



I AM A  
EVERYTHING.  
THE LAST TIME  
ALONE? WHAT  
EVEN DO W  
A L O



ALONE...

IN

WHEN WAS

ME YOU WERE

AT DO YOU

WHEN YOU'RE

N

E

?

# ANITA ČEKO

(ZADAR, 1987)



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# FAR AWAY, KANDAHAR

## TRANSLATORS

Ivana Ostojčić, Marija Andrijašević

### CHARACTERS

**LUCE** (15)

**TONI** (14)

**MOTHER** (42)

**FATHER** (45)

**GRANDMA** (70)

### LIVING ROOM

The story is set in 2014 in a town  
in Dalmatia.

*Mother, Luce and Toni gather around a laptop. They're trying to take the best possible angle and get a video call through with the father who is at the other side of the world.*

Wait, press camera.

Hello?

Move.

Hello? Heeey!

Turn the mic on.

Dad?

Hello!

I can hear you!

What's up?

Just did a bit of working out... a day off...

How are you?

... blackout...

Dad?

We're losing you.

I'm right here!

Your beard's grown!

Is it dangerous there?

... signal...

Looks great on him.

Looks great on you!

... truck...

We can barely hear you.

... chicken... rice...

Dad!

Turn the camera off! It slows it down.

How's it been over there?

... laughed... cow...

We asked how it's been?

He can't hear a thing from us.

...our driver... Ha-ha-ha...

He's laughing.

Dad, we have no idea what you're talking about.

He can't hear you.

Dad?

Come on, write to him.

What am I supposed to write?

It's gonna freeze. Write!

Where?

Down here.

What?

To call us when he gets a better signal.

...

**TONI** God, please make his signal better so that he can call us... Here, I'll donate my stickers to the organization. If nothing happens to him by summer, I'll also donate my soldier box. All the soldiers. Of course I will, what do I need that for. My Liverpool scarf? My box or my Liverpool scarf? Both? How about right now all the extra stickers and the entire album. What else? Or should I leave that for the summer? Liverpool's scarf for the summer. The box? The box first? Or the stickers now, then the box in

the summer. The scarf in the winter? When should I decide?

KITCHEN

*Mother is setting the table for lunch, expertly. Luce is in the living room, taking photos with her cell phone of her tight biceps, collar bone, cheeks. There is a sports bag by her feet. Grandma enters the place, panting. On her head she is wearing a colourful foulard, a hat, sunglasses, with a handful of asparagus in her hand.*

*Mother looks at her in disbelief.*

**GRANDMA** My doctor told me walk, you should walk more.

**MOTHER** But not in the high sun. You could have called me. Luceeee!

*Grandma puts the asparagus on the table, she picked them up on the way here. Mother puts a casserole on the table, Grandma takes a peek inside and breathes in the smell of the food.*

**MOTHER** Luuuuuce!

**GRANDMA** Whenever we feast like this, I wonder whether he eats anything down there, poor soul...

**MOTHER** He has people cooking for him. He's fine...

**GRANDMA** It's different when you're home.

**MOTHER** Luce!

**LUCE** What's the fuss about? I'm right here!

**MOTHER** Lunch is ready.

**GRANDMA** Look at our beanpole...

*Luce rolls her eyes, puts the bag down by the table. Grandma is adjusting her foulard, her bald head glimpses underneath.*

**MOTHER** I used to be skinnier than her. (to Luce) It's just that I ate, and you're not eating at all. I would have given anything back then to put some weight on.

**GRANDMA** Your Mother was as thin as a stick, plus the crooked spine.

**MOTHER** Got married at 90 pounds. How much do you weigh? Not less than a hundred.

**LUCE** A hundred and three... A hundred and five...

**MOTHER** I loved to see the girls' thighs touching on the inside, you know, the way they rub against each other when they're walking.

**LUCE** Hideous.

**MOTHER** To me it was a wish unfulfilled. Poor me, I always had this tunnel between my thighs.

**LUCE** I know, I heard the story, you were too skinny, you wanted to gain weight! Wow!

**MOTHER** There is no need for you to yell.

*An uncomfortable silence settles between Luce and Mother. All three women are sitting and eating their soup.*

**GRANDMA** I was watching the news last night, they were showing those poor people in orange suits kneeling...

**MOTHER** (Luce) Is it too salty?

**GRANDMA** Two guys stand by their sides with machetes, masked, and the third one records everything. The poor men cry, beg, drool... They are Danish or French, I think...

**LUCE** (to Mother) It sure is better than being tasteless.

**GRANDMA** What do you say to that?

**MOTHER** (to Grandma) Mom, please. Can we have lunch in peace?

**GRANDMA** I wasn't saying anything, just saying... Poor people.

**LUCE** (to Mother, quietly) The van is here in five minutes.

**MOTHER** (quietly) Take some food, please.

**GRANDMA** What? She's not eating again?

**MOTHER** She has a competition. Apparently, there's no time to eat.

*Luce gets up, takes her sports bag, grabs an apple, leaves.*

**GRANDMA** (to Mother, whispering) All that running she does, she'd better be paid.

**LUCE** (shouting) Too bad, my medals are worthless even for a pawn shop!

*Mother shakes her head in disbelief. Grandma looks at Mother, feeling guilty.*

**MOTHER** Let her be.

**GRANDMA** (remembers) We didn't even say graces.

**MOTHER** Well, Toni's not here.

**GRANDMA** Where is he?

**MOTHER** With his lot.

*Silence.*

**GRANDMA** I really can't understand why he's helping those nitwits...

**MAMA** What an ugly thing to say.

**GRANDMA** I just wanted to say I'm sorry he's wasting his time.

...

*It's nighttime. Luce is back home and she is sitting on the floor tiles, in her sports shorts and a T-shirt. She is eating cake.*

**LUCE** I gave it my best, I really did, but the last fifty meters it was like someone was weighing my legs down, like I was just standing in one place. My coach went ballistic, he yelled at me and at all of us in the locker room. He yelled he'd be the happiest to quit, he doesn't know why the fuck we train because we always fuck up when it's the most



important, that we chickened out and just we wait for it to backfire – generally speaking. Then he kept giving us the shit about eating too much (we were eating bananas!) and that we should stop because we're not seals, swimmers are seals, they need fat to keep them afloat. We? We're supposed to be cougars... Sanja flipped out and started grinning. He let her laugh it out, and then he told her to keep bingeing, her head will soon merge with her neck from all the fat. I felt like saying something to him, but I didn't...

*Luce is eating like there is no tomorrow, talking breathlessly, with her mouth full.*

**LUCE** Sanja and I were at the hotel bar in the evening drinking Coke with swimmers from Slovenia. They invited us. The coach would have killed us if he had seen us. Fortunately he drinks his pills so no one can wake him up by morning. Later this Primož guy, cute, long blond hair, ask me my number. I gave it to him. I mean, I know I don't want a relationship, I'm not into that. Of course, the guy didn't even mention a relationship, but you know, neither did I... I'm only a second grader, what am I supposed to do? Sanja's sister was already fingered by two (!) guys. They shoved their fingers inside her. The horror. One of them was Rico<sup>1</sup>, the lowlife of the elementary school all the girls drooled over, but not me. He's two years older and he was classmates with Sanja's sister... Is she a virgin anymore? I don't even know how it gets inside of you. The worst thing of all is that Sanja said she'd also allow it if she like the guy! I fuckin' like someone too every now and then, but I won't let him shove stuff into me. Why can't we just simply enjoy sports practice and life?

*Light turns on, Mother unexpectedly enters in her nightie, with a book in her hand.*

**MOTHER** When did you come back?

*Luce jumps, tries to hide traces of food around her.*

**MOTHER** I didn't hear you... What are you doing?

**LUCE** And why are you awake? It's two in the morning.

*They look at each other. Mother shows her the book, she has a little left to read.*

**MOTHER** Do you know what happened last night? Didn't Toni tell you?

*Luce just keep looking at her, Toni told her nothing.*

...

