilično rijetko, jer svaki je susret i podsjećanje na zlo koje se dogodilo. U takvim susretima se, naime, uglavnom priča o onome što je bilo, mnogo manje o onome što je sada. U jednom od takvih susreta spominjale se i vijesti iz Crvenog križa: obitelji i pojedinci traže svoje najmilije, raseljene po cijeloj Europi.

Tako jednog dana do mene stiže i vijest da Josip Bilić iz Mostara traži ženu Ružicu koja bi se trebala nalaziti u Švedskoj. U prvi mah to je za mene bio veliki šok, a potom, kad sam se malo smirila, shvatila sam to kao nečiju neodgovornu i neozbiljnu šalu. Moj Josip je ubijen ima tome gotovo godina dana. Vidjela sam svojim očima. Tko je u stanju igrati se s takvim stvarima, pitala sam se?

Međutim, mjesec dana kasnije, poruka je ponovljena:

- Josip Bilić traži suprugu Ružicu i sina Ivana u Švedskoj i moli da se ona, ili onaj tko zna gdje se točno nalaze Ružica i Ivan, javi na brojeve telefona: te i te.

10.

Ja sam se, poslije dolaska u Mostar, odmah zaposlio u tamošnjoj policiji. Trebalo mi je dosta vremena da počnem normalno razmišljati, da se priviknem na novu sredinu i oslobodim se straha, jer sam se poslije strijeljanja bojao i vlastite sjenke.

O Ružici i sinu nisam znao ništa osim da su u Švedskoj i da su, prema tome, izvukli žive glave. Nisam mirovao, pitao sam, tragao za ženom koju sam doista iskreno volio bezgranično, kao i sina. Nikad nisam ni pomislio da bi me Ružica mogla ostaviti ili zaboraviti da sam mrtav.

Preko svoga komandira upoznao sam nekoliko osoba koje su mi obećali pomoći. Iz Crvenog križa su javili da su moju poruku već više puta slali u eter i da im nije jasno kako poruka još nije stigla do Ružice, ako je doista živa i nalazi se u Švedskoj.

Travanj u Mostaru može biti tako vruć, sunce prži mostarsku dolinu. Dvadeset sedam gradi oko četrnaest sati, dvadeset drugoga spomenutog mjeseca.

Prijemna stanica je zvonila; ništa neobično, zvoni stalno. Ja sam se javio, ali je ovoga puta bilo drugačije: zvao je komandir Goran, no, ne zbog posla, nego zbog nečega sasvim drugog:

– Josipe, zvali su iz Crvenoga križa i rekli da im se javila neka Ružica iz Uppsale i rekla da ima sina Ivana, ali tvrdi kako je njen muž Josip već duže vrijeme mrtav, te kako je ona osobno vidjela strijeljanje pred njihovom kućom. Rekla je kako ih moli da prestanu objavljivati poruku, jer je to nečija neslana šala – u jednom dahu je završio komandir.

Vrućina i komandirove riječi su me gotovo bacili na zemlju. Kroz mene je kao strijela proletjela misao:

- Udala se i više ne želi čuti za mene!

Bljuvao sam očaj i bijes iz sebe, umotao se u tugu i bol, tražeći svježeg zraka.

11.

Očaj se spustio na mene kao teška kišna noć. Kolega Davor, s kojim sam dežurao, brzo je primijetio kako se sa mnom dešava nešto strašno. Pozvao je patrolu da nas zamijeni, odveo me u obližnju gostionicu, naručio mi hladno piće i zamolio me da mu sve ispričam.

Davore, moj jedini prijatelju u Mostaru, shvati me! Do devetnaeste godine nisam imao djevojku, tada sam upoznao Ružicu i poslije kraćeg zabavljanja se oženio. Volim je i ona je voljela mene. Napravili smo kuću u Banjaluci, dobili sina Ivana i dođe taj prokleti rat.

Nisam mogao piti sok, tražio sam travaricu, i to duplu, iako u životu nikad nisam pio alkohol. Ispio sam travaricu naskap i, naravno, tražio još jednu rundu za sebe i Davora. Ponekad je potrebno zatvoriti oči i pustiti muziku da uđe u nas i spere tegobe s naše duše.

Tog trenutka popio odmah bih litru da mi je Davor dozvolio. Počeo je i Davor piti i pričati o svome neuspjelom braku i kako krivi sve žene na svijetu da su...

Mogao je on pričati što želi, ali ja sam o mojoj Ružici imao prekrasno mišljenje. Ona je bila jedna krasna žena; kad se samo sjetim kako je pazila moju bolesnu mamu i tatu alkoholičara.

Davore, moja Ružica je doista vidjela kada su me strijeljali ispred naše kuće i kako su me mrtvog ubacili na „tamić“. Ona doista misli da sam mrtav i da se neko šali sa njom.

Pa dobro, neka se i udala, ali da je meni vidjeti moga jedinka Ivana! Kako se koja čašica više popila, tako se u mene sve više i više uvlačila sumnja kako se Ružica ne želi vratiti i vidjeti me. Pa da, našla nekoga i lijepo uživa u toj Švedskoj, u blagodatima visokoga standarda!

Vrijeme je prolazilo, a misli se sukobljavale jedne s drugima; gostionica puna ljudi i dima, i priče koju više niko nije mogao razumjeti. Davor je zapetljivao jezikom, tako da ga više ništa nisam mogao razumjeti.

- Oprostite, možemo li sjesti za vaš sto? - prozborio je glas mlađe simpatične žene. Klimnuo sam glavom i pokazao na dva slobodna mjesta za našim stolom. Žene su pristojno pozdravile, sjele, te ljubaznim pogledom prošarale po nama. Želio sam ispasti fin i odmah ženske upitao što žele piti?

- Oprostite, što se ovdje slavi? - opet je upitala ona što je tražila da sjednu za naš stol.

Davor nije bio ni svjestan novoga društva, no, on je već dugo bio u snovima, tako da sam joj ukratko objasnio o čemu se radi. Ženske su na moje insistiranje također popile jedno ljuto piće, pa drugo, treće i...

Ja sam ih nekoliko puta pitao za imena i opet ih zaboravljao, ali sam zapamtio da je jedna izbjeglica iz Konjica, a druga iz Rame, tu se našle, te skupa žive u jednom stanu. Ona iz Konjica je plavuša, a onaj iz Rame kosa je obojena u crveno.

Mene je boljela moja Ružica, misli su letjele u Švedsku njoj i Ivanu. Mislio sam: da li ću ih više ikada vidjeti? Njihovi glasovi su mi bili najljepša melodija života.

Djevojke su primijetile odsutnost mojih misli, pa su me zamolile da pričam o toj lijepoj dami iz Švedske. Priznao sam sve, ispričao sve, ali mi ni nakon toga nije bilo lakše. Probudio se i Davor; bio je dobar, nije hrkao. Ugledao je lijepe djevojke i odmah došao sebi.

Tražio je piće za cijelo društvo, i to da ga popijemo naiskap. Svi su popili, pa sam morao i ja. Ta čaša će me opiti do kraja; bio sam fizički prisutan, ali od alkohola više nisam mogao razmišljati. Čuo sam još samo nekoliko plavušinih rečenica:

- Je li ovaj muško? Nikada nisam vidjela da muškarac toliko žali ženu! Ja sam u Konjicu izgubila roditelje, sestru, rođake, momka i lijepu kuću, pa evo me, živa, ne mogu se ubiti, a ovaj piz...

Alkohol je učinio svoje, ja sam utonuo u san, a Davor je nastavio priču i svoje viđenje svega, kao i dogovor o spavanju kod njega u stanu.

Sunčevi zraci su se uvlačili kroz prozor u sobu u kojoj sam spavao. Budio sam se, u glavi je bubnjalo kao afrički ritmovi na malim bubnjevima. Pokušao sam progledati i vidjeti koliko je sati, kako

ne bih zakasnio na posao. Poslije nekoliko pokušaja, progledao sam i ugledao plavušu: leži pored mene i spava kao zaklana.

Digao sam paniku te sam sve probudio. Davor je provirio kroz vrata i rekao da nastavim spavati. S komandrom je sredio da ne idemo na posao. Probudena plavuša otvorila je oči, razgledala okolo i ugledala mene, pa kao iz rafala ispalila:

- Bio si dobar, ali si stalno spominjao svoju ženu!

Nisam mogao povjerovati da se to desi meni: da se napijem, da prevarim Ružicu, da ne znam ni gdje sam, ni tko sam! To mi je prvo opijanje u životu, a da bogdo nisam ni ovog puta!

Plavušu i crvenokosu poželio sam nikada više vidjeti, ali život je nepredvidljiv, čudan i zagonetan.

12.

Tu večer i avanturu brzo sam zaboravio, ali je i dalje ostao problem: zašto se Ružica ne javi, pa makar rekla i da se udala? Želim vidjeti i čuti svoga Ivana!

Zbog svega sam bio zabrinut i nikakav, nesposoban za poslove prometnoga policajca.

Prijatelji su mi i dalje željeli pomoći u uspostavljanju kontakta, ali, Bože, kako, kada se ne želi javiti?!

Najbolju ideju iznio je komandir Goran: osobno će, preko svojih veza, uspostaviti kontakt s Ružicom i uvjeriti je kako sam živ i da radim u mostarskoj policiji. Istog je dana napisao pismo policijskoj postaji u Uppsali, zamolivši ih da pronađu Ružicu Bilić i proslijede mu njen broj telefona.

Već sutradan je broj Ružicinog telefona bio na Goranovom stolu. Goran me pozvao u svoj ured, kako bi bio nazočan razgovoru i bio svjedok, ako to kojim slučajem bude potrebno.

Smjestio sam se u fotelju, tresući se kao jasikov list. Goran je birao brojeve i, poslije kraćeg vremena, telefon je zazvonio. Ženski glas s druge strane pomalo sumnjičavo je zapitao:

- Tko zove i što želi?

Goran je odgovorio smirenim glasom: kako zove iz policijske postaje u Mostaru u kojoj je komandir i da želi da ga osoba s druge strane samo strpljivo sasluša, ako ima vremena, ili će on nazvati drugi put.

Iznenadena Ružica je nakon kratke stanke i očite zbunjenosti rekla da će ga saslušati. Goran je, sada već nešto glasnijim i dostojanstvenim glasom, ponovio:

- Ovdje komandir policijske postaje Mostar. Kod nas radi Josip Bilić iz Banjaluke, koji već nekoliko mjeseci traži ženu Ružicu i sina Ivana. Čuo je da su u Švedskoj, u Uppsali, a nikako da mu se jave.

S druge strane se začuo jauk, pa plač, i veza je prekinuta. Goran nije odustajao, pa je nakon pola sata ponovno birao brojeve u Švedskoj. Ponovno se javio glas pun ljutnje:

- Tko god da ste, molim vas da me ostavite na miru! – oštro je, gotovo prijeteći, kazala Ružica.

Goran ju je najljubavnije zamolio da ne prekida vezu, te da će joj dati njenog muža kako bi razgovarala s njim. Uzeo sam slušalicu i počeo:

- Ružice, tvoj muž je preživio strijeljanje u Banjaluci, ostao živ, te u razmjeni dospio do Mostara...

Veza je, međutim, ponovno prekinuta, tko zna da li namjerno ili opet zbog šoka izazvanog viješću. Goran je uporan, pokušali smo i treći put. Čim je telefon zazvonio, Goran mi je dao slušalicu. Stajao pored mene kako bi mi pomogao u slučaju da se desi nešto nepredviđeno; možda bi mi moglo pozzliti.

- Ružice... Ružice... Ružice... - ponavljao sam bez daha. Prepoznao sam njen glas i nastavio:

- Ljubavi, ja sam, živ sam, tvoj Josip, živ sam, Bog je tako htio, živ sam, nemoj bacati slušalice, reci nešto da ti čujem glas, reci, reci ...

Ružica je kroz plač jedva uspjela izustiti nekoliko riječi, zamolivši me da je nazovem za nekoliko minuta. Čuli smo se i dogovorili o svemu. Za desetak dana Ružica i Ivan bili su u Mostaru, u mome zagrljaju. Ponovno sam čuo Ružicin i Ivanov glas najljepšu muziku moga života!

13.

Onaj Mostar koji sam vidio poslije moga dolaska i onaj koji sam doživljavao dok sam čekao Ružicu i Ivana da stignu iz Švedske, nešto je drugo u odnosu na ovaj koji vidim i doživljam sada. Sada je to jedan lijepi, veseli i topli grad. Prije mi je bilo hladno u srcu, a sada, otkako je obitelj tu, ja sam drugi čovjek u kontekstu moga raspoloženja i životnoga bioritma.

Mnogo je dana trebalo dok smo Ružica i ja ispričali jedno drugome što se sve dešavalo i kako je prošla cijela vječnost dok smo se ponovno našli u zagrljaju. Ružica još uvijek nije u svakom trenutku vjerovala da sam živ, te me je pipala i gledala kao da sam duh.

„Vrijeme liječi rane“, kaže stara dobra izreka, a tako će biti i s nama.

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Patrolirajući kroz grad, negdje iza Aluminijskog kombinata, ugledao sam na jednoj staroj kući natpis da je na prodaju. Kuća je stara, mala, prizemna, zapuštena, ali, Bože moj, za početak je dobra. Ako ništa drugo, tu je plac, a može se, za nevolju, preurediti i za stanovanje. Zapisao sam telefon i prvom prilikom ću nazvati taj broj. Naravno, Ružici još ništa neću reći.

Nazvao sam, a javio se stariji čovjek, vlasnik kuće, neki Vaso Jovanović, koji sada živi u Trebinju.

- Kuća je na prodaju, onakva kakva je, jedan kroz jedan na meni. Kada se bude moglo prevesti, ja ću doći u Mostar, a cijena: osam hiljada maraka, jeftinije ne dam - stari je to izrecitirao kao pjesmu i prekinuo vezu.