*Toni is carrying the laptop in his arms and parading around the apartment. He is talking, coming into the kitchen where Mother and Luce, who is typing, are. Toni puts the 'Dad-laptop' on the table. Luce puts her phone away. Mother and Luce join the conversation.*

I'm fine, I'm fine!

How far?

About two kilometres, everything's fine.

Oh, that's not that far... It's like from here to the market...

How many dead?

Not many... A few protesters. Don't worry! Our car is bullet-proof.

**LUCE** (to herself) Mother was making lunch when Breaking News came. A 19-year-old

kid blew himself up in the square. She started shaking. Toni was here and saw it all. Luce! How was the competition?

**MOTHER** (to herself) I called him straight away, we talked. We talked for half a minute, he tried to laugh by force. It was bad. We came fourth in the relay race.

**TONI** (to himself) I took the stickers yesterday and good thing I did. Who cares, the important thing is to hang out and have a good time! Look, look at all the photos I took. Wait...

*Dad sends pictures of girls and women, only their faces are visible.*

Wow... Look at those big eyes.

That's how they walk the streets?!

Where did you take those photos?

Badakhshan. It's a province.

Is it dangerous?

It's good when they're walking on their own, they weren't allowed before.

How? Ba...

It's not dangerous!

**TONI** (to himself) It's dangerous.

Badakhshan. Hey, the poverty... You should see that...

How old are these women?

They're Luce's age.

What?! They seem more like Mum's age!

**MOTHER** (to herself) His deployment never lasted less than two months, and never more than two years... For now... USA, Germany, Ukraine, Somalia, Indonesia, Afghanistan. We have 17 folders on our laptops with the photos he sent us – Luce counted them. We have six boxes of souvenirs down in the basement, and a whole bunch of that around the place. Half of that should be given out.

Most of them are already married...

Already?! That's disgusting!

1. Rico means curly in the Dalmatian dialect.

How did you manage to take their photos?!

Well, no husbands were around, so... You don't need to wait long. Ha-ha-ha.

Dad? How often are the attacks?

**MOTHER** (to herself) The attacks are all the time.

The attacks are rare.

Wow! You can't even see their eyes!

What is this?

Want a burka as a souvenir?

**TONI** (to himself) Luce told me that Mom couldn't sleep at all last night.

Please, don't bring us a burka.

Get us one!

Come on, delete those photos so no one finds them! We'll save them.

*Father sends photos of Afghan children.*

They're so cute!

Toni, this one's just like you!

He's not just like me...

Why is he carrying a bucket on his back?!

He's carrying water. He's working...

Poor kids.

**LUCE** (to herself) These photos rock!

What's up with you? I miss you guys.

Luce is in training, and Toni is still with the organization...

I'm going to a birthday on Saturday.

Toni is hanging out, can you believe that?

That's great, son! With whom, where?

This girl from the organization is having a birthday party so she invited me!

*The camera turns on. Toni, Luce and Mother strike a pose, try to get in the frame. Finally everyone is visible.*

So good to see you... Your Dad misses you. How's Grandma?

Her usual self... She says hi.

So much sand (!)

It's interesting, but I miss the Mediterranean a bit.

*Luce takes the laptop and goes to the window with a lot of greenery underneath.*

Hey! Where are you up to!

Look! Does it hurt? Everything's in bloom!

That's the way to enjoy life! Ha-ha-ha.

Give it back! Luce!

*Luce is showing him the greenery.*

Here, look!

Mom, tell her! Give it back.

She's impertinent.

WiFi dies near the window!!! Luce!

*Beep beep beep. The connection broke.*

My, you're really selfish.

*Luce feels a bit embarrassed.*

...

**MOTHER** As if one war wasn't enough for him... War zone (!) "a humanitarian in a war zone", that's "his name" now. He's not in a war... He dropped out of college because of the war and one part of him feels sorry about that, but he'd never admit it. He's always saying how 'lucky' he's been compared to others and how he spent only four years in the field around Dalmatia, while others did five and how apart from those two shrapnel pieces... he has nothing else 'visible'... I met him a month after... He was smoking like a chimney and as a souvenir, he immediately boasted, he got these two wounds below the spleen and two wisps

of grey hair... He never tells the kids about the war. He never tells me and I never ask... It's enough to remember it... It was never as close to me as it could have been... I only saw it on the news, although there were people dying a hundred kilometres away. My classmate's father, my elementary schoolteacher and her daughter, Mom's first cousin...

...

*Toni puts little soldiers in the box.*

**LUCE** I sent Primož some of Dad's photos, he was like stunned.

...

**TONI** Green soldiers, brown soldiers, they were all around the living room... I played with them a lot. Sometimes we played war, so they shot, and sometimes we just explored and crept around climbed mountains, went diving underneath the carpet or flew to outer space discovering planets - then I climbed the table and put them inside the chandelier. Sale told me he never played war, he keeps saying that war is 'the lowest of the low' and that he can't believe it exists... But if you have soldiers, you don't have to play war, they can do something else.

I met Sale at the organization and we hit it off straight away, with some people you just click. He's just a year older than me, but sometimes it seems like five. He's wise. Last year he moved to Split from an island and his new class was really dreadful, but luckily his aunt introduced him to volunteering in the organization straight away (*Kids for Kids*)... They gave him little Megi, she just lost a volunteer. She has that, you know... she's retarded. She looks Chinese

with her eyes and stuff. But she's too cool, she laughs all the time and keeps making jokes, she's so much fun. She confessed to me that she has a crush on Sale and all the time she's using me as a middleman she draws little hearts for him, writes him messages, letters. Can't believe a child can develop a crush like that... They really adore you straight away. No one ever told they loved me as little Juraj did the other day. He was so lovable. He was so happy that we came to his house that he kept clapping his hands, hugging us, shouting and doing his crazy faces. Sale and I were laughing our hearts out! ... The coordinator would kill us if she found out, we're not supposed to go their homes, she keeps yelling "Contacts are limited to the organization exclusively!" ... But why should we care, uncle Toma asked us and we said yes, but does she need to know? Uncle Toma and Juraj live downtown in a big room on the ground floor, that's the whole place, and it's all like poor and old, but the two are having a great time. Sale and I were just discussing how they're not missing out on anything... I'd like to show all this to Dad once, he'd like it. He's really a people person.

...

**LUCE** I don't feel hungry at all.

...

**MOTHER** We haven't heard from him in a few days. There's not much signal around these villages. It's a long road from the north to the south - that's where they're based, in Kandahar. In his last text he wrote "Today I spent six hours with a herd of goats and farmers. They were talking to me about the meaning of life - it's enough for them to give the goat something to

*graze and later to feed off it. There. Life philosophy at its finest. We ask for too much..." We ask for too much? "... Don't worry if you're not able to reach me in the next ten days. Lose the paranoia - as far as attacks are concerned, they mostly take place in the cities. He-he, they know where not to strike. It's much more peaceful around the countryside, and these new local people watching our back are great. People live all kinds of lives, I've witnessed some things and I can tell you I am more grateful with each passing day..." More grateful with each passing day? "... I love you. Give the kids a kiss."*

#### KITCHEN

*Mother and Luce are setting the table for lunch. Toni is sitting. All three are more aloof, tired. Grandma comes back from the bathroom, wiping her hands in her short. She keeps casting glances at Mother, Toni and Luce.*

**GRANDMA** My doctor is always surprised at my perfect blood results. No wonder, look at this lunch... I never cooked as great as your Mother. (pause) Shall we say our graces? Toni?

**LUCE** Grandma wants you to say graces.

**TONI** Huh? What?

**GRANDMA** I'm not saying anything, but you sum it up so nicely... for this and for that; and for us and for them, and for Dad and for Mother, and for me...

*Everybody is waiting for Toni, he is trying to focus.*

**TONI** God, ah... Ah... Please.... Ah... Thank you...

*Toni finds it hard to open his mouth. Luce rolls her eyes.*

**MOTHER** The food will get cold, God, bless this food and... us! Amen.

**GRANDMA** And thank you that it all went well in... Bash-ashan?

**LUCE** Badakhshan.

**GRANDMA** Bak-dash-kan. Bashak-dan?

**LUCE** Ba-da-KHS-AN, Grandma, Badakhshan.

**GRANDMA** Ba...

**MOTHER** Bon appetite, guys!

*Silence.*

**MOTHER** (to herself) I had a dream last night, just a few hours apart, that I was watching two kids fell off a building. Each building was ten storeys high and I was really far away from them. The first thing I saw was a kid falling down from the roof while playing there with other kids. I couldn't do a thing. A few seconds later, I was at a different place, in a completely different neighbourhood. I look at a similar building. A similar scene, only different kids on the roof. I look away, but then look back at them another free-falling kid.

**GRANDMA** It's not easy for him.

**MOTHER** Huh?

**GRANDMA** It's stressful. That's what I wanted to say. He can't do a thing if his contract is still binding...

*Toni is slowly stirring the soup in his plate, closes his eyes and opens them, this is hard for him.*

**GRANDMA** What's the matter? Don't tell me you think you're fat too.

*Toni forces himself to put a little soup in his mouth. Grandma takes the spoon to her mouth, but has trouble with it because of the tremor. Mother reaches to help her.*



**GRANDMA** No, no, no. This is my workout.

*Silence. Mother and Luce are watching Toni 'looking' at his plate with his eyes closed.*

**MOTHER** I'll drive you to therapies the next month, you won't go alone.

**GRANDMA** I love walking.

**MOTHER** I can't walk with you because I'm working.

**LUCE** Grandma didn't ask you to walk with her.

*Mother grunts. Toni suddenly gets up and slowly staggers away.*

**GRANDMA** Where are you going?

**MOTHER** Toni!

**LUCE** Let him be.

*They wait a bit, Luce gets up and follows Toni.*

**GRANDMA** What's the matter with him?

*Sounds are heard. Mother also runs.*

BATHROOM

*Toni is over the toilet, he just vomited. Luce is standing next to him. Mother comes, closes the door.*

**MOTHER** You can hear everything!

**LUCE** (quietly) I can't imagine how you thought he'd eat today.

**TONI** I did...

**MOTHER** (to Toni) Please go lie down.

**LUCE** (to Mother) What are you gonna tell Grandma? I don't understand why you even forced him...

*Grandma is shouting from the kitchen. A cell phone rings. Toni vomits a bit more.*

**GRANDMA** Someone's phone is ringing! (shouting) It says "SA-LE DAD" Who's that? Should I answer it???

**MOTHER** Don't answer! Don't answer!

*Mother runs to the kitchen.*

**GRANDMA** Hello? Huh? Huh?

*Toni and Luce are listening from the bathroom*

**MOTHER** Why did you answer it!

**GRANDMA** Take it, take it, there's a man on the line!

**MOTHER** Hello. Good day! Well, he's fine, he's on his feet. Thank you!

*The kitchen door closes in the distance, indistinct sounds come from the kitchen*

**TONI** Why is Sale's Dad calling?

**LUCE** The man drove you last night. (pause) Wash your mouth, you're full of it.

**TONI** I really didn't want to.

**LUCE** Who gave you alcohol?

**TONI** No one... It was only when the other guys came... That Rico...

**LUCE** Rico was there?

**TONI** The girl from the organization who was celebrating is his cousin and he came...

**LUCE** He came on his own or with a girl? Rico?

**TONI** I don't know... And then... She went to the tobacco shop for drinks...

**LUCE** The volunteer girl? Fantastic. Volunteers with kids and buys booze.

**TONI** She one of the good ones... she wasn't drinking at all last night....

**LUCE** So, what did you drink?

**TONI** A beer...

**LUCE** Since when do you drink beer?

**TONI** I tried one last night.

**LUCE** So you passed out on one beer?

**TONI** ... and some cherry brandy, and honey brandy. And then someone brought some wine...

**LUCE** You're such an idiot! You don't mix the drinks! Even I know that.

**TONI** But I was completely normal and then it hit me... I couldn't get on my feet, so I lied down...

**LUCE** (to herself) Primož wrote me this morning that this is completely normal to him and that he too once got drunk like this in eighth grade. But this is too pathetic. Can't you control yourself? With Dad gone, Mom has to do everything on her own. I can't understand how you can be so selfish?

*Silence.*

**LUCE** I don't know if you're aware of this, but they came buzzing our door in the middle of the night. Mom jumped up and started screaming. She didn't know what was going on, who knows what she thought. Her phone didn't even ring for some reason. I had to calm her down. She couldn't fall back to sleep until morning, and she wouldn't let me sleep too.

**TONI** What is Sale's Dad like?

**LUCE** A man like any other. He carried you to your bed. That is, you puked once more in the hallway. Mom cleaned it up when you were asleep.

**TONI** I'm sorry.

**LUCE** Well, fuck it. How come Sale didn't get wasted?

*Toni just shrugs.*

**TONI** ... Are they alike at all? Sale and his Dad.

*Luce shrugs.*

**TONI** Did they talk to you?

**LUCE** No. The man just said the ambulance came first and they gave you glucose, then you felt a little better.

**TONI** (to himself) First I was lying on the grass, that I remember, and then on sand. There's grass right by the beach, so I must have rolled on my own, or someone moved me... I heard some folks behind me. And as I was lying there, at some point I only heard Sale's voice, right by my ear, but I don't know what he was saying, I couldn't understand him. He was holding my hand as he was talking and wouldn't let it go. His hand was really soft, like a cushion; I could picture myself resting my entire body on his hand... And then nothing for like ten minutes, total silence; until it felt like someone pressed 'play' and people were laughing again, talking and I was really glad, because I couldn't move, but it's all fine, life goes on, people around me are alive... At some point, between light and dark, Sale and I, I don't know how, got up in the air and started flying. A few feet above the ground. Like two helium balloons, tied one to the other... Dad would always carry me in his arms at night from the car to the house, and I pretended to be asleep... I could hear the sea behind me...

**LUCE** Mother is so disappointed in you.

*Mother and Grandma talk in the kitchen with their voices down, Mother is putting the tea kettle on*

**MOTHER** ... And then this kid called his dad and they brought him here. At 3am. I had a dream and then all of a sudden the doorbell, it all came together. I looked at my phone later, just a black screen... Nothing...

**GRANDMA** Did you take anything?

**MOTHER** Two Ambiens.

**GRANDMA** Good for you! He should eat toast, drink tea... You could have told me! Why didn't you tell me?

**MOTHER** You know what was finally the death of Vlado?

**GRANDMA** Liver. Cancer.

**MOTHER** Liquor. It was the booze that got him.

**GRANDMA** Poor Vlado, God knows the things he saw...

**MOTHER** But booze is not the answer! He finally died from drinking, and everyone's trying to hide this, my husband, his late mother, all of them. God forbid you're in pain or having a hard time... That's what I'm afraid of.

**GRANDMA** War?

**MOTHER** No, the booze, this addiction, genetics...

**GRANDMA** Does your husband drink? No! And he's his son.

**MOTHER** That's precisely why... Where did Toni get the idea of getting smashed, shitfaced...? If he had a glass or two, but to look the way he looked - staggering, yelling "Sorry, Mother, it won't happen again, I'm a piece of shit, I'm nothing..." for that you really have to have a few.

**GRANDMA** What "piece of shit"? What the hell's wrong with him?!

**MOTHER** His T-shirt covered in puke, his hair, pants, trainers - it all reeked, Luce were cleaning the place until recently. I told the man I'd pay for the car wash, he wouldn't hear of it, he said it was human to help...

**GRANDMA** Grandpa Vlado and Toni seem like heaven and earth to me... Have you heard from your husband?

*Mother takes a deep sigh. She has had enough of everything. Grandma would like to comfort her, but she doesn't know how. After a while Mother takes her phone, turns it to Grandma and plays her a voice message.*

**HUSBAND'S VOICE MESSAGE** My love, can you hear this rattle? We're speeding along some paved road. I'll call you as soon as I get normal signal, everything is fine, it's very quiet here. Give the kids a kiss, I hope you're all fine! Love you so much.