Desetak dana smo Ružica i ja pričali o kupnji; obilazili, maštali kako ćemo je srediti i napraviti kućicu u cvijeću.

Ružica je, zahvaljujući komandiru Goranu već, počela raditi u hotelu „Ero“. Dvije kakve-takve plaće, a Ružica je u Švedskoj i nešto uštedila - možemo

kupiti kuću! Dogovor je pao, ali, još je rat, kako stupiti u kontakt s Vasom iz Trebinja?

Opet je moj komandir Goran potegao svoje veze i vezice: za nekoliko dana je napravljen ugovor, potpisan u Trebinju, ključevi dostavljeni i novac uručen. Poslije mjesec dana, obitelj Bilić je ponovo u svojoj kući, ali ne u Slatini, ne u Banjalući, već u Mostaru, naselje Rodoč.

Čudne su ljudske sudbine, i, još čudnije nego što čovjek može i zamisliti. Poslije pet godina kućica je doista bila kao iz bajke: sav svoj trud, novac i ljubav uložili smo u nju. Često sam stajao ispred kućice i prostirao misli tamo preko livada, odmarajući se i sjećajući se Slatine.

Prijatelji su dolazili na kavu i divili se našem trudu i mašti uloženom u kuću. Najčešći gost bio nam je komandir Goran sa svojom suprugom Irenom; on je, ustvari, i bio najbolji prijatelj moje obitelji.

Ako mislite da sam zaboravio moga oca Vinka, varate se. Naime, odmah poslije Dejtonskog sporazuma uspostavio sam kontakt sa Slatinom i do dana današnjih, 1999., o ocu nisam čuo ništa. Od 1993. ga više nitko nije niti vidio, niti čuo. Kuća je u raspadanju, sve je polupano, pa se vlast raspituje hoće li je netko popraviti ili srušiti?

Još uvijek ne mogu ni pomisliti na odlazak u Slatinu, bez obzira na materijalnu korist od moguće prodaje kuće i okućnice.

Ružica je išla u Laktaše, ali nije našla svoje roditelje, oni su odavno u Hrvatskoj. Poslije se s roditeljima vidjela nekoliko puta, oni su dolazili u Mostar, a i Ružica išla kod njih u Okučane.

Ružica je bila i u Slatini, raspitivala se za moga oca, ali od njega nema ni traga, ni glasa. Sjećaju se neki susjedi da su ga viđali, i to uvijek u pripitom stanju.

14.

Godine 2000. dobili smo nekoliko telefonskih poziva iz Slatine i Banjaluke, a radilo se o ponudama za kupovinu naših kuća. Na prve pozive nismo



reagirali, čekali smo na bolje ponude, na veće cijene. U obiteljskom razgovoru o prodaji bili smo demokratični, uvažavajući sve želje, kao i razlog za čekanje. Naime, ja sam čekao bolju cijenu, Ružica je čekala Ivanovu odluku, jer je on često spominjao djeda Vinka i tako se sve odužilo nekoliko mjeseci. Neki kupci su bili nestrpljivi, maltene su nas molili da prodamo.

Početkom jeseni umro je Ružicin otac, te se prodaja dodatno odužila. Obavili smo sahranu u Laktašima i sugerirali Ružicinoj mami da i ona proda svoju kuću. U kući su živjeli podstanari s kojim nije imala nikakvih problema. Ružicina majka ipak je odgodila prodaju za neka bolja vremena, a mi smo naše kuće prodali, mislim na onu u Slatini i u Banjaluci. Cijene kuća bile su prilično dobre ili, bolje reći, odgovarajuće kupovnoj moći tih godina. Sve pravne poslove oko kuća obavila je Ružica, s mojom punomoći, ovjerenom u općini. Ja ne bih išao u Banjaluku ni po cijenu da su kuće propale i da za njih nismo uzeli nijednu marku.

Čitao sam u tisku kako se biskup Komarica cijelim svojim bićem bori za opstanak i povratak Hrvata u Banjaluku i okolicu. Imam o njemu visoko mišljenje i neka se on bori i dalje, a ja, u koga je ispaljen rafal, ali je, zahvaljujući Bogu i dobrim ljudima, ostao živ, ne mogu ni pomisliti da vidim Banjaluku.

Strijeljan sam samo zato što sam Hrvat. Pa jesam li ja kriv što me rodi majka Hrvatica, kriv za zlodjela nekih političkih stranaka i ideologija, pa da zbog toga budem strijeljan?

Dogovor je pao: pola novaca od prodaje oročiti Ivanu za školovanje, a od druge polovice podići jedan kat na postojećoj kući i tako nadograditi Ivanu stan. Ivan je bio protiv oročavanja novca, misleći kako će ga, ako ga ima sada, biti uvijek. Mladi ljudi ne znaju da u životu, kroz život, možeš danas imati ogroman kapital, a sutra postati bijeda, prosjak.

„Od viška glava ne boli“, kažu stari ljudi. Čak sam jednom prigodom rekao Ivanu:

- Sine, moje zanimanje je velika opasnost, svakoga trenutka može se desiti da ostanem invalid ili, još gore, poginem. Što onda, tko će te školovati?

Želja mi je da završiš fakultet i ne ideš u patrole, gdje se uvijek možeš poginuti.

Ružica je na to dodala:

- Josipe, o zlu nije dobro ni pričati, gluho bilo!

15.

Već duže vremena, prije odlazak na posao, komandir je isticao kako trebamo obratiti pozornost na auta za koja se sumnja da se njima krijumčari droga. Navodno, krijumčari su iz Crne Gore ušli u Bosnu i Hercegovinu i kreću se prema Mostaru, Sarajevu, a poslije će vjerojatno u Zagreb i dalje, prema zapadu. Priopćili smo da smo razumjeli i otišli patrolirati.

- A što smo razumjeli? - komentirali smo Davor i ja: na autima ne piše tko je u njima i tko je rasturač, možeš samo slučajno potrefiti na njih, te dobiti batina, pa i više od toga. Ipak, poziv smo sami birali, zavoljeli ga, radimo ga, opasnost je naše zanimanje.

Moj prijatelj Davor bio je dobar čovjek. Već mnogo godina smo skupa na poslu, deset godina nerazdvojni, sada je 2004. Stalno smo u patrolama od Bijelog Polja do Čapljine, kao i po gradu Mostaru. Uvjerio sam se da bi Davor život dao za mene. Jedina moja primjedba na njegov rad je ova: zbog rastave sa suprugom, u patroli je bio grub sa vozačicama, a često i s muškarcima, ako mu je dan bio loš. Ja sam pokušavao uvijek biti isti, bez obzira na raspoloženje.

Sunčan dan, ne može biti ljepši. Sunce obasjalo mostarsku dolinu i unijelo u Davora i mene neko čudno raspoloženje, da je bilo teško odgonetnuti razlog te imaginarne sreće, sreće izazvane klimatskim uvjetima.

Iz stanice je javljeno da patroliramo od Čapljine do Žitomislića i da kontroliramo svaki treći ili četvrti putnički auto. Kako rečeno, tako učinjeno! Zauzeli smo položaj iza jedne oštrije krivine blizu

Žitomislića. Mijenjali smo se u kontroliranju osoba i prtljaga; jedan bi stajao dvadesetak ili više metara od našeg auta i gledao reagiranje vozača na kontrolu. Nismo imali većih problema ni bilo kakvih primjedbi. Vozači k'o vozači, uvijek primjedbe: žuri im se, već su kontrolirani, je li to opet pljačka ...

Oko trinaest sati napravili smo pauzu i otišli nešto pojesti. Brzo smo završili s jelom i opet se vratili na isto mjesto kako bismo nastavili s kontrolom. Davor će gledati na reagiranja, a ja ću zaustavljati i pregledati. Samo što sam zaustavio vozilo i ljubazno zaustiti tražiti vozačku dozvolu od vozača, zadnja vrata su se naglo otvorila, a iz auta je izjurio mlađi čovjek i bacio se na mene kao panter. Nisam to očekivao, iako mi je bilo sumnjivo zašto izlazi tako brzo. On je brzo izašao, a ja sam sporo razmišljao i zato se više ničega nisam sjećao.

\*\*\*

Ni oči nije mogao otvoriti, ali je znao kako ga supruga Ružica drži za ruku. Pokušao se probuditi, ali je ponovno utonuo u nesvijest. Poslije nekoliko minuta ponovno je davao znake života. Htio je podići očni kapak, ali je trud bio uzaludan. Soba je bila puna prijatelja, i iz policijske postaje i iz susjedstva. Neka lica je prepoznao, a mnoga i nije. Posebno je primjećivao liječnike i sestre u bijelim mantilima. Na trenutke mu se činilo kako ga sve boli, a pogotovu dok ga je sestra okretala u krevetu.

Josip nije imao pojma gdje se nalazi, jedva je znao tko je uopće. Tijekom narednih nekoliko dana um mu se razbistrio, a moć govora počela mu se vraćati. U Josipovu sobu ulazilo je mnogo ljudi, čak i nepoznatih sugrađana, građana Mostara, ali su svi brzo izlazili. To je bila zahvalnost za otkrivanje još jedne grupe rasturača droge.

Rekli su Josipu da je pet dana bio bez svijesti. Bila je to posljedica udaraca i ranjavanja zadobivenih od krijumčara, dok se nije pojavio njegov kolega. Davor je pucao na njih, bilo ih je trojica, te jednoga ranio; taj je kasnije bio veoma važan u priznavanju počinjenog djela.

Davor je mislio da je Josip mrtav, ali ne, evo Josipa u bolnici, živ, dolazi sebi, već prepoznaje rodbinu i prijatelje.

Josip se nije mogao sjetiti kako se desio susret s rasturačima droge. U snu je imao reprodukciju događaja, ali bi, čim bi se probudio, sve zaboravio.

Jednog od narednih dana u posjet u bolnicu došli su mu načelnik policije i gradonačelnik. Susret je bio dirljiv. Suze su se pojavile na licima i kod jednoga i kod drugoga načelnika. Zagrljaji, poljupci i zahvalnost uime svih građana Mostara.

- Tvoja hrabrost je otkrila 90 kg droge - s velikom zahvalnošću su isticali dva čelna čovjeka Mostara i dodali:

- Koliko je mladih ljudi spašeno od lažne sreće, od imaginacija ljepote, od bježanja iz stvarnosti, od fizičkog i psihičkog propadanja mladih tijela i ...

Josip je u bolnici ostao četiri mjeseca, u banjama dva mjeseca, na bolovanju ukupno godinu dana. Kroz cijelo vrijeme liječenja njegova desna ruka bili su supruga i sin. Oni su mu bili smisao života i glavni razlog ozdravljenja. Ivanu je već četrnaesta godina, odličan učenik, razmišlja o upisu u srednju školu, voli sve sportove kao i tata.

- Samo da se ne zaljubi kao ja! - često je naglašavao tata.

- Hvala Bogu da je sasvim ozdravio, te ponovo počeo raditi svoj posao i bez ikakvoga straha od ponovnih napada. U Josipa su krijumčari ugradili meteorološku stanicu, te više nije imao potrebe slušati vremensku prognozu – šalila se Ružica, opisujući teške dane svoga dragoga Josipa.

16.

Lijepo nedjeljno popodne. Bračni par iz susjedstva, Ružica i ja, sjedimo u cvjetnom vrtu ispred moje kuće. Inače, mi sa svim susjedima imamo dobre odnose, na principu: ne miješaj mi se u život, niti ću ti se miješati, vodi svoj život kako znaš i umiješ. Ovoga puta susjedi Ivanka i Miro došli su, kao i mnogi drugi, čestitati na priznanju za hrabrost.

Naime, Davor i ja smo na Dan Grada Mostara, na svečanoj sjednici Gradskog vijeća, dobili usmena i pismena priznanja za hvatanje skupine rasturača droge. Mostarske, kao i druge novine su o tome mnogo pisale, mada je, ispostaviti će se, bilo bolje da nisu.

Na stolu je kava, nekoliko vrsta kolača, voće, a naravno i vinice. Vino ne miruje ni u buretu, a kamo li u stomaku, pa se uskoro počelo i pomalo pjevushiti. U međuvremenu je došlo još nekoliko susjeda; pravo sijelo, prava proslava. Vicevi, šala, pjesma, pa što drugo, naravno, uz zdravlje i obiteljsku ljubav, treba čovjeku!

Odjednom je Ivan istrčao iz kuće kao metak i pozvao mene da se javim na telefon:

- Tata, zove neki gospodin i traži tebe!

Prekinuo sam pjesmu i otišao na telefon. Odmah poslije moga halo, ispaljen je čitav rafal riječi:

- Ti primaš priznanja, a mi, ovisnici, ne možemo živjeti bez droge! Ženu ćemo ti silovati sutra nanoć, a Ivana kidnapovati i zadržati sve dok nam ne vratite svu oduzetu drogu!

Vratio sam se u veselo društvo, praveći se kao da se nije desilo ništa važno. Nastavljeno je s pjesmom; sada je Ružica započinjala onu *Cvati, ružo moja*. Zvučalo je tako lijepo i tečno kao da smo vježbali dugo vremena.

Ipak, Ružica je na mom licu lako primijetila da nešto nije u redu i neprimjetnim znakom je pitala što je? Tresem se kao prut, ali pjevam još jače i još bolje. Kao da je dragi Bog dao, dođe i kolega Davor. Susjedi su i njemu odmah čestitali priznanje za hrabrost.

Ispričao sam se svima i odvojio Davora na stranu, te mu odmah rekao što se zbilo prije dvadesetak minuta. Davor je odmah otišao i iz postaje donio kontrolor i snimatelj poziva, a u dogovoru s komandrom odmah je organizirao osiguranje kuće, Ivanov odlazak u školu i Ružicin na posao. Sijelo je nastavljeno do iza dvanaest sati, a kratko nakon toga sve je utonulo u tišinu.