**GRANDMA** You just take your time, I'll make us some coffee.

...

*Luce to herself*

What would be my fuck-up of choice?

10 times 200 metres. 600 metres. 800 metres. 10 times 300 metres. 400 metres. A kilometre.

How would I disappoint Mom?

10 times 40 kilos squat. 300 metres.

Plank. 150 metres.

How should I flip out?!

10 times 60 kilos semi-squat. 400 metres.

Push-ups. 200 metres.

I won't eat a thing until morning.

10 times 40 kilos. 6 times 400 metres. 10 times 30 kilos. 4 times 200 metres.

The blisters on my right foot have started pulsating.

...

BALCONY

*Grandma and Mother are having coffee on the balcony.*

**GRANDMA** It's different for a child when the father is present, although, there are some fathers who are much better absent... At least you got it all sorted out, nothing is hanging above your heads anymore.

**MOTHER** We've given him everything? Haven't we?

**GRANDMA** He's alright. He puked... Whatever's troubling him... It can happen to anyone... Nurse told me "Madam... *This is all stress-related. This whole tumour is accumulated stress, everything you've been holding inside over the years, instead of throwing out.*"

**MOTHER** And I can't even call him... Not even if something worse happens.

**GRANDMA** Your dad and I were never apart, and that's also not good! Plus, he wouldn't let me talk, at least you can speak up in front of your husband.

**MOTHER** Hahahaha, imagine me not speaking up.

**GRANDMA** He'd used to tell me "Shut up, be quiet, it's no one's business what goes on in your house..." And I used to like having friends. But I wouldn't shut up before him, I had my say! Your dad was not a bad man, he was just sometimes overshadowed by his bad manners.

*Mother is listening to Grandma and takes a deep sigh.*

**MOTHER** More coffee?

**GRANDMA** He'd also be embarrassed afterwards, and would ask me later "Was I really that harsh? Was I?" He'd feel sorry, but I didn't care much.

**MOTHER** Want more coffee?

**GRANDMA** Never mind the coffee! I mean, I wouldn't let him mess around with me.

*Pause.*

**GRANDMA** I'd tell him alright! I didn't keep my mouth shut.

*Pause.*

**MOTHER** Remember that time when he beat me?

**GRANDMA** Huh?

**MOTHER** When he beat me.

**GRANDMA** Yeah.

**MOTHER** You didn't say a thing. A thing.

**GRANDMA** When he beat you...

**MOTHER** You didn't say a thing. You just kept your mouth shut.

*Grandma is embarrassed.*

**MOTHER** And then the guests came and you told them I was in my room, studying, while I really didn't want to get out. Or couldn't. Or both.

*Grandma is very embarrassed, she takes a deep breath, doesn't know what to say.*

**GRANDMA** You know what I regret? I regret that we haven't kept a single poem of yours. You used to write poetry and then rip it off. Tore the paper. Remember? Throw them into the sea. And then dad used to run after you and take it out of the sea. Nothing is kept. What was it that you were writing?

...

*Luce to herself*

I'm so desperate for sleep.

Apple

Three toasts

Yoghurt

It is so easy to get fat.

**LUCE** Last night in my dream I was naked in a pool in the middle of a desert. It was night and the pool was full of women and girls, all naked, cramped. I stood right by the edge, water barely covering my tits. The nipples on this girl standing next to me, she was about twenty, peeked out from

the water and just those nipples were bigger than my boobs gigantic, pointed, huge, purple. And the girl was a tad fatter too, she looked like someone smeared a layer of fat over her; like she should lose ten pounds and be just fine. A bunch of armed men were parading around, all with beards. That girls beside me all of a sudden started whispering that now they're going to start taking out all the virgins. And as soon as she said that, they started taking out some girls. I started hunching to be as ugly as possible; I saw Sanja far away, but she didn't see me. As soon as they started dragging her and the girls around her out, I shoved my nail down there - my index finger - I pushed and I pushed, I really pressed on and suddenly it just came in! And nothing hurt, just a little spilt blood... I haven't seen blood in ages.

*Pause.*

**LUCE** After the practice, my coach told me that the blisters would pass, but we had to talk about the psycho-test we had to solve at the Athletic Institute. It turned out I have poor training motivation. It turned out like I was being forced, which he finds odd because I train every day... Maybe I'm in some kind of a crisis... To be honest, I don't know what I'm gonna do, or where I wanna go. I'm so fed up with practice, and it's not like I have friends or something... Sanja is living in a world of her own, she'd be the happiest to find a boyfriend, and Primož is in another country and we only saw each other once, I can't count on him. I'll try to hang in here and keep my feet on the ground, there, the days just fly and that's good for me. Sooner or later things will have to go back to normal.

## TONI'S ROOM

*Toni is lying on his bed in a semi-darkened room. Later he gets up.*

**TONI** God... I know I fucked it up... And now I'm paying for it. If I ever do this again... Then, I mean, I... Didn't deserve any better... (silence) Please make Sale call... Did I do something to him? Did I tell him something...? (pause) Kids at the organization are so sweet, they're never angry and they'd give you anything. Megi once brought Sale a gift, out of the blue, we were waiting to see what it was and she opened her backpack and took out a kitten (!) Man... So cute, yellow. Her kitten! From home. I didn't touch it because... I don't know... But Sale took it in his hands and cuddled it...

*Luce comes in the room, holding her phone, with a bit of a limp. Before she starts reading the text from her phone, she disgustedly opens the window to air the place, pulls up the blinds.*

**LUCE** You'll fuckin' suffocate in here... "... how are you... blablabla... And how is Tonči<sup>2</sup>, he's not calling, say hi to my Tonči for me!" ... What am I supposed to write him?... Come on, man, I haven't got all day!

**TONI** Why didn't he text me? And why is Sale not answering my texts?

**LUCE** What?

**TONI** Nothing.

**LUCE** Why would he send the same message to both of us? (pause) You won't tell him what happened? Getting drunk and stuff.

**TONI** Did Mom tell him?

**LUCE** "blablabla and Toni is fine. Call us when you get to a town so we can catch up!" Sent.

**TONI** (to himself) I'm such a pathetic shit... To get so wasted, to stink like that, to vomit... And I'm not even 15. Horror...

*Luce sits on the floor, pokes around her toes, stretches.*

**LUCE** You should start doing some sport, you probably got drunk because you have nothing better to do.

**TONI** If you came here to give me shit, buzz off...

**LUCE** I'm not saying anything, just saying.

*Luce stretches. Toni is silent for a moment.*

**TONI** Luce? Remember Petra's kittens from the countryside?

**LUCE** What about them?

**TONI** When we threw them away...

**LUCE** So? Her Grandma put that on us.

**TONI** The three of us kept laughing all the way... Laughing our hearts out. All the way to the forest.

**LUCE** Laughing? I only remember you crying afterwards.

**TONI** Yes, afterwards. But first we were grinning like idiots, screaming, they were meowing... Why were we laughing? What was so funny about that?

*Luce shrugs.*

**LUCE** You cried.

**TONI** Yes, but only later when we were left alone! You were comforting me.

**LUCE** I was comforting you?

**TONI** I could see you were sorry and you said it was such a dumbass thing to do.

**LUCE** How was I comforting you?

**TONI** Well... you were by my side all the time, listening to me... and then we tried to save them.

**LUCE** I was comforting you...

**TONI** And they were totally tangled up, their eyes bleary, they kept whining; they wouldn't put a thing in their mouths.

**LUCE** In the morning Mom came to pick us up, right?

**TONI** And we told her nothing...

**LUCE** We never told her anything. I remember her hands on the steering wheel and those wounds, longish, red.

**TONI** From ironing. Does she still have them?

**LUCE** When she came back, her hair was shorter and she smelled different... I was a bit embarrassed, she seemed like some other woman. It seemed like our Mom died and a new one came. It seemed like we weren't her kids...

**TONI** (to himself) ... Sale had a twin sister, Anja, she died when they were a month old. She had that totally disfigured, huge head with water inside. I Googled it then and never again... Those kids if they live, their head never comes back to normal. He often has dreams about Anja she wears a yellow dress and is about three. Her hair is long and brown, and her head completely normal. In his dream it always seems like she wants to tell him something and just when he realises it, everything turns to slow motion and Sale wakes up. He admitted that he lives for the day when he'll finally hear what will come out of her mouth. Ever since I heard about his dream, I've been looking forward to that day too. You should always look forward to something, no one needs to know what it is or how big it is...

**LUCE** (to herself) I lost four toenails - two on my left, two on my right foot.

**TONI** (to himself) Mother had an abortion after me, but I'm not sure it counts like I lost someone real. She was vomiting, Luce and I were looking forward to getting a brother or a sister, and then one day she came and said the baby was gone, there

2. Tonči is diminutive of Toni.

was something wrong with the baby and she had to go somewhere. Where can you even go? We didn't ask, she didn't say... I decided to define who this baby of 'ours' was. Why wouldn't I have someone of my own too? I'm still debating about a name, but I knew the sex right away. The baby was male. In my head he just turned two, he has curly hair and is dressed in a chequered short sleeve shirt. I'm imagining a normal Anja and him hanging out and whispering something, they can understand each other. Every time I imagine Sale and I getting closer to them, they disappear...

**LUCE** (to herself) Nothing to be done... I had to go to the doctor. First she said my blisters were a mess, I should put cream on them and rest. Realistically speaking, I can't because of the pain, plus I'm really having some kind of energy drop. Just thinking about making a physical move gives me the creeps... And then out of the blue she asked me to take off my clothes, all except my panties and bra, she wanted to weigh me. I turned out to be quite skinny, so what, Mom (!) was too. The next question - my period. I started beating about the bush and the woman figured me out, called Mom... This would be so much easier to take if I didn't feel like my thighs were rubbing off each other, I gained weight again. Disgusting.

...

## LIVING ROOM

**MOTHER** It doesn't come at all? Not even for a day or two... Not a single drop? ... For seven months?! Why didn't you tell me.

**LUCE** I'm not using pads. You could have figured it out.

**MOTHER** Would you put the phone down and talk to me!

*Luce looks at her and still clings onto her phone.*

**MOTHER** You should have told me.

**LUCE** Why, I'm fine with it!

**MOTHER** How can you be fine with it?!

**LUCE** No pain, no drain, no smell, no bloating. And besides, do I really need to have kids?

**MOTHER** It's not because of the kids, it's because of you... The hormones... It's all deregulated now... Seven months... Were you hiding it from me on purpose? I mean really... Where's my phone... Toni! Toni!

**TONI** What?

**MOTHER** I don't know where my phone is. (to Luce) Why didn't you tell me... Come on, put that phone down!

**LUCE** Don't touch my phone!

*Toni is carrying Mother's phone from the hall, he found it.*

**TONI** You have a missed call from Dad! It says "HUSBAND AFGHAN"

**LUCE** Who are you calling?

**MOTHER** That one... Of mine, that one of mine...

**TONI** (to Luce) Did you hear from Dad?

**LUCE** Why her?

**TONI** Where is Dad now? Mom, will you call Dad later?

**MOTHER** (to Toni) Wait! (to Luce) She has to see you.

**TONI** It's over now, now you'll have to gain weight!

**LUCE** Disgusting.

**MOTHER** Toni!

**TONI** Ha?

**MOTHER** Stop fucking with us!

**LUCE** Wow, the drama! Now what, I'm gonna walk around all day taking my clothes off in front of doctors.

**MOTHER** Hello? Hello? Good afternoon!

**LUCE** (to herself) Oh, and the best for last... Primož! He wrote to me that he (?) would too love to see me in my panties and bra, and even more without them (!) I only replied I couldn't believe what kind of idiot I was dealing with and that he should go fuck himself.

## KITCHEN

**GRANDMA** He's some coach?! The mother-fucker! I told you straight away, she's not eating at all. There's something wrong here!

**MOTHER** Allegedly he too vomits if he eats too much.

**GRANDMA** A madman!

**MOTHER** Luce says he's been through all kinds of things, he didn't have an easy life.

**GRANDMA** He's been through all kinds of things? And what have we been through?! Now I need one of your Ambiens!

**MOTHER** Want one?

**GRANDMA** No! Give me some brandy.

*Mother goes to get the brandy. Her phone rings, her husband is calling (on silent). Mother sees the call and doesn't pick up.*

**MOTHER** Luce texted him that she can't train for a while.

**GRANDMA** She should fucking get rid of it altogether. What did that doctor of yours say?

**MOTHER** That she should start eating...

**MOTHER** (reads a text to herself) "My love, call me, is everything all right? Kiss."

**MOTHER** ... The eggs are a bit lazy so they're not ready to be fertilised, but that's all OK, anatomy... It could have been a lot worse. She says she has ballet dancers, gymnasts, models, all with the same story...

**GRANDMA** This idiot should lose his licence! How many more girls is he going to wreck.

**MOTHER** Uh, well, he didn't wreck Luce... touch wood...

**GRANDMA** What do you mean he didn't? The girl's not menstruating, she looks like a boy. She can't go there anymore. Do you hear me? She should take dance lessons if she wants something recreational! She should have coffee in the sun, go out, sleep until noon, and not run around all day like a horse... Why does she even run? What's the matter with you now?

**MOTHER** I think it's my fault.

**GRANDMA** Huh?

**MOTHER** I didn't see a thing... She was doing all that right under my nose... She wasn't eating, she wasn't having her period... And I didn't see it. How come? I didn't see anything.

*Pause.*

**MOTHER** I remember, it was summer. I left them in the countryside at his Mother's, to take a few days of rest, to clean the place, to clear my head. I come to get them, they're standing in front of the old house, scratching their heads like crazy. Lice. Both of them. With all their fingers in their hair. After two days of fucking around the apartment, shampoos, combing, tears, baths and crying, I took the hair trimmer and shaved their heads. She's still holding it against me, how could I shave her – a girl – and how did it make her feel... How she looked like a boy for the next half a year.

LIVING ROOM

**TONI** (to himself) Sale decided that he'll probably stop coming to the organization, he said he couldn't make it anymore. And he didn't tell me, he told the director. She called me this morning to tell me and asked if she could take those stickers

to her grandson, he also collected them since the last Euro Cup. I donated them to the organization, and she can do what she pleases with them. I sent him another text and asked him was it because I got drunk. He said he didn't know what I was talking about.

**MOTHER** (sending a voice message to her husband) Please call me, I didn't see the missed call until very later. Call me when you get this! Everything is... OK. I mean, I want to talk to you.

**TONI** He texted me that he was fine and in some town of Bagram. That's somewhere near Kabul. I texted him back, asked him why he called you.

**MOTHER** Why did he call me?

**TONI** To hear from you. They're on their way to Kabul and they'll proceed to Kandahar later... What do you think, when will he get there?

**MOTHER** Never, they stop in any god-forsaken place.

**TONI** (to himself) I asked Dad when will he be back for good. He said I shouldn't worry about that and that time will fly, he'll come soon, he'll be back soon. He always says that... Mom didn't tell him yet.

**MOTHER** Did you notice anything about her? About Luce.

**TONI** She's always mad when you tell her something.

**MOTHER** Oh for fuck sake! He's never here... If you see she's not fine, please tell me! If she confides in you, tell me. OK?

*Toni nods.*

**MOTHER** Are you alright?

**TONI** Me?... Yes.

**MOTHER** Do you have any problems? Is there something that bothers you?

**TONI** Nothing bothers me, I'm fine.

**MOTHER** When you got drunk...

**TONI** I'm sorry, that was really awful...

**MOTHER** You told me "I'm a piece of shit, I'm nothing."

**TONI** I said that? To you?

**MOTHER** Yes. You called yourself a piece of shit.

**TONI** Oh, really?

**MOTHER** Why would you say that? Don't think about yourself that way... It's better that you don't remember, maybe you didn't really mean that.