Poziv je obnovljen u srijedu, još drskije i s još drastičnijim prijetnjama, ali, to je bio kraj, jer se

čovjek koji je zvao upecao na jeftini mamac. Poslije poziva, za nekoliko sati, drogirani momak i djevojka bili su u policijskoj postaji. Odmah su priznali kako je dogovor njih nekoliko ovisnika da ucijene mene, kako bih ja molio policijsku upravu da vrati drogu ovisnicima, odnosno grupi koja je sve ovo smislila.

Kraj dobar, sve dobro, ali život teče dalje i donosi nove radosti i nove probleme.

17.

Svanuo je svjež lipanjski dan. Noću je padala kiša, te okupala grad i osvježila zrak. Kako je u Mostaru lijepo lagano disati poslije kiše! I ja sam se probudio svjež i veseo. Trebam na posao. Bilo mi je neobično bez moga dugogodišnjeg radnog kolege Davora. On je s novom prijateljicom otišao na godišnji odmor na more. Ja sam za patroliranje dobio novoga mladoga kolegu. Za danas smo za kontrolu prometa dobili relaciju od Mostara prema Čapljini.

Lipanjski dani, cijela Bosna hrli na more, predsezona je nešto jeftinija; preporuka je da turiste puno ne ometamo u prolazu, izuzev one koji prave prekršaje.

Novi kolega i ja parkirali smo se blizu Žitomislića. Gledamo i rijetke kontroliramo. Kada je lijepo i svježije vrijeme, vozači voze pažljivije i opreznije. Sunce je ponovno počelo pržiti i pokazivati svoju moć i razlog odlaska na more i osvježenje.

- Blago Damiru, on je na moru! - razmišljao sam.

Mladi kolega bio je veoma šutljiv i naizgled nepovjerljiv. Teško sam iz njega izvlačio riječi. Na svaki moj prijedlog klimao je glavom i potvrđivao, pa tako i na prijedlog da nešto odemo pojesti. Poslije jela smo se vratili skoro na isto mjesto, bolje reći, petsto metara bliže Mostaru, na jednom dužem pravcu.

U ranim poslijepodnevnim satima sve više i više vozila jurilo je prema moru. Doista nije poželjno ometati te ljude na njihovom putu do odredišta za odmor. Zato sam kolegi predložio da

pustimo ljude neka idu svojim putem, te da nekako ubijemo vrijeme do kraja dežure. Ja sam se uputio do Neretve, kako bih uživao u šaputanju te hercegovačke ljepotice.

Dvadesetak metara od ceste ugledao sam tu mirnu i zelenu ljepoticu. Prije nego što sam se i predao osjećanjima uživanja, čuo sam ispred sebe neko roptanje, tupe glasove, neki meni nepoznat zvuk. Usmjério sam pogled prema izvoru zvuka i dobro aktivirao moj slušni radar. I ugledah: golo tijelo mlade djevojke, svezanih ruku i traku zalijepljenu na ustima, a između njenih nogu mladića koji pokušava da je siluje.

Stao sam i iznenađeno gledao kako se djevojka, zapravo djevojčica, pokušava osloboditi, ali je bila nemoćna. Iscijepana i razbacana odjeća bila je svjedok zbivanja. Mlade nabrekle lijepe grudi bile su gole, kao i cijelo nježno tijelo tog mladog bića. Odmah se vidjelo da se radi o djevojci od petnaest-šesnaest godina. Mladić je bio uporan, pokušava, ali ne uspijeva u namjeri. Naravno, djevojka je stisnula svoje mišiće i branila se koliko je mogla. Izvadio sam pištolj i vrisnuo:

- Prekini ili pucam! –

S uperenim pištoljem sam nastavio prema njima. Desetak metara ispred mene, mladić je ustao i čekao moju reakciju. Rekao sam da odveže ruke i odlijepi traku s djevojčinih usta. Sagnuo se kako bi to uradio, a ja sam se približio i posmatrao djevojku. Nisam mnogo obraćao pažnju na njega, jer je poslušno izvršavao moju zapovijed. No, u trenutku je njegova desna ruka kao strijela pojurila prema mojoj desnoj ruci, u kojoj sam držao pištolj, i izbila ga. Pištolj je odletio u Neretvu. Skočio sam na mladića i obojica smo pali niz obalu, u hladnu Neretvu. U vodi se vodila žestoka borba, tko će koga potopiti. U vodi sam čas bio ja, a čas on. Udaljili smo se pedesetak metara od mjesta silovanja, nisam imao velike šanse u borbi, jer je mladić bio i mlađi i jači od mene. I on je imao pištolj, što mi je prije promaknulo, primijetio sam to tek kad ga je izvadio, usmjerio cijev prema meni i opalio. Metak se zario u moj but i ostao u butnoj kosti. Krv je počela bojiti vodu u kojoj sam se u tom trenu nalazio.

Mladić se poslije opaljenog metka počeo udaljavati od mene, ali nije stigao daleko. Moj mladi kolega čuo je pucanj i odmah pojurio prema nama. Naravno, s pištoljem na gotovs je dojurio do rijeke i odmah shvatio situaciju. Mladić nije pružao otpor.

Kolega je pozvao hitnu pomoć, a djevojku je umotao u svoju jaknu i tako smo djevojka i ja prevezeni u gradsku bolnicu u Mostaru.

I opet bolnica, i opet liječenje, i opet bolovanje. Deset mjeseci!

Suđenje „tatinom sinu“ za pokušaj silovanja odgađano je do moga izlječenja. Otac mladića koji je pokušao silovanje nekoliko puta je zvao telefonom kako bismo upriličili susret i upoznavanje. Pretpostavljao sam razlog susreta, te nisam pristao na bilo kakve dogovore. Ipak je pred moju kuću jednog popodneva stigao njegov predstavnik kako bi pokušao uticati na mene, kako bih izmijenio iskaz o silovanju. Naravno, nisam htio ni čuti za tako nešto.

Na suđenju sam ponovio iskaz, ništa ne dodajući, niti oduzimajući. Mladić je osuđen na tri godine zatvora, ja ostao invalid, a mlada djevojka bit će cijelog života pod psihološkom traumom.

Zaista, poslije ovoga događaja više nisam imao volje ni želje za rad u policiji. To sam i rekao novom načelniku i novom komandiru. Imao sam dvadeset i pet godina radnog staža u policiji, a kada se tome doda beneficirani staž, to je bilo dovoljno za odlazak u mirovinu.

I tako jedog dana, Davor dođe mojoj kući i donese mi vijest koju sam čekao: uprava me predložila za mirovinu! Zaplakao sam i od sreće i od žaljenja. Naime, bio sam sretan, jer mi je rada i svakodnevnih opasnosti doista bilo dosta, mada i tužan, jer mi se nije bilo lako rastati od Davora i drugih kolega s posla.

18.

Počeli su teći dani su u mirovini, u početku sporo, poslije sve brže, a poslije izvjesnoga vremena sasvim normalno, kao da radim. Mirovina je bila nešto manja od plaće, ali za mene to nije bio veliki



problem; Ružica je radila, a bilo je i zaliha, te uštedećevine od prodatih kuća.

Nisam mirovao: učlanio sam se u ribolovačko društvo, počeo pecati, te uređivati dograđeni kat za sina. S prijateljima sam odlazio na bučanje, na izlete, kad je bilo loše vrijeme mnogo sam čitao, dakle, doista nikad nisam bio besposlen. Ako ne želiš biti besposlen, uvijek se nađe nešto za čime bi se zanimao.

Najradije sam odlazio na rijeku i uživao, osjećajući kako mi teče kroz vene, tiho, lagano; kao da se ritam rijeke izjednačio s ritmom otkucaja moga srca.

Imao sam čak i problema s nedostatkom vremena za završavanje svojih obveza. Rado sam išao na radne akcije kod susjeda koji su pravili kuću, garažu ili nešto slično. Na akciji pomogneš susjedu, širiš prijateljstvo, malo se našališ, nešto popiješ i pojedješ, i lijepo provedeš vrijeme.

Moram priznati da mi je bilo drago kad bi me kolege pozvale na proslavu Dana policije. Na takvim susretima stvarno je bilo lijepo; pohvale i priznanja za minuli rad, često su se dijelili pokloni, a ponekad i novčane nagrade, sportska natjecanja, šale, pjesma do duboko u noć...

Ružica radi, ne žali se na teškoće na poslu, ne žali se na zdravstvene probleme, još uvijek se volimo i cijenimo. Sin studira pravo, već je treća godina, pa, Bože, hvala ti na svim dobročinstvima koje daješ meni i Ružici.

Shvatio sam da je onome tko nema jaku vjeru i ljubav duša prazna, pa često ponavljam:

- Teško onom tko ne vjeruje u svoje sposobnosti i u nekoga tko će mu pomoći. Kada vjeruješ da nešto možeš, onda to doista možeš, a, isto tako, kada vjeruješ u Boga, da će ti pomoći, ti se nadaš, tebi je mnogo lakše; teško tebi ako ne vjeruješ u sebe i u Boga.

To mi je pokojna mama puno puta ponavljala:

- Sine moj, vjeruj u sebe i u Boga, sve ćeš moći i bit će ti lakše ići životnom stazom punom trnja, ruža, krivina, provalija, dobrih i loših prijatelja-ljudi, a malo iskrenih i odanih.

U svim problemima koje sam dosad imao, uvijek su mi vjera i ljubav prema životu, mojoj Ružici i sinu Ivanu, davali snage savladati te silne fizičke povrede i psihičke padove.

Dani, mjeseci, godine, tako brzo prolaze, a pogotovo kada se osvrneš na prošlo vrijeme. Pa to je nepojmljivo! K'o dlanom o dlan ili kao lijepi san, sve to tako brzo prođe. Ili još bolja usporedba: moj Ivan je, čini mi se, jučer bio dijete, a danas student treće godine prava. Pa, Bože, kad to vrijeme tako brzo projuri?

Posljednjih nekoliko godina, sređujemo Ivanov stan. Mnogo smo uradili, dnevni boravak je sasvim sređen, stigao je i namještaj. Ivan ima sve više i više učiti, pa smo malo požurili, ali se s Ivanom u kući sve češće viđa i neka djevojčica. Djeca uče, pa neka ih.

Ivan sve više vremena provodi na fakultetu i izlascima, na sportskim terenima i u učenju, a sve manje s nama, roditeljima. Često ga poželim i vidjeti, a mama, koja radi, još i više. Ne ljutim se, tako sam i ja radio; nogometno igralište, ili, kasnije, Ružica. Sve se vraća u istim opancima, kako to narod kaže.

Jednog dana, kasno popodne, Ružica je radila drugu smjenu, Ivan dođe iz grada i odmah kod mene u dnevni boravak.

- Tata, ako nisi planirao nešto raditi, ja bih s tobom imao jednu dužu priču, a ti kasnije prenesi mami i vidi njeno mišljenje o tome - reče te ode u svoj stan, kako bi preobukao trenerku.

Za nekoliko minuta opet je bio kod mene i bez oklijevanja započeo već dobro pripremljenu priču:

- Tata, nekoliko puta si u mojoj prisutnosti pričao kako si upoznao mamu i kako si se zaljubio, oženio i kako su vas nosali valovi života. Ja, tata, imam večeras svoju priču, koja je vjerojatno slična tvojoj, a ako i nije, vremena se mijenjaju i donose nešto bolje, a možda i gore.

- Ja sam bio četvrti razred gimnazije, a ona prvi ekonomske. Škole su bile u istoj zgradi; gledali smo se jednu školsku godinu, a poslije još jednu, kad sam ja dolazio s fakulteta samo kako bih je vidio. Tako smo se samo gledali, bili simpatije, nisam imao vremena izvoditi je; morao sam učiti ili ići

igrati lopte, ili su moji nagoni za djevojkama još bili slabi da me tjeraju da je po svaku cijenu moram vidjeti. U veljači prošle godine otišao sam u disko klub u hotel „Bevanda“ i odmah na ulazu u klub ugledah nju, Dijanu. Od te večeri se, doslovno rečeno, ne rastajemo. Nadoknadili smo sve izgubljeno vrijeme za one dvije godine šarmiranja i gledanja.

- Ona je, tata, dijete bez oca. Navodno je umro kad su njoj bile dvije godine, odnosno, poginuo u prometnoj nezgodi.

- Jednom sam sa dvadesetak metara vidio njenu mamu. Ne bih je više ni prepoznao, uostalom, mene interesira Dijana, a ne njena mama, a mislim, tata, da i tebe nitko drugi ne interesira osim moje mame. Dijana kaže kako njena mama ne želi vidjeti momka u kući dok se ne vjeri s njime, a ne brani da Dijana dođe kod mene u stan.

- Tata, Dijana i ja spavamo skupa, ali smo se dogovorili da se do vjeridbe možemo ljubiti i maziti, te da nećemo imati seks. Danas su takva vremena, ako neću ja s djevojkom, prijateljicom, spavati, ona nađe drugoga momka. Moram se prilagoditi vremenu i prostoru. Dijana mi se sviđa, čini mi se da sada ne mogu zamisliti život bez nje.

- Miris njenog tijela me opio, njene plave oči me obaraju s nogu i čitavo njeno biće mi se sviđa, pa čak i narav. Dijana i ja smo se dogovorili da se vjerimo na godišnjicu susreta u hotelu „Bevanda“, a to je veljača 2011. godine.

- Tata, ta vjeridba nama, Dijani i meni, mnogo znači. Ja ti obećavam da ću fakultet završiti u roku, a i Dijana ekonomsku školu, te nastaviti fakultet. Poslije vjeridbe ne moramo žuriti s vjenčanjem. Ako poslije vjeridbe mami i tebi dodamo još po jedno ime, nećete se ljutiti.

Sin Ivan je završio svoje izlaganje tečno kao na ispitu, a ja sam na nekoliko minuta zašutio, kao da sam nijem ili sam bez teksta, kako to sada moderno govore. Kad mi se glas vratio, odmah sam počeo:

- Hvala ti, sine, na iskrenosti i na tvojim viđenjima Dijanine i tvoje budućnosti. Tvoja sreća usrećuje mamu i mene i neka vam bude sretno i blagoslovljeno. Mama u deset sati dolazi sa smjene,

pa ću je izvijestiti, a možeš i ti doći na večeru i odmah čuti mamino mišljenje; vjerujem da isto mislimo.

Ružica je došla točno u deset, a Ivana nije bilo ni tada ni kasnije. Do jedan sat poslije ponoći Ružica i ja smo pričali o novonastaloj situaciji. Naravno, Ružica je bila sretna Ivanovom odlukom da nam i imena promjeni; Ivanu je dvadeset druga godina, mnogo čita, dobar student, pa neka razmišlja svojom glavom, a mi ćemo mu pomoći koliko budemo mogli.

Sve je to Ivanu preneseno sutra, pa čak i detalji o vjeridbi: gosti, večera, kupnja vera, cvijeća, treba pozvati i župnika da to sve blagoslovi svetom vodom...

19.

Dobio sam pozivnicu za vjeridbu i odmah sam javio Josipu da dolazim. Dolazim u ulozi prijatelja, a ne kao tvorac ove priče o Josipovoj sudbini.

U razgovoru mi je Josip priopćio da će biti oko dvadeset i pet gostiju, što Dijaninih i što Ivanovih, te ponovio mjesto i vrijeme održavanja.

Prije nekoliko godina obećao sam doći na Ivanovu svadbu, čak sam se nudio za kuma. S Josipom sam imao susret u svezi njegovog strijeljanja u Banjaluci, a imao sam i susret s Ružicom u svezi Josipova stradanja od rasturača droge.

Ružica i Josip su mi se veoma svidjeli: blagi, mirni, znaju poštovati ljude, nisu naporni, a Josip je još i toliko iskren.

Na dan vjeridbe krenuo sam iz Kreševa i ranije došao u Mostar kod moga trostrukog kuma Davora Kolende, gdje ću u njegovoj lijepoj vikendici i spavati. Poslije dužeg odmora presvukao sam se, uzeo darove i krenuo do hotela „Bevanda“.

Došao sam prvi. Ako je i bilo nekoga od gostiju, ja ih nisam poznao, jer ne znam nikog osim Ružice i Josipa. U jednom dijelu restorana moglo se vidjeti da su stolovi pripremljeni za neku feštu i upravo za najavljeni broj gostiju.

Gosti su počeli pristizati i sjedati za lijepo pripremljene stolove. Sjedio sam za šankom i promatrao pridošle goste. Nekoliko minuta prije najavljenog početka, u osam sati, ušli su Josip i Ružica. Poslije kraćeg razgledanja po sali restorana, primijetili su me i prišli pozdraviti se. Kao i uvijek, bili su veoma ljubazni, a ja sam iskoristio priliku predati cvijeće Ružici. Josip i Ružica su pošli prema stolovima pozdraviti već mnogo pristiglih gostiju. Primijetio sam svećenika kad je ušao i odmah se uputio za sto i počeo pozdravljati sve goste. Odmah poslije svećenika ušla je sredovječna žena s čovjekom nešto mlađim od nje. Žena je dosta visoka, ljepuška, crna kosa s lijepom frizurom i plavim očima, koje su kao radari šetale po ostalim gostima. Netko je dobacio:

- Josipe, evo ti prija došla, upoznaj se, pozovi i Ružicu da je upozna! - Kada je Ružica prišla, Josip je ljubazno započeo priču s prijom, izvinjavajući se zbog prvoga viđenja:

- Oprostite, prijao, moj Ivan i vaša Dijana nisu dozvolili da se mi miješamo u organizaciju ovoga sijela, vjeridbe, a kako je Dijana izjavila da vi ne želite nikakvoga upoznavanja i dolaženja dok se ne obavi vjeridba, mi smo to sve poštovali. Evo prilike da se dogovaramo o svemu za ubuduće.

Sve stolice su popunjene. I ja sam za stolom, u jednom kutu, kao i uvijek, nikad se ne želim eksponirati. Pjesma iz zvučnika, postavljenih po zidovima, već daje dobro raspoloženje. I priča se razvezla, a pogotovo oko svećenika. Prijatelji ne sjede jedni do drugih, pa vjeridba je, nije ni bitno. Mladi se ne vide, mislim na Dijanu i Ivana. Samo što sam se zapitao gdje li su, oni se pojaviše u restoranu. Uslijedio je veliki pljesak i ljubljenje od bliže rodbine. Na pitanje gdje su do sada, odgovoriše:

- Bili smo u diskoteci, tamo gdje smo odlučili ne rastajati se više nikad!

Čulo se jednoglasno čestitanje:

- Neka vam je sretno!

Poslije nekoliko minuta prišao sam tiho i bez naglašavanja kako bih vjerenicima predao cvijeće i moju knjigu *Mudrost življenja*. Naravno, rekao sam im da sam Josipov i Ružicin prijatelj.

Padale su šale, izgovarale se dobre želje, sve je bilo u veselom tonu, baš kao da je svadba. Svećenik je zatražio riječ i počeo:

- Pozvan sam od Ivanovih roditelja, koje dobro poznajem, oni su moji župljani, kako bih prisustvovao ovom činu i blagoslovio vere koje trebaju spojiti ovo dvoje mladih ljudi u njihovom zajedničkom životu. Evo, upoznat ću i Dijanu, i ona će brzo kod nas u župu, a također mi je drago upoznati i Dijaninu mamu.

Svećenik se prekrstio i pomolio za sreću i zdravlje vjerenih, potom je blagoslovio vere i dao jednu Ivanu kako bi je stavio Dijani na prst, a potom je Dijana stavila veru na Ivanov prst. Svećenik je zatražio da se poljube, a onda je uslijedio veliki pljesak i čestitanje vjeridbe. Nakon što je završeno sa čestitanjem, svećenik je opet uzeo riječ:

- Želim zaista puno sreće vjerenim u budućem braku, a nemojte dužiti ni s vjenčanjem. Za ove iskrene želje imam veliki razlog: dugo godina poznajem i Ružicu i Josipa i malog, a sada velikog Ivana, oni su moji dobri župljani, bez laskanja, ne moraju ni biti dobri kao župljani, ali su dobri kao ljudi – kazao je, malo zastao, pa nastavio:

- Prisjetimo se samo Josipove sudbine: njegovog strijeljanja u Banjaluci, ostao živ, Ružica otišla u Švedsku, problemi s uspostavljanjem veze s Ružicom i ...

Netko je glasno vrisnuo:

- Onesvijestila se Dijanina mama!

Jedan od konobara je bez panike pritrčao i počeo ukazivati pomoć onesviještenoj ženi: polijevao ju je vodom, davao umjetno disanje i poslije nekoliko minuta Dijanina majka je došla sebi, ali je izgledala loše. Ustala je te jako i očajno vrisnula:

- Dijana i Ivan su brat i sestra!

Nastao je tajac, mrtva tišina; veliko veselje se pretvorilo u jedno čudno stanje. Ponovno vrisak u restoranu, plač, jauk. Ružicin glas je bespomoćno vikao:

- Josipe, Josipe, što ti je, što ti je, ljudi pomoziteeeeeeeee, Josip umire!

Nekoliko jačih gostiju unijelo je Josipa u auto, pa su pojurili prema bolnici, a ostali gosti i osoblje bili su šokirani rečenicom:

- Dijana i Ivan su brat i sestra!

Svećenik je poslije dugoga muka pokušao mrtvu atmosferu vratiti u normalu, misleći kako se radi o nekoj veoma neozbiljnoj šali.

Prozvaao je Dijaninu majku da objasni stvar, ali je bilo kasno. Ivanov mobilni je zazvonio i trznuo ga iz teškog, očajnog stanja; čuo je glas i zanijemio, prilegao na stol i plakao tako glasno da je cijela dvorana ječala od njegova plača. Plakali su i mnogi drugi, a Dijana je preuzela mobilni i javila se. Potom je spustila mobitel i rekla:

- Josip je umro...

## **Epilog**

Poštovani čitatelji, ako ste ovu priču čitali napreskok, te preskočili ulomak koji objašnjava kako je Josip pogriješio samo jednom u životu i to ga je koštalo života, onda o Josipu ne možete donositi točne zaključke. Desilo se mnogima da su mnogo puta pogriješili, pa ništa, a pravedan čovjek jednom i ...

Rečenica „Dijana i Ivan su brat i sestra“, ubila ga je, a zašto?

Čovjek s visokim moralnim kodeksom, kao što je bio Josip, to nije mogao izdržati: njegovo srce je puklo!

U životu se često uleti u oluju koja te baca s jednoga na drugi kraj, a ti toga momenta nemaš snage bilo što učiniti.

Nikada u životu prije Ružice Josip nije imao djevojku, nije se zabavljao, našli su jedno drugo i krenuli stazom nejasnom i tamnom, kao mnogi, stvorili dom, jedan, pa drugi, imali Ivana i gledali u njega kao u svetinju: treba se ženiti! I vidi nesreće: svoju sestru!

Josip nikada u životu nije pio, kušao je alkohol samo kad je morao, na proslavama i blagdanima

kada reda radi treba nazdraviti. Čak je mrzio alkohol, jer je njegov otac bio alkoholičar.

Poslije ovih redova, kritizirate li Josipov postupak te „večeri“, koja će za njega biti kobna?

Strijeljan, ostao živ i poslije par mjeseci razmijenjen u Mostar. Ružica u međuvremenu s Ivanom odlazi u Švedsku, misli kako je Josip mrtav. Vidjela je strijeljanje svojim očima! Poslije nekoliko mjeseci netko se s Ružicom šali kako je Josip živ. Ružica se ne želi javljati i tako neozbiljno šaliti.

Za Josipa je Ružica bila sve i kakav šok za Josipa te večeri kada Ružica ne želi pričati s komandirrom policije! Što je Josip mogao pomisliti, već da se udala i uživa visoki švedski standard.

S radnim kolegom Davorom odlazi u gostionice i pije, iako nikada nije pio; traži lijeka za velike jade, izgubio je i ženu i sina! On i Davor se opijaju do iznemoglosti, nailaze dvije ženske koje su našle žrtvu i za piće i za seks.

Josip se probudio u Davorovom stanu, pored njega plavuša iz Konjica, također izbjeglica; Josip je doživio teško kajanje, ali je bilo kasno. Jedna greška, i to teška, koštala je Josipa života.

Dakle, Josip je plavušu iz Konjica vidio prije sedamnaest godina, toliko godina ima Dijana sada, a da je bogdo nije vidio ni tada. Život teče i mijenja se, a mi to moramo prihvatiti.

Umjesto braka i muža, Dijana je dobila brata, a Ivan sestru. Tata Josip neka počiva u miru Božjem.

Život ispisuje dramatične scenarije koji nadvisuju i najdarovitije pisce svijeta!

(Kraj na hrvatskom)



## HE WENT ASTRAY ONLY ONCE

I have witnessed a story that will flow across the pages of this book like a mountain stream; sit back, relax and follow the flow...

\*\*\*

God, you have given us all crosses to bear during our life, be they large or small. Yet, the cross you have given to your son Jesus and some humans is not an ordinary, standard one, but the largest of them all.

God, please forgive me for this saying, you are not a villain, you do not punish people for you are gracious.

God, you have given us a brain to think about the path we choose to walk in life, when we can choose our path and control the circumstances.

God, there are situations on our life paths arising from the essence of life on this Earth which can embitter you life so much that not even the greatest mind of them all could help you – and you can't avoid them.

1.

There's an old Arabic proverb that says: If one misfortune comes your way, the second might pass you. However, if a second misfortune strikes you as well, so will many more.

Dear God, so many things have happened to me, when will all these misfortunes and hardships stop?

This is the story of my life and all the hardships I went through. I strongly believe that some of the misfortunes could've been avoided, but

most of them were simply meant to be. Perhaps all of this wouldn't have happened to me if I had a different job, but it is what it is – let's call it fate, my destiny. Had all of this not happened, then it wouldn't be destiny. Life's circumstances determine the flow of my life as well as yours.

Even though I was born in Slatina near Banja Luka, a rather beautiful plain, my life has been rolling, or, should I say, flowing like a mountain stream since my early childhood.

This mountain stream, a representation of my life, flowed peacefully and steadily for a while. Soon, it began tumbling down a steep and rocky slope, breaking up into droplets and splashing about only to merge back into the stream again.

After a short flow, my stream tumbled down a cliff once again, and the splashes of droplets formed a milky mistiness. The water descends from a height, hits the ground and forms the stream again; it flows to the waterfall again, and again, and again – until it reaches the bottom of the high mountain.

My small stream flowed, and merged with another one, and another one thus becoming a small river. My small river, then, merged with a larger river – and disappeared. The water was still there, but my strong, fast-moving stream was gone.

2.

After 15 km drive northeast from Banja Luka, you will reach a small town called Slatina or Malo Blasko.

This beautiful town is situated on a somewhat hilly terrain suitable for agriculture and fruit-growing. The town is well known for its production of strawberries, raspberries, and several sorts of apples and pears. Slatina is also well known for its thermal water springs and thermal baths.

If one can imagine heaven on earth, it must be Slatina in April. Everything is green: the fruit blossoms burst open, the spring flowers bloom, and you would think that the most beautiful flowery tapestry is spread over the land. The visitors, passers-by and the inhabitants drink in the

intoxicating fragrance of the blossoms, feeling blissfulness in their souls. Add the beauty of hundreds of birds singing in the morning to this picture, and the paradise shall open in front of your eyes.

An April night: full moon glimmers its lantern-light over the colourful meadows, and the flowers' and thermal waters' fragrant cocktail delights the walkers who find themselves in this natural wonder.

My name is Josip Bilic, and this is what Slatina looked like when I was born – in the most beautiful month of them all, April 1964.