*Uncomfortable silence. They don't know how or what to talk about. Mother just smiles at him.*

**MOTHER** You're a good kid.

**TONI** When are you going to tell Dad? That I was...

**MOTHER** You're worried that I didn't tell him?

*Uncomfortable silence. Toni nods. Mother smiles kindly, as if she wants to say – let it go.*

**TONI** And how are you doing?

**MOTHER** Me? I'm...

...

**TONI** (to himself) Her voice is somehow interrupted, quiet; how she sighed... Did I really say those things about myself out loud?

BEDROOM

*The laptop is on the bed. Mother is in her nightgown, looking at the laptop. She is making a video call. Dad appears on the camera. They are finally alone with one another.*



Finally! You in your room?  
 Oooh, can't believe to see and hear you!  
 Look at the room, it's huge!  
 How is safety?  
 Turn the lights on, I can't see you well!  
 Top safety! A five-star hotel. The best in town!

I saw you called the other day, but everything was so chaotic, I couldn't call back.  
 You look nice...

Oh I just washed my hair...

I miss you.

I mean, I just wanted to talk a little, nothing terrible happened, but...

*There's knocking on the door of Dad's room. They both freeze.*

Just a second.

A male voice is heard.

*I have some Skype going on. No, you go. Or you can wait for me downstairs. Drink something. See you! Sorry, Sebastian, a colleague. I need to go to a business dinner with him.*

A dinner?

The driver's already waiting, but let him wait. What were you saying?

Couldn't you cancel it?

How am I supposed to cancel it? The embassy organised it, everyone's here...  
 Ad fucking hoc.

You said you can talk for half an hour.

I can! We can.

*Mother is looking in disbelief.*

Talk.

We didn't talk properly in two weeks...

Where are the kids?

They're here. It's like... I can't talk like this.

Why are you so angry?

We can either talk now or we can leave it for tomorrow.

I don't know what you want me to say...

You couldn't spare half an hour.

You don't know the chaos I'm in!

Half an hour!

*Dad takes his phone and calls someone in a theatrical manner.*

What are you doing?

Sebastian! Hey! Aaaaa... Listen! My wife needs me...

What's wrong with you now?

You go! I will find some other driver...

Why are you doing this?

Ha-ha-ha, don't worry, I'll fin...

Hey...

Ha-ha. Yeah, tnx! Bye! See you! There.

Half an hour. Talk.

*Mother is silent. They're looking at each other.*

I'm so fucking stressed out every day.

There's shooting everywhere! I can't believe you're making a drama out of this... I'm not in and out of dinners all the time, this is once in three months... I can't even relax once in three months! There, I'm not going to this dinner at all, I'm not.

*Mother is silent. Dad calms down a bit, thinks.*

I miss hearing from you more often, too...

I'm not happy with the fact that I don't hear from you in two weeks, I don't even know what's going on with you. This is hard for me.

*Dad's picture freezes. The sound is still there. Mother answers.*

Let's talk tomorrow, please.

I'm right here, talk. What's up?

*Silence.*

What do you eat at those dinners?

What's the food like?

Nothing special, yours is better, I miss homemade goulash, they can't make it right here... It feels so stupid to fight over petty stuff, but we're just under such pressure, these maniacs over here blow themselves up in town squares, they barge into crowds, there's blood everywhere...  
 I know...

*Mother is looking at Dad's frozen image while he's talking.*

My chef's son was recently killed. Sixteen years old. The kid was an intern in town and... Off with his head!

Is it even wise to go to this dinner?

There are foreigners there, double security.

We can talk tomorrow... Whenever you can...

Don't be angry with me. Are you angry with me?

Oh well, I'm not...

This isn't fucking going to last forever!

*Silence.*

Are you free tomorrow to talk? In the morning?

I work in the morning, call me some time in the afternoon...

Call me. Don't you dare not call me. I love you. A lot. Give the kids a kiss!

I love you too...

*Dad can't be heard anymore. The connection is broken. Mother is left alone*

*with the frozen image of her husband. Silence. She is looking at this picture. She is left with this picture. Looking at her husband.*

**MOTHER** One, two, three, four... New wrinkles. You're getting old.

*Silence. She is looking at the picture.*

**MOTHER** How many new people told you you were genius, charming, skilful, empathetic? How many? How many new people will tell you that now at this dinner? Ha? You're empty, to me you now seem completely empty. You're here. And here's where you'll stay. As long as I want.

*Silence.*

**MOTHER** I'm scared. I don't know what I'm scared of, but I'm scared... Luce lost her period from hunger and pushing herself too hard, I don't know whom she's trying to impress; her coach is a maniac. Toni... Got drunk. I don't know why, he doesn't know why either and if it weren't for those friends, this friend, he could have been left alone, vomiting, I wouldn't find him, he'd suffocate, I was asleep... My Mother is not well, she pretends she is, but she's not. It's a matter of days when her cancer will just reach the point of no return... She doesn't want to talk about this. Me neither. I am alone... in everything. When was the last time you were alone? What do you even do when you're alone? When there are no emails you 'must' reply to, when there are no planned trips to a new town, a new middle-of-nowhere, when there are no arranged meetings, when there are no fucking guns firing around you and when you're not in mortal danger? What do you do? Why is it so appealing? The fact that you can get

killed on any given day? That turns you on? Right? Yeah, it turns you on. And you don't see a problem there. It's really hard for you to be 'ordinary', 'unimportant', 'small', 'weak'. It's hard for you to be like the three of us. We're small, you're big. You run, you rush, you travel, you plan, you help, you make money, you're a big humanitarian. Being home is not humanitarian for you. You find it boring, frustrating, tedious, full of boring stories – you, with your big stories about saving the world... I sometimes save an afternoon and that's enough for me. You decided to move on? You're standing right there. "Never again"... (to herself) "Never again", and then you look for it... You look for it around the world, and you always find it, it's not hard to find it. (back to her husband) And don't, don't tell me about money. We don't even need that money of yours anymore. The three of us could just as well live off my salary.

*Silence.*

**MOTHER** You know what else is new? I have a wish to be alone with myself. I want to be alone with myself.

*Sounds from the living room are heard, it is Luce and Toni*

**TONI** Mom! Are you using your laptop?

**LUCE** Do you have internet? Ours is non-stop disconnecting!

*Luce enters Mother and Dad's bedroom*

**LUCE** Did you talk to Dad?

**MOTHER** I did, but the connection is awful!

*Toni comes too, he and Luce are looking at the frozen image of Dad*

**TONI** What, connection issues again?

**LUCE** Holy cow! Did he lose some weight?

**TONI** Is he here?!

**MOTHER** No.

*Mother reaches for the laptop to turn it off.*

**LUCE** No, no, no, don't touch it! Can I take a picture of you?

**MOTHER** What?

**LUCE** One with Dad!

**MOTHER** With him?

**LUCE** Yeah! Stand closer! Come on, closer to the screen! Pull your head near, please! It'll be so cool!

**MOTHER** Toni? What is she up to?

**TONI** A...

**LUCE** Yes, yes, there, just a little closer.

*Mother is confused, she tries to pose next to her husband's frozen image. Luce is taking photos with her cell phone.*

*click.*

**LUCE** Wait, let me do another.

**MOTHER** Luce, come on...

**LUCE** You're grimacing. Relax your face.

**TONI** Give it a smile.... Try it.

**LUCE** Come on, you seem like you've never smiled before, show some teeth!

*click.*

**LUCE** Now more naturally...

**MOTHER** What do you mean more naturally?

**LUCE** I can tell you're forcing it!

*click.*

**TONI** Think of something funny.

click.

**LUCE** Now your eyes are closed. One more!

*Mother's eyes are full of tears. Luce is focused on her phone screen.*

click.

**LUCE** Wait! You can do better. Now! Hold it.

click.

*Luce shows Toni the picture. Now she is happy.*

...