When did my ancestors come here, you ask? I do not know; but my father told me that he was born in the same house as me. This old fashioned house's interior was remodelled only a couple of times, but its exterior walls were often painted because the house is near the main road, and the car exhaust gases and dust blacken the facade.

My father Vinko was a chemistry teacher, and my mother Jelenka was a housewife, so there was never enough money for a complete redecoration of the house. Even when there was some money left, my father would spend it on liquor and field trips, thus leaving my mother and me to ourselves.

I was just like other boys of my age – I was growing, playing and running around. One day, I was five and a half years old, I ran out into the street right in front of a big truck! The driver abruptly hit the brakes, and, luckily, managed to stop the vehicle. Fear took over me, and I collapsed right in front of the huge wheels, but they didn't touch me. My mother ran out of the house to see what had happened, and to apologize to the driver, because the accident was really my fault. I got up, ran back into the house and hid behind the couch so that mom wouldn't find me and spank me. While she was talking to the driver, I found a piece of wire lying on the floor next to me. I picked it up and tried to stick it into the power socket. The power burned me and I screamed with pain. Mother came running, and when she saw me passed out on the floor, she and the driver that almost ran me over took me to

the hospital. Luckily, it didn't take long to wake me up, so I was soon sent home.

Although I didn't study too hard, I was quite a good student - maybe because my father was a teacher, and maybe I just had a good memory. When I was a child, I loved all sorts of games, and when I grew up I loved all sports, football in particular.

I remember one specific football match me and my friends won - the kids we defeated were from a nearby village. After the match, a fight broke out; I was hit in the eye with a stone, and the doctors barely saved my sight.

3.

I took a liking to traffic police when I was in the elementary school. Since our school was near the main street, the school management, assisted by the police department, organized a pedestrian crossing guard programme. The students who operated in the morning and after school wore police uniforms and carried a stop sign and a whistle. Whenever I was on the watch, I felt like a real traffic cop, and I took my job very seriously. I was so committed to this duty that the teachers and other police officers often praised me. Hence, I grew to love this profession, and this love determined my calling and path in life.

When I finished elementary school, I started Police High School in Belgrade. Right at the beginning I chose the traffic officer's course. My parents never questioned my decision for various reasons - they could see my passion for the profession, the school was tuition-free, and being in Belgrade would broaden my perspective. I graduated with ease, since the accent was on physical fitness and abilities - and I was good at both; of course, I was good at other subjects as well. Three years passed in the blink of an eye.

It was great; I had good friends I spent my free time with. We would go for walks, play ball games

and fantasize about girls. I never had a girlfriend, everything was more important to me than dating.

As soon as I graduated from high school, and with very good grades I might add, I went back home to Slatina. Ten days later (that is how long it took me to gather all the documents necessary) I got a job at a police station in the centre of Banja Luka. Of course, I started out as a trainee traffic officer. I completed my tasks with such ease, that it all seemed like a game to me. I still lived with my parents in Slatina, so I had to take the bus to my workplace every other day.

The fact that I didn't have a girlfriend really started to bother my mom, and I didn't blame her - she was right; I didn't feel the need to have a girlfriend. At least that was the case until the Saturday that was to come. I did go to the parties and dance clubs with my friends, but I preferred spending my free time on a football field to clubs and girls. However, the Saturday that was to come would change my life around.

Two of my friends and I decided to go to a nearby club in Laktaši. As we walked in and looked around, I caught a glimpse of the most beautiful blue eyes whose gentleness and inviting energy captured me. She smiled at me, and I felt overwhelmed with love. Her energy was so strange and inviting that I got love drunk, felt encouraged and only wanted to go up to her, hug and kiss her and take her home to meet my mom.

I walked away from my friends, came up to that girl, introduced myself and held her hand in mine for a while. I apologized and asked her to repeat her name. As her blue eyes wandered over me, she said slowly and clearly: Ruzica Franic; I was hypnotized. Her hand was still in mine, and it seemed that some inner love force bonded our hands together never to be parted. Her hair smelled like dreams.

This encounter opened the doors to heaven and happiness. Ever since we met, Ruzica and I never left each other's side; Ruzica settled in my heart and stayed there, our relationship and love were never-ending.

Mom was drunk with happiness – her only son had a girlfriend! She boasted around, telling everyone about it. She was right, too – how could a twenty-year-old boy prefer football to a girlfriend. It all changed now; Ruzica was, and forever would be, the centre of the world for me.

While we were dating, I would often go to Laktaši by myself, without any friends. In that period, I had only one bad experience. It happened on a Wednesday evening; Ruzica and I were in a café enjoying life, soaking up each other, living our wonderful fairy tale completely forgetting about the world around us. It was then that a young man approached our table, pulled her by the hand and said:

- Ruzica is MY girlfriend!

At that moment I felt like nobody was stronger than me. Without thinking, I hit him so hard that he flew across the room landing flat on his back three tables away. As I hit him, five guys approached me, beat me half to death, slapped Ruzica in the face, and ran away. I ended up in a hospital to have my wounds bound. As I came to, I thought to myself what in the world just happened?! One of these guys was in love with Ruzica, but he never had the guts to approach her or say something to her. He only had the courage to ask one of her friends to tell her that he wants to be her boyfriend.

4.

Even though mom often complained that she was in pain, she never said exactly where it hurt. She went to the doctors who did some tests, she got medicines, but the pain never stopped. It varied in intensity, but it was still there. Yet, my father and I never took her seriously. I was head over heels in love, and whenever I finished with work, I would go to see my girl. My father, on the other hand, spent his time with his friends, drinking, playing cards or going on fieldtrips. Mom, who had trouble breathing, would stay at home with pain keeping her company.

One day, during our Sunday lunch, mom said angrily:

- You two need to clean up your act, or you will lose me! I can't go on like this, always home alone, feeling sick and sad...

My dad didn't say a thing, and I promised to get married if I have their blessing. They met Ruzica when she first came to our house. The decision was made – the sooner we marry, the better!

5.

Mom was very excited that her son decided to get married. As always, she was right; Ruzica helped my mom through the illness.

We decided to have a small ceremony because my mother wasn't feeling well. So, we only invited our close-cousins – a small, but exquisite group of people. The wedding was held at a nearby restaurant; everything went smooth and everyone was cheerful. It is a tradition to give money for the newlyweds on their wedding day. Since my parents generously gave money on other weddings, we got a nice sum of money ourselves. We accepted mom's advice and used this money to buy a house in the suburban part of Banja Luka called Motike. As mom said – I was closer to my workplace, and Ruzica will have less trouble finding a job there. Besides, our family house was old and in a bad condition anyways.

The wedding gave my life a new purpose.

However, mom was getting worse and worse, and dad was drinking more and more. Ruzica kept it all in balance; there are no words to thank her for all the kindness and love she gave to me, to my parents, and our son she was carrying in her womb.

Ivan saw the light of this world, and his grandmother went to a hospital, too weak to bear the pain. Sinking into depression, my father was getting weaker and weaker as well. This was partly because of my mother's poor health, but mostly because of the liquor he used to drown his sorrow.

The doctors prolonged mom's stay at the hospital. They were pessimistic, but they kept on trying and experimenting with medicines, struggling to save my mother's life. Mom was obviously aware of the fact that there is no cure for her illness. One day I came to visit her, and she pulled me close and whispered in my ear:

- Son, my time has come; I know that my lungs are rotten, and there's no cure for my disease. Your father's love for alcohol will cost him his life. The profession you chose will bring many problems your way. I had a dream last night that you will survive injuries, assaults and fights, but words from a woman will be the cause of your death.

Mom looked very bad, and her troubled breathing got worse, so I decided to keep quiet and said nothing to her words.

Ruzica and I started building our house in Motike. We decided not to rush, so we worked slowly, helping the workers ourselves. We spent work days in a shed made of wood used for storing building materials. Nothing was too hard for us, and all we ever prayed for was my mother's recovery.

Unfortunately, my mom's heart stopped beating. The three of us were in shock, but there was nothing we could do. The burial was organized in accordance with the local tradition. Mom was buried in the local cemetery, and her early death made me feel alienated from my beautiful hometown.

6.

Being a severe alcoholic, my father was soon laid off from school. His frustration was further increased when he got a notice of retirement. He started to drink even more, and reached the bottom of human dignity.

The house was getting bigger and bigger, and so was our son Ivan. We used all our knowledge and money, and finished building the house. We moved in, and life became completely different. It was our house and our land! We asked my father to come



live with us on several occasions, but he was stubborn. He kept saying that he wants to die in the same house he was born in.

I was often told by old men that one can never achieve absolute happiness, like they say - even honey sometimes turns sour. I always thought they were talking about other people, and that those words meant nothing to me. Ruzica and I are in love, we built our house, she was promised a job, and our son was healthy and happy. We had our entire lives ahead of us, and so many things to experience. I had a job and a good salary, my colleagues were good and honourable men, and I was more than happy with my life.

I don't think my colleagues knew if I was a Croat or a Serb. In fact, nobody ever cared about nationalities; nobody ever asked me my nationality unless I needed to fill in a form that contained this entry.

In year 1992, war was raging in Croatia. Never in my wildest dreams would I imagine that war would break out in Bosnia. At least I, Josip, never thought this could happen. The news began to report riots in Hercegovina in Ravno municipality, conflicts with the Yugoslavian army and barricades being set up in Sarajevo. It all reminded me of an episode of a popular TV show "Nadrealisti"; they predicted this hell. The dark clouds over Croatia spread to Bosnia. These clouds brought hatred and a desire for vengeance that was to erase past misdoings. The ghosts of the pasts cannot be erased from people's minds easily.

August 1993 was so hot, that it seemed that the Sun wanted everything and everyone to stop moving. I was patrolling the city with my colleague Simo when he got a call on his radio. The conversation lasted for a few minutes; eventually Simo said that he understood the situation. His eyes were telling me that something was wrong; he looked sad and low-spirited, but didn't say a word. I wasn't able to resist the urge to ask him what had happened, because his eyes and his face showed he felt unease.

With sadness in his voice Simo told me: - Josip, the chief just ordered me to send you home and tell you not to come to work until they call you. The Ustasha are killing Serbs whenever and wherever they can, and the chief is worried that somebody might try to kill you...

He mumbled the last part as if he was trying to use those words to apologize, but I was still offended and hurt. How could anyone even try to compare me with men I knew nothing about?! What did I have to do with them?! Unhappy and filled with anger, I barely said goodbye to my partner when I headed home. My wife was happy and surprised to see me come home early, but the look on my face betrayed me, and she realized that something bad had happened. I only regretted not asking for permission to take my family and go visit my father.

I spent the next few days at home, patiently waiting for someone to call me to go back to work. I did nothing wrong. I respected the law and police statutes, I thought to myself; this was absolutely uncalled for. This was just an honest mistake which will be recognized, and my superiors will call me back to work.

In Banja Luka, the war was only seen on TV. The war wasn't raging in, nor near Banja Luka. The army forces were sent to battlefields, Bosniaks were persecuted, you couldn't trust anybody, but the war wasn't raging here. Not having a job was tearing me apart, I worried about our existence. Times were hard even if you had a pay check. I would've gone to look for a job and earn some money had I not been ordered to stay at home.

I spent the rest of August with my wife and my three-year-old son hoping to get a phone call from my chief, or to find any other solution. It was 9 o'clock in the morning on the first day of September when we heard some voices in front of our house. I went out to greet the men and see if they needed help with something. A man I never saw before asked me: - Josip, why didn't you hand over your gun when you got laid off?

I wasn't even given a chance to speak. He looked very threatening, and I could feel hostility in his

voice. I was just about to tell him that I kept my weapons because I wasn't laid off, and that I was waiting for a call from my chief when I felt his fist collide with my face, and I hit the ground. Ruzica screamed teary-eyed. They ordered her to stay put. I got up slowly, not saying a word, and stood there quietly. They were whispering so I couldn't hear what they were saying, until the man who hit me said out loud:

- You piece of shit Ustasha! We should kill him right now!

Never before had I heard that a verdict could be reached that quickly; never would I imagine that this could happen to me. As I was thinking about my death sentence, they took me to the garage wall. I could hear Ruzica moaning, and my son crying. A burst of machine gun fire was the last thing I heard before I fell asleep... or died...

7.

I woke up delirious, unable to remember who or where I was. Everything seemed unreal. The truck tent kept the sun from shining on me and other unfortunates who were also killed that day. Later I found out that we were taken to the Little Camp barracks.

The dead men around me were already eternally sleeping. I could see about a dozen of them in the dark, but I wasn't sure if I was alive. Was this real or just a really bad nightmare? The truck stopped, and I could hear voices outside. Somehow I managed to raise myself and felt a piercing pain. That was a good sign – I was alive after all, and I wasn't dreaming – it was all a bitter reality.

Someone lifted the tent from the back of the truck and glanced over the corpses as he ordered some men to bury us. He startled me with a scream:

- What are you doing there, you sluggard, are you trying to dodge you responsibilities?

I realized that he was talking to me. I wanted to react to his command to follow him, but I couldn't. I

felt excruciating pain, and had to lay back again. I screamed in pain; the scream was so loud that it could be heard from a distance. Some men came up to the truck to see if there was a survivor among the dead. A familiar voice ordered them to take me to the ambulance.

The doctor said I had a big wound on the left side of my stomach. I stayed there for thirty days. All that time someone was looking out for me, sympathizing with me and helping me, but I never found out who.

I spent five months in the camp. At the beginning I didn't have any obligations or responsibilities. We lived in a closed space, and we got just enough food to keep us from starving. We weren't allowed to ask anyone anything. Those who did were cussed out, assaulted, and beaten. The best thing to do was to be quiet and not ask any questions.

The Red Cross activists, who visited us twice, sent messages about me being alive to Ruzica, but there was no response. I worked as hard as I could. We were often beaten – their way of reminding us that we can work even harder. Whatever was left of human dignity was disparaged day after day. There wasn't an inch on our bodies that hadn't been beaten. One day I was asked if I wanted to be transferred to Mostar. I accepted the offer without thinking. Anything was better than the hell I was in. In a few days I was in Mostar. I was free... born again... alive!

8.

When she heard the burst of machine gun fire, Ruzica fell on the ground unconscious. The neighbours heard the shots, but no one dared to go out until the truck drove away. Ivan got out of the house and saw his mother lying on the ground. He started crying, kissing his mother, trying to wake her up. It wasn't working. Neighbours came up to them, and barely managed to bring Ruzica around.

They checked her pulse – she was alive! That was the most important thing at that moment. They massaged her forehead, and poured water over her face. The minute she woke up, she screamed:

- Where's Ivan??!! Where's Josip??!!

Ivan was there, hugging her. She squeezed him so hard that the neighbours thought she might hurt him.

That day Ruzica couldn't say a word. Her life turned into dust, her lips were sealed; the shock left her mute. She was crying and sobbing, all the way kissing and hugging her son. Later that evening she gathered all the strength she had, and asked her neighbours if they knew where Josip's body was taken, but nobody could help her. Someone cautiously warned her not to ask around and insist on getting information, or even greater disaster might strike her. After all, they said, her son was with her and she had to protect him.

Days passed by, and Ruzica never spoke to any one of her neighbours. The only person she spoke with was her best friend Joka, and her son. The neighbours hesitated to come to her house because they feared her reaction, so Ruzica spent most of her time alone with Ivan. She never found out where they buried her husband. Days were as long as years. She intentionally alienated herself from people, from her neighbours; she trusted no one. She would lock the house door in the early afternoon, and wouldn't open it to no one. Joka was the only person to visit her and her son. She would also bring them some food – as much as she could.

Three months after Josip was shot, Joka heard an announcement on a local radio station that those who weren't feeling safe in their homes should register at the Red Cross office. She told Ruzica about it, and she was very cautious too – she didn't want her best friend to misinterpret her intentions. As soon as she heard about the announcement, Ruzica asked Joka to register her and her son as soon as possible. They wanted to go to Sweden. After some time, Ruzica was asked to bring her and her son's personal documents to the office. This call brought her back from the dead.

Ruzica went to the interview, and submitted all the documents needed. The officials were very kind and didn't ask much about the incident in front of the house.

Although leaving Banja Luka also meant leaving behind the place she grew up in, her ancestry and all the memories, it still filled Ruzica with joy. Besides, she already convinced herself that there was nothing left for her there since her husband died.

9.

At last, the Red Cross bus came, and nearly forty people got on it, old people, women and children. Final destination: Uppsala, Sweden. All that mattered to me was to get across the border; I didn't care how long it would take to get to Uppsala. The drive to the border was stressful; I kept looking out the window, praying that we wouldn't be stopped by a patrol that would make us turn around and go back to Banja Luka. Once we crossed that invisible line between Bosnia and Croatia, I felt liberated, as if I was born again. The rest of the journey to Uppsala was rather dull, and nothing worth mentioning happened.

When we finally arrived in Uppsala, Ivan and I were accommodated in a small motel. We got a nice, spacious room for sleeping. There were also other, collective rooms we shared with other residents; they were nice and functional as well. I was told that I had to attend the Swedish language course as soon as possible, so I did. It wasn't too difficult, and having obligations to take my mind off of the past was just what I needed. We got solid incomes, so we lived a rather good life.

As the saying goes, the sun must come after the rain, even if it shines for a short while. My four-year-old son Ivan and I were alright, our hearts were healed. Of course, Josip was still in my heart, and he always will be, but I had to move on. Ivan and I were studying Swedish, and we were getting quite good at

it. I was offered a job which I didn't accept right away, simply because I didn't think I could handle it physically or psychologically.

Two months have passed since our arrival, and my new friends persuaded me to accept an offer to clean the house of some rich Swedes. They were very satisfied with me, and paid me well. Ivan and I were like one; we got used to living in Uppsala and had many good friends. We refused to think about things that would make us sad, and we were finally living life to the fullest. Josip rests in peace, but he'll live forever in our thoughts.

We had been in contact with our compatriots as well, but we met them rarely because they reminded us of our past. They would usually talk about the past, and not about the present. I guess it was too painful. On one occasion, they were talking about some news from the Red Cross; apparently families and individuals were trying to locate their loved ones who found refuge in other countries.

One day, I got the news that a person called Josip Bilic from Mostar looked for his wife Ruzica who lived in Sweden. The news shocked me at first, but I managed to calm down, and assumed that it was an irresponsible and thoughtless joke. It's been a year since my husband was killed, I saw him die with my own two eyes. I couldn't believe that someone would have the heart to joke about something like this.

However, I got the same message one month later:

- Josip Bilic is trying to reconnect with his wife Ruzica and son Ivan. They are in Sweden, and he would like to ask her or anyone who knows them to contact him; his phone number was ...

10.

Once I got to Mostar, I got a job at a local police station. After the execution I was afraid of everything, even my own shadow, so it took me

some time to adjust to the new environment and start thinking straight. I didn't have any information about my beloved wife and son; I heard that they were alive and save, and found refuge in Sweden. I just couldn't let it rest; my love for Ruzica and Ivan was immense and genuine, so I kept on looking for them. The idea that Ruzica might have forgotten about my death or that she left me never crossed my mind.

My chief introduced me to some people who might help me. The Red Cross informed me that they had aired my message several times already, and that Ruzica should've heard it if she was indeed alive and in Sweden.

It can be really hot in April in Mostar under the scorching sun. It was twenty seven degrees Celsius in the early afternoon on the twenty-second April when we got a call on the radio. We get calls all the time, so why would this one be any different? Well, I was wrong. The call was from my chief Goran, but he didn't call about work. He said all in one breath:

- Josip, I have just received a phone call from the Red Cross. They say that a woman named Ruzica, who has a son Ivan, called them from Uppsala. She claimed that her husband Josip isn't alive for some time now – she saw his execution with her own eyes, and asked them to stop airing the thoughtless joke that he's looking for her.

I almost collapsed when I heard the news. The first thought that crossed my mind was that she got married and didn't want to hear from me. I was furious and desperate at the same time; I was gasping for air overwhelmed with sadness and pain.

11.

The shroud of desperation covered me like the darkest night. Davor, my colleague I was on the watch with, soon noticed my despair. He called the



men who were patrolling to take over our shift, and took me to the nearest pub. He ordered me a cold drink and asked me to pour out my soul.

He was my only friend here in Mostar, so I told him about my sad destiny. I told him how I fell in love with Ruzica when I was nineteen, and how she was my first and only love. “We got married and built a house in Banja Luka,” I said, “We were deeply in love, and our love gave birth to our son – Ivan. But, this damn war ended our happiness...”

Although I never drank a single drop of alcohol in my entire life, I ordered two shots of herb brandy. I drank it bottoms up, and ordered two more for Davor and me. Sometimes you just need to close your eyes and let the music in, and it will wash away all the sorrows laying on our souls. I was so miserable that I would’ve drunk the entire bottle of brandy in the blink of an eye, had Davor let me. Davor started drinking as well; he opened up to me and told me about his failed marriage.

He blamed all the women on the world for his unhappiness, but I had nothing bad to say about my wife. She was a remarkable woman; when I only think about the way she cared for my parents – how could I say anything bad about her? Then I said: “Davor, she did witness my execution, and she did see my lifeless body in the back of that truck. She really thinks I’m dead, and that someone is pulling her leg. So what if she got married? I just want to see my only son!”

After each shot, I felt more and more suspicious – maybe Ruzica didn’t want to come back to me. Of course! She found someone else, and now she’s living the life of luxury, enjoying its benefits. Time passed by, and my thoughts wandered back and forth. The pub was now full of people, cigarette smoke floated in the air, and people were telling stories that didn’t make sense. Davor was already drunk, and he couldn’t talk straight, so I didn’t understand a word he said.

- Pardon me, do you mind if we sit with you? – a young, nice woman asked me, and I nodded. The women politely said hi, sat down and glanced over us. I wanted to be polite, so I asked them if they

wanted a drink. The girl who asked to sit with us wanted to know what the occasion we celebrated was. Since Davor was already so drunk that he fell asleep, I briefly explained our situation and insisted on buying them a drink. The girls didn't want to drink at first, but they soon gave in and drank several shots.

I remember I asked them for their names several times because I couldn't remember them. I knew for sure that they were roommates; the blonde one was a refugee from Konjic, and the redhead was a refugee from Rama. I couldn't stop thinking about my beautiful wife and son in Sweden. The sound of their voice was the most beautiful melody I ever heard. I wondered if I'd ever see them again.

The girls noticed my absent-mindedness, and asked me to tell them more about the beautiful woman from Sweden. I told them everything, but my chest was still burning with pain. In the meantime, Davor woke up – he was alright, he didn't even snore. As soon as he saw beautiful ladies sitting at our table, he came around.

He ordered a round of drink, and we drank it bottoms up. They all drank, so I had to as well. That last shot was the end of me – I couldn't think any more, though I felt alright physically. I could hear the blonde one say: - Is this dude even a man?! I have never seen a man so depressed because he lost his wife! I lost my parents, my sister and cousins, my boyfriend and my beautiful house in Konjic – yet here I am, alive and well. I have to move on with my life, I can't die, and this guy...”

I fell asleep, and Davor took over. He stated his wise opinion on the whole thing, and invited us all to sleep over at his house.

The rays of sun crept into the room I was sleeping in, and woke me up. My head was pounding like a bass drum. I tried to find my watch and see what the time was because I didn't want to be late for work. When I finally opened my eyes, I saw the blonde from last night sleeping next to me.

As soon as I saw her, I jumped out of the bed and made so much noise that I woke up everyone. Davor opened the door and told me to go back to

sleep because we were having a day off – he called the chief and took care of it. The blonde opened her eyes, looked around, and as soon as she saw me said: - You were alright, I guess, but you constantly talked about your wife!

I looked at her and couldn't believe it. How could this happen to me?! How could I get so drunk that I don't even know who or where I am, and cheat on my wife?! This was the first time I ever got drunk, and now I wish I never did!

I didn't want to see the blonde and the redhead ever again, but God works in mysterious ways, and life is unpredictable.

12.

It didn't take me long to forget all about that night and my affair. I forgot about that, but I couldn't forget my problem. Why won't Ruzica call me, at least to let me know that she got married? I wanted to see and hear my son. This whole situation really made me worried and absent-minded, and I couldn't even carry out my basic responsibilities as a traffic cop. My friends still wanted to help me find Ruzica, but how could they help me when she won't contact me?!

Chief Goran proposed an idea I immediately accepted; he would call some of his contacts and get her number. Then, he would call her and convince her that I was still alive, and that I worked at the Mostar police station. That very day he sent a letter to the police in Uppsala, asking them to send him Ruzica Bilic's telephone number.

The phone number Goran asked for was on his desk the next day. He called me into his office to hear the conversation in case he finds himself in need of a witness. I sat in a chair, shaking like a leaf in the wind. Goran dialled the number, and the phone rang. The voice at the other end of the line asked suspiciously: - Who are you and what do you want?

In a calm voice, Goran replied that he was the chief of the police in Mostar, and that he wanted her to patiently listen to what he has to say. He added that he could call some other time if she was busy. Ruzica was rather surprised, and after a short pause accepted his request.

The chief said, in a louder and more dignified voice:  
- I am the chief of the police in Mostar. There is a policeman called Josip Bilic working here. He's from Banja Luka, and for the past few months he's been trying to reconnect with his wife Ruzica and son Ivan. Someone told him that they were in Uppsala, in Sweden, but they never replied to his messages.

He heard a moan and a cry at the other side of the line before she hung up the phone. Goran wouldn't give up, so he re-dialled the number. Ruzica picked up the phone and incisively and threateningly said: - Whoever you are, leave me alone!

Goran asked her kindly not to hang up because he will give the phone to her husband, and the two of them can talk. I took the phone and said:

- Ruzica, your husband survived the execution in Banja Luka; he's still alive and he lives in Mostar...

She hung up again. I didn't know if she did it purposely, or because she was shocked to hear my voice. Goran was persistent; we tried for the third time. As soon as the phone rang, Goran gave me the phone. He stood next to me, should something unexpected happen; maybe I could get sick.

- Ruzica... Ruzica... Ruzica... – I kept calling her, breathless. I recognized her voice, and went on: "It's me, my love, Josip. I'm alive! I'm alive, God spared my life, I'm alive! Don't hang up, please don't, say something, I want to hear your voice! Say something..."

Ruzica was crying and could barely utter a word. She asked me, through tears, to call her in a few minutes. So, I did, and we talked everything over. In ten days, Ruzica and Ivan were in my arms. I could hear their voices, the most beautiful music my ears have ever heard.

13.

When I arrived to Mostar, I saw a gloomy, cold city. I suppose that was because my heart was gloomy and cold as well. However, ever since Ivan and Ruzica came back to me, Mostar brightened up. I was able to see its beauty and warmth, and its joyful spirit. Once I was reconnected with my family, I became a completely different person – full of life and happiness.

It took Ruzica and me days to tell each other what we went through. It seemed like an eternity has passed since we last saw each other. Ruzica still couldn't believe I was alive, and every now and then she would touch me or look at me to make sure I wasn't a ghost.

They say that time heals all wounds, and, God willing, it will heal us as well.

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During one of my patrols through town, I noticed an old house behind the aluminium smelter. There was a sign on it, and it said that the house was for sale. This small house was a ground floor, and it was old and shabby. But, it was still a good start. It could be renovated into a beautiful living space; if that didn't work out, we could still make use of the land. Thus, I wrote down the telephone number, and would call the owner as soon as I got the chance. Of course, I wasn't planning on telling Ruzica anything. Not just yet.

I dialled the number I wrote down, and a man named Vaso Jovanovic, who was living in Trebinje, answered the call.

"The house is for sale in its current condition. I am the sole owner of the house, and I will come to Mostar and sign it over to you if you purchase it. Its price is eight thousand marks and not a penny less," the old man said gracefully, like he was reciting a poem, and hung up.