**MOTHER** From Switzerland I only remember the smell of steam, hot water, iron and tons of bed linen. A 15-storey hotel in the Alps, every room crowded. For three months. We mostly spent time in the basement. We laughed a lot, communicated by gestures, we came from all four corners of the world. I remember the spasmodic laughter, to tears. Some women worked like that all their lives, and I sacrificed only two winters. The work conditions were really good.

...

#### LIVING ROOM

*Luce and Toni are lying on the couch. Luce is commenting on her parents' photo, Toni is typing on his phone.*

**LUCE** She looks like she was forced to laugh.

**TONI** Well she was...

**LUCE** It's better to have any photo than none. *(she shows him a photo of Kabul)* See, so many women and children in the streets. It's a huge city, like entire Croatia.

It's really dangerous over there.

**TONI** The entire Afghanistan is dangerous...

*Luce gets up, wraps her head in a scarf.*

**LUCE** I'd love to go there once with Dad and walk around all day wrapped up like this. No one touches you, no one sees you. Head to toe, except for your eyes. You see everything around you, but no one can see you... Mighty stuff.

**TONI** Yeah, you'd love it...

**LUCE** What's the matter with you?

**TONI** What do you want? You want me to tell you that your stupid idea is great?

*Silence.*

**LUCE** You're typing all day. Who with? Is something going on?

**TONI** Sale cancelled the bike ride on me. We managed to arrange that and he told me he'd love to talk to me, and then... all of a sudden...

**LUCE** Is this why you're acting all depressed?

**TONI** And he dropped the organization.

**LUCE** Smart move. He is better off without it, anyway. You two can hang out on your own now... And maybe something got in his way, maybe his mother needed him.

**TONI** She didn't need anything, his mother lives on an island.

*Pause.*

**TONI** What am I going to tell little Megi, Juraj? Uncle Toma?

**LUCE** What? Who?

**TONI** Never mind. He said he'd like to meet some other people, not just 'hang out with kids'. All of a sudden that Rico guy and his whole crew are good...

**LUCE** Want me to call him?

**TONI** Who?

**LUCE** Sale!

**TONI** What the hell's wrong with you?!

**LUCE** Come on, Toni, don't be so dramatic! It's not how you thought it would be and you're immediately depressed. Give it a break, will you.

**TONI** Why are you even concerned with this?! I didn't ask for your help...

**LUCE** I just wanted you to keep that one friend you have.

**TONI** Look who's talking, you have that Sanja girl and who else? If Sanja is your friend at all.

**LUCE** You don't know a single thing about me!

*Luce is preparing to do a push-up.*

**TONI** I thought you took a break with the practice.

**LUCE** My coach keeps texting me, he begs me to come back.

**TONI** (to himself) I once tried to hang out with the kids from my class, but I simply couldn't... They kept talking about jerking off and who stole how many cigarettes from dad.

**LUCE** You know what's my personal best in plank? *(pause)* A plank. Like this, when you hold still in a push-up.

*Luce holds still in a push-up. Toni is just watching her. She is planking.*

**LUCE** 4 minutes. It's too hard. Give it a try.

*Toni's facial expression seems to tell "Why are you doing this?"*

**TONI** (to himself) When I'll need to go to college, if I will, and I really hope I will, I'd love to go abroad (God, please) to some country where I don't even know the language and learn everything afresh.

**LUCE** (to herself) *"Don't talk to me like that ever again, I really hate it. Okay?"* I texted Primož, he saw it and said nothing.

*Frozen Luce doesn't have a clue why she is doing this.*

**LUCE** (to herself) He keeps posting some stupid swimming pool pics. I liked one. Two more days – if he doesn't reply, I'll delete his number and block him on Facebook.

*Luce can barely hold the plank.*

**LUCE** (to herself) When we were in fifth grade, Rico told Sanja's sister that he'd like to fuck me... He was looking at some photo from Sanja's birthday. "I'd fuck this kid," that's what he said.

*Luce can barely stand, she is shaking.*

**LUCE** (to herself) You run and you think about nothing. You just run. And run. And you don't give a shit about anything. You couldn't care less. You just keep running.

*Luce struggles to keep her position but eventually falls down, exhausted. She is out of shape.*

*She remains lying down on the floor. Toni watches her.*

**TONI** Grandma said to Mom, I heard them, that, if Luce goes back to training, she would go there and set the place on fire.

...

*A silence interrupted by a*

POWERFUL EXPLOSION

...

KITCHEN

*Dust. Mother is sitting at the table, Grandma is on her feet. Toni is sitting next to Mother. All three among the settling dust. Luce comes in, there is no dust on her. She sees the others, it's clear to her that something happened.*

**TONI** Three cars full of explosive drove into Dad's hotel.

*Luce opens her eyes wide.*

**GRANDMA** It's all fine, Dad is out. He managed to escape to the bunker and they got them out.

**TONI** He called Mom from the bunker!

**GRANDMA** She heard the guys firing at the door.

**TONI** A colleague of his died.

**GRANDMA** They were in there for two hours and then the army came and got them out.

**TONI** Regular army, not terrorists.

*Toni takes the TV remote.*

**MOTHER** Turn it off, please!

**TONI** (to Luce) I'll play it for you later... It was on the News...

**GRANDMA** First one guy drove a car into the fence, it all exploded, the security guards were killed and the road was opened for two other cars. Those two other cars then drove directly into the hotel, downstairs into the restaurant. It killed all the people who were having breakfast, there were reporters' kids. He was lucky to escape to

the bunker... There's fresh bread for you. If you're hungry.

*Luce is looking at Mother. The phone rings. Grandma grabs it, give it to Mother. They fuss a bit. Mother answers.*

**MOTHER** Hello?! (to others) I hear a noise... Hello?! (to others) I can't hear a thing! Heeeelloooo!... I can't hear a thing!

**GRANDMA** Calm down, the connection must be broken!

*Toni takes the phone and calls back.*

**TONI** Unavailable.

**MOTHER** I'll kill myself.

**GRANDMA** It's just bad reception! You won't kill yourself over that...

*All of a sudden, the sound of a text message. Toni opens it.*

**TONI** "@us emabsyy, all fine! Lovr u"

**GRANDMA** Great! (to Mother) He's going to be fine, it's Americans after all.

**LUCE** How many dead?

**TONI** Fifty-six and counting.

**GRANDMA** How's your head?

**MOTHER** I can't feel a thing.

**GRANDMA** (to Luce) Your Mom got a hell of an headache. (to Mother) How about lying down for a sec? (to Luce) We'll make a quick lunch.

**TONI** I think it would be for the best if he came home now.

**LUCE** That hotel was really well protected. He said it had double protection.

**MOTHER** He says all kinds of things.

**LUCE** Did anything happen to any of the other Croats there?

**TONI** We'd already know if it did.

**LUCE** Where's this colleague of his from?

**TONI** Some woman from Macedonia. They said so on the News.

**LUCE** And how did she die?

*each of them engrossed in their thoughts*

**LUCE** (to herself) How old is he? Does she have any kids? Who are they with? Does she have a husband? A mom? A dad? Did she die from a bullet? Or was it the explosion?

**TONI** (to himself) I'll give away everything I have. Everything! A bunker! Does it look like a cave or an ordinary room? How many people fit inside? What would happen if those guys broke in?! Who managed to run inside? Who didn't?! Imagine someone didn't! Did some kid run? Did some kid stay out? They shot their door. What if the bullet had gone through? When did we last see him? In person. At the airport? No. In the yard? No. Where? When did we last see him? At home? Where?

**GRANDMA** (to herself) A kilo of potatoes. Chopped. Chicken legs from the fridge. Now he needs to come back home. A bit of lard. Spice it up. He'll come back. Heat the oven. 180. 45 minutes. A big pan. They're all going to get sick. Lettuce. Cucumbers? My poor kids.

**MOTHER** (to herself) "I'm so sorry for your loss. - He was so young! - So young! - The kids! - Two of them. - A tragedy... - Look at her. - God forbid anyone should go through this..." You selfish motherfucker! (out loud) You motherfucking idiot!