Ruzica and I spent the next few days talking about buying the house; we would go see it and

imagined how we could redecorate it to make it our own little house in the flowers.

Chief Goran helped Ruzica find a job; she worked at a hotel *Ero*. Ruzica saved some money while she was in Sweden, so when we got our salaries, we had enough money to buy that house. But, the war was still raging, how could we reach the owner in Trebinje?

Chief Goran helped us once again. He called his contacts, and in a few days a contract was written and signed in Trebinje, we got the keys to the house, and Vaso got his money. A month later, the Bilic family was in their house again, only this time they weren't in Slatina nor Banja Luka. They lived in Mostar, in the village of Rodoc.

God works in mysterious ways, and human destiny is stranger than one can imagine. Five years had passed since we bought our small house. We invested all our money, love and hard work into our little home, and it really looked like a dream house. I would often stand in front of it, feasting my eyes upon the meadows surrounding us, thinking about my hometown.

Friends would often visit us and admire our little paradise. Chief Goran and his wife Irena, our best friends, spent most of their time with us.

If you think I forgot all about my poor father Vinko, then you'd be wrong. As soon as the Dayton peace agreement was reached, I contacted some of my old friends in Slatina. No one had seen my father since 1993, and I never heard any news about his whereabouts. The house was completely demolished and ruined, and the authorities were inquiring whether it would be renovated or torn down.

I couldn't even think about visiting Slatina again. Not even the eventual financial gains from selling the house and the land could change my mind.

Ruzica went to visit her parents in Laktaši only to find out that they had moved to Croatia years ago. She contacted them, and they came to visit us in Mostar on several occasions. Ruzica went to visit them in Okučani as well. She also went to Slatina and tried to find out what had happened to

my father, but her effort was futile. A few neighbours remembered seeing him, though. They said he was drunk every time they met him.

14.

In year 2000, we received several phone calls from Slatina and Banja Luka, and they were all from people who wanted to buy our houses. At first, we didn't want to sell them because we were waiting for the right price to be offered. We discussed the idea of selling the houses as a family. We laid out all the reasons for and against selling them, and everybody's desires were taken into account. I was waiting for the right offer, and since Ivan often talked about his grandfather Vinko, Ruzica waited for his decision. Hence, the selling was prolonged for another few months. Some buyers were desperate; they were practically begging us to sell the houses.

The sale was further prolonged in the early autumn, when Ruzica's father had deceased. His funeral was held in Laktaši. Afterwards, we suggested Ruzica's mother to sell her house as well. She was leasing it to subtenants she never had any problems with. She decided, however, that she would wait for some better times, so Ruzica and I sold our two houses. The prices we got for them were pretty good, given the circumstances and the purchasing power. I gave Ruzica my power of attorney, and she handled all the legal documentation work. I would never go to Banja Luka again, not even if that meant we wouldn't get a penny for them.

The newspaper said that bishop Komarica fought with all his heart to help the Croats come back and stay in Banja Luka and cities around it. I thought highly of him and wished nothing but success in his endeavours to accomplish that goal. However, being shot at in front of my own house, and saved by merciful people, I had no desire

whatsoever to see that city once again, let alone move back there.

I was shot at because I am a Croat. Is it my fault that I was born to a Croat mother? Am I to be held responsible for the atrocities of some political parties and ideologies? Is that why I was shot at that day?!

Ruzica and I decided to deposit half of the money in a savings account for Ivan's education. We planned to invest the rest of the money to build another floor on our house for Ivan. Our son didn't like the idea of depositing money in the bank; he believed that we would always have money if we have some now. The youth always thinks that way. They are too young to realize that they could have all the money in the world one day, and lose it all the other. They say that you can't get enough of a good thing. On one occasion I even told Ivan that I never knew when I might get crippled or killed. "Who's going to put you through college if something like that happens? My only desire is to see you graduate from college and find yourself a decent job. I don't want to see you patrolling the city, facing the danger every day."

Ruzica reprimanded me, saying that it was bad luck to talk about such things.

15.

For some time, the police suspected that there were drug smugglers operating in the area. They say the smugglers came to Bosnia from Montenegro, and that they were headed for Mostar and Sarajevo. They would probably go to Zagreb as well, and further west from there. Every morning, the chief reminded us to pay close attention to any suspicious vehicles. We would say that we understood the situation, and we would go out and patrol the streets.

What DID we understand, exactly? We didn't know for sure. There aren't any signs on the car indicating that a smuggler is driving it. The only thing that could happen is to run into the smugglers



by accident, and get beaten or worse. But, we chose this job, we grew to love it and we carried out our duties. Danger was our job.

My friend Davor was a good man. We've known each other, and worked together, for 10 years, since 1994. We always patrol the area from Bijelo Polje to Čapljina, and we patrol Mostar. Davor was prepared to lay his life for me; I've seen it with my own eyes. The only thing that bothered me about him was that he would give drivers, females in particular, a hard time when he was having a bad day. He's been like that ever since he divorced his wife. I always tried to behave the same way, regardless of my mood.

It was a beautiful, sunny day. The sun shone on the valley, and Davor and I were in a rather good mood. We assigned this imaginary happiness to the wonderful weather.

We got instructions from the station to patrol the road from Čapljina to Žitomislić, and to stop and check every third or fourth car. We did as we were told. We parked our car behind a sharp curve near Žitomislić. We took turns in controlling the passengers and the baggage in the car. While one talked to the passengers, the other stood about twenty meters away, closely monitoring passengers' behaviour. We didn't have any serious problems or comments. Besides, drivers always find something to complain about: they're in a hurry, they were already controlled, was it about another robbery, and so on.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon, and we took a short break. We went to a nearby restaurant to get something to eat. We finished our meal quickly, and went back to our position to go on with our controls. It was my turn to stop the cars, so Davor walked away to his post. I saw a car coming my way, and signalled them to stop. I came up to the car, and was just about to politely ask the driver for his license and registration, when the back seat door suddenly opened. A young man jumped out of the car and threw himself on me like a panther. Although I wondered why he ran out of the car like that, I didn't expect this to happen. He was fast, and

I was slow, and I couldn't remember what happened afterwards.

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He couldn't even open his eyes, but he subconsciously knew that his wife was holding his hand. He tried to wake up, but he lost his consciousness again. A few minutes later he showed some signs of life again. He tried to open his eyes, but his efforts were in vain. All his friends from the police station and all his neighbours were there in the room with him. He could recognize some of them, but they were mostly strangers. Doctors and nurses in their white coats caught his attention the most. At times he felt his whole body was sore, especially when the nurse tried to roll him to the side in the bed.

Josip had no idea where he was, he barely remembered who he was. In the following few days, his mind cleared up, and he could speak again. Many people came into his room, even people he didn't know, but they would soon get out. They wanted to express their gratitude for busting the group of drug smugglers.

Josip was told that he was unconscious for five days. The smugglers, there were three of them, managed to kick him and wound him badly before Davor came. He shot at them, and wounded one smuggler who admitted to the crime. Davor feared the worst – that Josip was dead. Fortunately, he survived; he was coming around and could already recognize his family and friends.

Josip couldn't remember exactly what happened with the dealers. He dreamt about the incident, but he forgot this dream as soon as he woke up. The chief of the police and the mayor came to visit him in the hospital one day. It was an emotional moment, both chief and mayor had tears in their eyes. They hugged and kissed Josip, and expressed gratitude in the name of the citizens of the city. The two men pointed out that his courage helped the police confiscate 90 kilograms of drugs. They added: "You have saved so many young lives from false happiness and unreal beauties. You saved

them from avoiding reality and from deterioration of their bodies...”

Josip stayed in the hospital for the next four months. Then, he was sent to the thermal baths, where he spent two months. All in all, he got a one-year sick leave. His wife and son were there for him the entire time. They brought the meaning into his life, and they were the main reason he got better. Ivan was fourteen years old; he was an excellent student and a fan of all sports – just like his father. He was thinking about starting high school, but didn't choose one yet. His father would often say: “Just don't fall in love like your father did, and you'll be alright!”

When someone asked about Josip, Ruzica would say jokingly: “Thank God, he's alright. He has recovered completely, and he's already gone back to work. The smugglers were nice enough to implant a small weather station into my dear husband, and now he doesn't have to wait for the forecast!”

16.

It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon. Two of our neighbours – spouses, Ruzica and I were sitting in front of our house in our flowery garden. We got along with all of our neighbours. We never tried to solve anyone else's problems, we lived our own life the best way we knew how, and we wanted our neighbours to do the same. Ivanka and Miro came to congratulate me on the badge of courage I received.

Davor and I were invited to attend the Ceremonial Conference of the City Council on the City Day in Mostar. We were given oral and written acknowledgement for catching the drug dealers. We were all over the newspapers, local as well as regional. Now I wish we hadn't been...

The table looked amazing – there was coffee, cakes, fruit and some wine on the table. When you drink wine, you suddenly feel an irresistible urge to sing, so we did. In the meantime, a few more people

came by, and our pleasant, quiet evening turned into a small party. We were joking, laughing and singing! That's all a man really needs when he's healthy and has family.

Suddenly, Ivan ran out of the house, and told me that some man wanted to talk to me on the phone. I got up, and went into the house to take the call. The minute I said "Hello" I heard a flow of angry words burst out:

- While you're getting your acknowledgements, the addicts who can't live without drugs will go insane and die. We'll rape your wife tomorrow night, and kidnap your son! We'll hold him a hostage until you give us our drugs back! You've been warned!

I got out of the house, and joined my joyful friends. I pretended that nothing serious had happened, and we started singing again. Ruzica began to sing *Bloom, bloom, my sweet rose...* Her voice was soft, and she sang beautifully. I joined her, and we sounded like we rehearsed the song for a long time.

Ruzica knew me all too well. She noticed that something was bothering me, and she signalled me to tell her what had happened. I was shaking like a leaf on the wind, but the more I feared, the better I sang. Thank God, my colleague Davor came by as well, and the neighbours congratulated him on the badge as well.

I apologized to everyone for having to take Davor away, and pulled him to the side. I told him what had happened briefly, and he immediately went to the station to get the controlling device, and a phone call recording device. He told the chief what had happened, and they organized a surveillance of our house, and an escort for my wife and my son. The party went on until midnight, and then our house sank into the night.

The mysterious person called me again on Wednesday. The threats were more arrogant and drastic, and they never happened again. The caller was tricked, and we found out his address. A few hours after the call, a young man and a woman were brought into the station; they were both stoned. They confessed everything without thinking; they said that several addicts decided to blackmail me.

They said that they had hoped I would be so scared that I would beg the chief to return the drugs to them.

All is well that ends well, but the life goes on and brings new problems.

17.

It was a beautiful, brisk morning in June. It rained last night, and the rain washed away the dirt and refreshed the air. It felt so good to breathe in the air after the rain. I woke up happy, knowing I had to go to work. Work was strange without my colleague Davor. He and his new girlfriend decided to spend their holidays at the seaside. I, on the other hand, got a new, younger partner. That day's route to be controlled was the road from Mostar to Čapljina.

The roads in June are crowded with cars; people from all parts of the country want to get to the seaside as soon as possible. The pre-season is always a bit cheaper, so everyone wants to use that opportunity. The chief told us not to harass the drivers unless they made an offense.

We parked our car near Žitomislić. We watched the cars drive by and only stopped a few of them. When the weather is nice and brisk, the drivers tend to be more attentive and careful. However, the sun shone again, and the heat was unbearable. "This is why so many people are in a rush to reach the seaside," I thought to myself. "Davor is so lucky to be at sea!"

My young colleague didn't talk much, and I didn't really feel I could trust him. I hardly got him to utter two words. Whenever I suggested something, he would nod – that was the sign of his approval. So, when I told him that we should go and have something to eat, he nodded. We came back to our post after our meal. We parked our car about 500 meters closer to Mostar.

More and more cars drove to the sea in the early afternoon. There was really no point in

hampering people's drive to their final destination on the coast. Keeping that in mind, I suggested that we let them drive and find something else to do until the end of our shift. I decided to sit on the banks of Neretva and enjoy the beauty of this emerald-green river.

It was flowing peacefully twenty meters away from the road. I didn't even have the chance to surrender to her soft whisper. I could hear some strange sounds and dull groans down in the bushes. I looked in the direction the sound was coming from, and pricked up my ears. And then I saw them: a young, naked girl with a tape covering her mouth and her hands tied lay on the ground, and a young man standing between her legs wanted to rape her.

I stood there and watched the young woman, actually a little girl, trying to untie her hands and run away, but she couldn't. Her clothes were torn up and thrown around, witnessing the atrocious act. Her young, bulging breasts were naked, as was her entire fragile little body. It was obvious she was only fifteen or sixteen. The boy was persistent in his intent, but the girl cramped up every muscle on her body making it impossible for him to do anything. The poor thing defended herself as much as she could. I took out my gun and screamed:

- Stop right there, or I'll shoot!

I pointed my gun at the young man and started walking toward him slowly. He stood up and waited for my reaction. I told him to untie the girl's hands and take the tape off her mouth. He leaned forward to do so, and I got close enough to see the girl's face. I wasn't paying much attention to him; he did what he was told, and I assumed he wouldn't be stupid to try anything. In the blink of an eye, he hit me on my right hand, and I saw the gun fly through the air and into the river. I threw myself on him and we both fell down the bank into the ice cold river. We fought hard, and it was a matter of life or death. I was trying to pull him under the water, and he was trying to do the same thing to me. We were about fifty meters away from the place we fell into the river. He was younger and stronger than me, and I didn't stand any chance against him. I didn't see he

had a gun as well until he took it out, pointed it at me and fired it. I could feel the bullet pierce my thigh and lodge in my bone. The water around me was turning red.