**GRANDMA** Ha?

**MOTHER** Never mind!... Do you need help?

**GRANDMA** No, maybe just with the potatoes and onions.

**MOTHER** Where are the onions?

**LUCE** I'll take the potatoes.

**TONI** Should I do something?

**MOTHER** Answer the phone if he calls.

**TONI** I want to peel something too...

...

*a few days later*

**TONI** Sale was so surprised when I first told him where my father was. He asked me that two days before I got drunk. Then he told me he recently read an article about the safest countries in the world; they took several criteria crime, murders, terrorist attacks, military stability... And he told me that, according to that list, Croatia was in the 28th place, Iceland in the first place, and Afghanistan in the last, the worst, the 163rd. Even Syria did better at the 162nd... I gave my box with soldiers to the manager, she put it to the playroom. Now I'd be the happiest to call Sale and tell him all this.

**LUCE** The Macedonian woman was burnt. She was having a shower in her room when it exploded and she ran out naked from the shower. In the hallway she just ran into the fire and got through it. She died after an hour and a half. In the bunker. All burnt, she was shaking on the floor, freezing...

**MOTHER** I once wished evil to that woman...

**LUCE** It was on all the news. Surely in Slovenia as well.

*Grandma is standing alone on the balcony, smoking.*

**MOTHER** Are you coming back at all? In what state? The next time we see you, if we see you, how many times will you fall off the bed in your sleep, running, persecuted... Who are you fighting all the time?

**TONI** I gave little Juraj my Liverpool scarf and told no one. He started jumping, clapping, hugging me, and he has no idea what Liverpool is. And now I have nothing left to give for the summer. Or winter. I gave it all.

*Toni's voice is strewn with resignation. Soon, Luce starts bleeding. She is on the verge of tears, she is happy. Mother approaches her and tries clumsily to give her a hug. They are both embarrassed, but they make it.*

*a few weeks later*

*Toni comes to the kitchen and starts reading the messages he and Luce got from Dad to Mother.*

**TONI** "I'm certainly not here for some kind of adventure and entertainment. This was all agreed on with my wife and your mother."

**MOTHER** Keep reading...

**TONI** "I pray God to give me strength to carry this cross to the end and return home soon. Don't worry, we're now at the American embassy until the things calm down a bit, and then we'll move on, to the south, where we're headed."

**MOTHER** Fine...

**TONI** "In a few months I'll definitely take a more peaceful mission, it only takes patience. All in all, if everything is fine, I'm in Kandahar in less than a month, it's safer in the south, and then I'll fly home for two weeks so I hope we'll have more time to hang around and chat."

**MOTHER** And?

**TONI** That's it in that first text.

**LUCE** He doesn't have much choice...

**MOTHER** What do you mean he doesn't?

**TONI** And your debts?

**MOTHER** We settled our debts.

**LUCE** Fine, but what's he going to do here? It's not like he is showered with job offers.

**MOTHER** True. No such challenges here. The adrenaline, always new people, the 'danger', 'humanitarianism'.

**TONI** Perhaps he's scared you'll go into debt again.

**MOTHER** What debts are you talking about! We had those loans because his business went bust and he, the idiot, co-signed some loans. But now all this is taken care of! This is his decision, there's nothing more to do. He's a grown man.

**LUCE** All the same, you're letting him do it.

**MOTHER** Me? He has a mind and a will of his own. What am I supposed to do? Pull him by the hand to make him stay? He knows it's dangerous. We talked about this on more than one occasion.

**LUCE** Mom, there's shooting down there!

**MOTHER** Of course there's shooting, but how do you make an idiot understand that? "We're safe, they won't shoot at humanitarians." What do you mean they won't? They shoot women and children, and they will somehow spare 'humanitarians, from West, no less. Sometimes he really seems stupid, I don't know how else to explain this.

**LUCE** Why don't you tell him that he's stupid? That he can't see things clearly.

**MOTHER** Why don't you tell him?

**TONI** *"There were easier roads to take, but I was supposed to give up on my principles. Say, I could have accepted the mayor's offer and become deputy. You know the things it would bring? A place, a car, a job, decent money... And of course, I was supposed to do whatever the ones in power told me. I'm much more at peace here where I earn for a living, for my family and myself."*

**MOTHER** Bullshit. Fantasies! Someone probably mentioned something along the line and he immediately caught onto it. Politics my ass, he doesn't know a single thing about politics...

**LUCE** Last week he wrote us how he really feels like 'professionally accomplished', he communicates with the entire world, helps people, children, they did some really big things.

**MOTHER** Yes... Here at home it's just a bunch of little things.

**TONI** I wish I could shove him on a plane...

**LUCE** It would be good to send him the same message every month, "You better come back."

**MOTHER** You know what, I'm not gonna spend every day of my life worrying. We need to fucking live!

*Luce and Toni don't know what to say.*

**MOTHER** Get ready. Grandma is taking us to lunch.

**TONI** I can't, I got to go to the organization...

**MOTHER** First you eat with us, then you go where you please. She booked a table by the sea. Her therapy is almost over.

**TONI** I promised, little Juraj has a test tomorrow, someone needs to show him how to do math...

**MOTHER** If no one among that staff doesn't know how to put three numbers together and show the poor kid how to add and subtract, then they should close down the organization! I'll call and tell them if I need to.

*Toni seems to be a bit relieved, almost glad that Mother is speaking up for him. Mother goes to get ready. Luce and Toni wait for her, sitting at the table. Toni laughs.*

**TONI** Our Mom can really go wild. Remember that time when she almost punched that idiot who called you a tomboy?! She stood in front of his face, I was there, outside the school!

**LUCE** I gave that moron a good hiding... I was not the only one he mocked...

**TONI** *"Motherfucker!"* that's what she shouted. Pure luck there weren't kids around. It was a bit cringe.

**LUCE** The idiot dropped out of school later anyway... I hope his life sucks. Remember how you and I 'smoked' Mo's cigarettes and Dad came in? We were sitting here.

**TONI** Mhm. He went crazy.

**LUCE** Started yelling.

**TONI** Didn't talk to us in 3-4 days?

**LUCE** Five days. *"We disappointed him."* Five and then he went away.

**TONI** We weren't even smoking, we just lit it and it started smoking. And then he came back...

**LUCE** Man, he really pushed my button! ... Toni, what do you think it will be like when he returns?

**TONI** When he returns... You'll probably be in college, and I'll be graduating from high school...

**LUCE** So, we won't be around...

**TONI** Are you into bicycles? That's also good training for you... People go around the island to explore.

**LUCE** I don't know why you always think I'm not into stuff.

**MOTHER** Luuuuce! Would you like some make-up?

**LUCE** Whaaaat?

**MOTHER** I have this new lipstick, I think it'll look great on you... Take it off if you don't like it. Just a tad.

*Luce gives in. Mother is putting make-up on Luce's lips, Luce is a bit pleased.*

**LUCE** Less, less...

**MOTHER** It's barely visible! Just a bit, so you're not that pale. Looks great... (to Toni) Ha?

*Toni nods.*

*Luce is looking at herself in the cell phone screen, happy, but removes the excess with her finger.*



**MOTHER** (to Toni) I wish I could put make-up on you as well.

**TONI** So people could make fun of me in the street.

**MOTHER** You make fun of them too. It's none of their business anyway!

*Luce and Toni and Mother soon leave the place.*

*the place is empty  
a phone ringing is heard in the empty place  
someone's phone is left on the table  
in the empty place the phone keeps ringing  
nobody is answering  
in the empty place the phone keeps ringing  
the ringing is interrupted by a woman's voice*

**WOMAN'S VOICE** "Leave the message after the signal."

*silence*

*the signal*

**DAD** "Heeey... Where are you guys? I... I just wanted to hear from you... I miss you... I'm thinking about buying a plane ticket at the end of this month and returning home for a while... But I'm not sure if my organization will let me, things are busy again around here. I'll try to think of something and it's definitely going to be soon... I dream about you a lot lately... Hey, I have new photos, it's better not to show all of them, they're a bit brutal... Where are you? Call me back... I love you."

**BEEP-BEEP-BEEP**

...