After he shot me, the young man turned away and started to run. He didn't get far, though. My young colleague heard the shot and came running to see what had happened. He had a gun in his hand, determined to fire it if necessary. As soon as he approached us, he knew what had happened. The young man had no other option but to stand still and let my colleague cuff him. My colleague then phoned the ambulance, and gave his jacket to the girl to keep her warm. So, the young girl and I were both taken to the hospital.

I was at the hospital recovering, again! Ten months of sick leave!

They postponed the trial to the young man until my full recovery. He turned out to be the son of an influential, rich man who called me several times. He wanted to meet me, but I refused, knowing the purpose of such a meeting. Still, a car parked in front of my house one afternoon. It was his representative who tried to convince me to change my statement. Of course, I ruled out that option straight away.

I repeated everything I stated in my statement – nothing more and certainly nothing less. The young man was sentenced to three years imprisonment, I was now a cripple, and the young girl will remember this trauma for the rest of her life. Indeed, after this incident I had no desire to work as a policeman whatsoever; I even said that to my new chief. I'd been working as a policeman for 25 years, and when you add the beneficiary service, you get a number that is more than enough for someone to retire.

One day, Davor stopped by to inform me that my request for retirement was approved. I was so happy and sad at the same time that I couldn't control the tears. I was happy I finally got retired because I couldn't bear another day at work. I was sad because I wouldn't spend my entire day with Davor and my other colleagues ever again.

18.

At first, my days as a retired man dragged on. Soon, however, I felt like I was working again. My pension income was slightly lower than the pay I was used to, but that didn't bother me. Ruzica still had her job, we had food supplies, and we even saved some money from selling the houses.

I couldn't be at one place very long, so I joined the fishing club. I started fishing and decorating the second floor for my son. I would go bowling with my friends, we went on fieldtrips, and when it was raining, I would stay at home and read. All in all, I was never bored. You can always find something to do, when you want to. But, most of all, I loved to sit by the river and feel the blood flowing through my veins; it almost felt like my heartbeat was attuned to the flow of the river.

I must say, I was having a hard time completing everything I planned in a single day. I loved to go and help my friends who were building a house or a garage. Not only do you help a neighbour, but you also fortify your friendship, have fun, and drink and eat something.

I must admit I felt honoured when my colleagues invited me to the annual Police Day celebration. Such celebration were always fun; you receive commendations on your service, and you know your work is acknowledged. Presents were often given, and sometimes even financial support. Various athletic competitions would be organized, and people would joke and sing long into the night.

My wife was still working; she never complaints about her job, and she's healthy. We still love and respect each other. My son was studying law; he was in the third year of study. I often thanked God for all the good he had given me and my wife.

I realized that those people who lack strong faith and love have an empty, sad soul, so I often said:



“He who has no faith in his own abilities and in other people’s mercy is a sad man indeed. When you believe you can do something, you will certainly succeed in it. Likewise, when you believe in God and his mercy, and you hope and pray he will help you, you will feel relieved. Blessed is he who believes in himself and in his God.”

I learned this from my mother. She often told me that, if I believe in my abilities and in God, nothing will ever stop me. My faith would lead me on the path covered in thorns and roses; it would help me overcome the abysses, twists and turns. My faith would bring me good, honest friends and protect me from the bad ones.

Hadn’t it been for my faith and for my love for Ruzica and Ivan that gave me strength, I would never be able to overcome all the difficulties and problems in my life, and all the mental and physical ups and downs.

When you look back, you can see how fast days, months and years pass by. You would never imagine how quickly everything passes, in the blink of an eye, like a beautiful dream. Take a look at my son, for instance – yesterday he was just a kid, now he was a third-year student! When did all this happen?

We’d been renovating Ivan’s second floor apartment. A lot of work has been done; the living room was finished and the furniture also arrived. We sped the process a little because Ivan had to study a lot. A girl would often come to the house; they were study buddies so we didn’t mind.

Ivan spent more and more time in the lectures, on the football fields, or studying, and less and less time with us, his parents. I often felt the need to see him and talk with him, his mother even more. What goes around comes around, or so they say. One day in the late afternoon, Ivan came home and sat next to me in the living room. Ruzica was still at work, so we were alone. “Dad, I have something I wanted to talk to you about, if you have time. You can then discuss it with mom and tell me what you think about my idea,” he informed me, and went upstairs to change.

It only took him a few minutes, and he was now sitting next to me, starting the well-prepared speech.

“Father, you have told me on several occasions how you met my mother, fell in love with her and decided to share your life, happiness and sorrow with her. Well, tonight I will tell you my story which is very much like yours. Even if it’s different, we all know that times change for the better, and sometimes even for the worse.

I was in my senior year of high school, and she was in the first grade. The schools were situated in the same building, so we met each other every day. We flirted that year, and the next one as well – I stopped by just to see her. We liked each other, but I didn’t have time to go out with her; I had to study, or wanted to play football. I guess I didn’t like her so much to be willing to sacrifice everything just to see her. Last year, in February, I saw Dijana again. I went to a disco club at a hotel *Bevanda* and there she was, standing right next to the entrance. Ever since then, we’ve been inseparable. We’ve made up for all the time we lost.

Dad, she doesn’t have a father. He died in a car accident when she was two. I saw her mom from a distance once. I wouldn’t even recognize her if I met her on the street, besides, I’m interested in Dijana and not her mother. I’m pretty sure you’re not interested in any other woman other than mom, right dad? Well, Dijana told me that her mother won’t allow her to bring a boy to her house unless they’re engaged. On the other hand, Dijana is allowed to come to our house.

Dad, Dijana and I have been sleeping together for some time now. We decided not to have sex before marriage, but we do cuddle and kiss. What was I supposed to do, anyway? That’s how it is nowadays; if you won’t sleep with your girlfriend, she leaves you for another boy. I had no other choice but to accept this way of life. I really like Dijana now; I can’t imagine my life without her.

The scent of her body is enchanting; her blue eyes knock me off my feet every time she looks at me. I like every inch of her body, even the way she

thinks and speaks. Hence, we decided to have an engagement ceremony in February 2011, precisely one year after we met. We plan on having the ceremony at the same hotel where we met – hotel *Bevanda*.

Dad, this really means a lot to us. I promise to graduate from college in time, and Dijana wants to finish high school and go to college as well. Once we get engaged, there won't be any need to rush the marriage. I hope you and mom won't get married if add another name to our family. “

Ivan ended his speech proudly. I was absolutely speechless, this news came completely unexpected. I was mute for a while, but as soon as I got my voice back, I replied:

“Son, I appreciate your honesty and courage to share your future plans with me. As long as you're happy, your mom and I will be happy as well; you have my blessing. Your mother will be home at ten; I'll inform her about your plans. You could come here for dinner as well, and hear what your mother has to say. I'm sure we think alike.”

Ruzica came home at ten o'clock sharp, but our son never showed up. We discussed this situation until after midnight. Of course, Ruzica loved the idea to add one more name to our family. After all, Ivan was twenty-two, he loved to read and he was a good student. It was high time he thought about his future, and we would be there to support him and help him out as much as we could.

We retold our conversation to Ivan the next day. We even laid out some details about the engagement party: who to invite, what to eat, when and where to buy the engagement rings and flowers; we stated that a priest should be also invited to give his blessing...

19.

I received an invitation for Ivan's engagement party, and I immediately called Josip to let him know I was going to attend it. I would come to the party as a friend, and not as the writer of his life

story. When I spoke to Josip, he told me that there would be about twenty-five guests there, and he reminded me of the venue and the time of the party.

I promised to attend Ivan's wedding years ago, I even wanted to be the godfather. I met Josip after he got shot in Banja Luka, and I also met Ruzica when I came to visit Josip after he busted those drug dealers. I grew fond of both of them: they were nice and peaceful, respected other people, they were never intruding, and they were so honest.

I left Kreševo and arrived to Mostar early that day. I was going to sleep at Davor Kolenda's cottage; he was my godfather. After a long rest, I changed my clothes, took my presents and headed for the hotel.

I was there first. If any other guests arrived before me, I couldn't recognize any of them. Technically, the only people I knew there were Josip and Ruzica. One part of the restaurant was decorated especially for this occasion.

The guests started arriving, and they sat at the beautifully arranged tables. I sat at the bar and glanced over them. At eight o'clock, Ruzica and Josip arrived; several minutes before the beginning of the ceremony. They looked around the room, and as soon as they noticed me, they came to say hello. They were very as nice and friendly as ever, and I took the opportunity to give Ruzica flowers. After a short conversation, they walked away to welcome other guests as well. When the priest came in, I decided to sit at my table, and said hello to all the guests along the way. A middle-aged woman escorted by a young man came in after the priest. She was tall, pretty, had a nice black hair and blue eyes that glanced over the room. I heard someone say:

"Josip, that's your daughter in law's mother, go and meet her. Ruzica should come with you, too." They walked up to the woman, and Josip immediately apologized for meeting her like this. "My son and your daughter insisted on organizing this party by themselves. They also told us you didn't want to meet us before their engagement, so we respected your wish. Now is our chance to make further arrangements," said Josip.

All the seats were taken. I was sitting in the corner, as always; I never liked being in the centre of attention. The melody coming from the speakers created a joyful atmosphere, and everyone was talking with someone. Dijana's mother and Ivan's father weren't sitting next to each other, but that wasn't a problem; it was an engagement party after all. I couldn't see the happy couple anywhere, and I was just wondering where they were when they came through the door. Their entrance was welcomed with a loud applause, and their closest relatives circled them to congratulate them on their engagement.

When someone asked them what took them so long to show up, they replied that they had been at the club where they promised never to part. Everyone congratulated them, wishing them a happy future.

After a few minutes, I came up to them, and told them I would like to give them a bouquet of flowers and a copy of my book – *Wisdom for living*. I introduced myself as a friend of Ivan's parents.

People were joking, giving their blessings to the happy couple, and the atmosphere reminded me of a wedding. The priest asked for our attention, and said:

“Ivan's parents, my good friends and members of my parish, have asked me to witness this couple's love and bless their engagement. This engagement will bring these two young people together, making them one. I'm honoured to be given this opportunity to meet Dijana, who will join our parish, as well as her mother.”

The priest prayed for the happiness and health of couple. Then, he blessed the engagement rings, and gave one to Ivan to put it on Dijana's finger. He gave the other ring to Dijana, and she did the same. The priest said they may kiss, and everyone welcomed the kiss with a loud applause. Once everyone congratulated them on their engagement, the priest continued:

“I wish you the best of luck in your future marriage; don't postpone the wedding for too long. I say this because I've known Ivan's entire family for years.

They are truly good members of parish, and most importantly – good people.” He took a short break, and continued: “Let us take a moment and recall Josip’s faith. He was host in Banja Luka, and he survived. Ruzica left to Sweden, and he had so many problems with contacting her...”

Someone screamed: ”Dijana’s mother passed out!”

A waiter rushed to her and did everything he could to bring her back. He poured water over her face, gave her a mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and after a few minutes Dijana’s mother came around. She was still very pale, but managed to get up and scream in despair: “Ivan is Dijana’s brother!”

The room was quiet, you couldn’t hear a sound. The big joyful party turned into a quiet gathering. Someone screamed again, and we could hear moans and cries for help: “Josip! Josip, please, what’s the matter?! Josip?! Somebody help me, he’s dying!”

A few guests took Josip to the car and rushed to get him to the hospital. The other guests stood there, still in shock – Ivan is Dijana’s brother?!

After a long silence, the priest tried to get things back under control. He assumed that was all a bad joke and he called Dijana’s mother to explain what she meant. It was too late – Ivan’s phone rang and brought him back from his desperation. He answered the phone and was mute. He leaned his head against the table and cried so loud that the entire room was shaking. Other guests cried as well. Dijana took the phone and listened to the voice on the other end of the line. She hung up and announced

- Josip is dead....

## EPILOGUE

Dear readers, if you have skimmed through these pages, then you must’ve missed the chapter that explains the only mistake Josip ever made in his entire life. Therefore, you are not eligible to make any conclusions about this great man. Everyone makes mistakes, and nothing happens. A

good, honest man went astray once in his life... only once...

One sentence killed him – *Ivan is Dijana's brother!*

Why, you ask?

Because a man with such a great moral character couldn't take it – it broke his heart, and it stopped beating.

You often fall into a storm that throws and tosses you around leaving you completely helpless.

Ruzica was Josip's first love, never before did he have a girlfriend. They found each other and decided to take the same path through life. Like many others, their path was dark and gloomy. Yet, they built a home, had a son they adored who was going to get married. Who was the bride to be? His own sister!

Josip never drank a single drop of alcohol in his entire life, unless he had to at parties and during holidays when people usually propose toasts. He had a deeply rooted hatred for alcohol because his father was an alcoholic.

Now that you have read these lines, would you still judge Josip's life, and the mistake he made on that ill-fated night?

He survived execution and got a transfer to Mostar. Thinking her husband is dead, Ruzica and Ivan go to Sweden – she saw him die with her own two eyes. A few months later, someone calls Ruzica and informs her that her husband is still alive. She refuses to answer the call, disgusted at this thoughtless joke.

Ruzica meant the world to Josip. So, imagine his disappointment and despair when she refused to talk to the chief of the police. Josip thought she must've married someone else and enjoyed the rich life.

He goes to a pub with his colleague Davor and gets drunk. He, who never tasted alcohol, drank to forget about his sorrow. He just lost a wife and a son! He and Davor got so drunk, that they allowed two women take advantage of them sexually.

Josip wakes up in Davor's apartment, the blonde refugee from Konjic lying next to him. He repented last night, but it was all said and done. He

went astray once, and that one mistake cost him his life.

To sum up, Josip met the blonde refugee seventeen years ago, and he wished he never met her at all. Her daughter, Dijana, was seventeen. Nothing can change the fact that Dijana was Josip's daughter. Life goes on and changes its flow, and we have no other choice but to adjust and follow its flow.

Instead of a husband and a marriage, Dijana got a brother. God rest Josip's soul. Life indeed writes the most dramatic stories of them all, stories that not even the greatest writers can replicate.



