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RED WATER

Jurica Pavičić

Translated by Matt Robinson

BITTER LEMON PRESS
LONDON

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First published in the United Kingdom in 2025 by
Bitter Lemon Press, 47 Wilmington Square, London WC1X 0ET
www.bitterlemonpress.com

First published in Croatian as *Crvena Voda* by Profil Knjiga, Zagreb, 2017

This edition by arrangement with Agullo Editions, France

Bitter Lemon Press gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Arts Council of England.

This book was published with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia.

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A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

PB ISBN 978–1–916725–157
eBook USC ISBN 978–1–916725–164
eBook ROW ISBN 978–1–916725–171

Typeset by Tetragon, London
Printed and bound by the CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

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PART ONE

SILVA DISAPPEARS

1
VESNA (1989)

First of all, Vesna remembers the weather.

It was a warm September day, a beautiful day, as if the sky was mocking them in advance. All afternoon, a welcome sea breeze had taken the edge off the Indian summer and as dusk fell a pleasant evening chill stole into the streets, the kitchens and bedrooms, heralding autumn.

Vesna remembers the place, too.

She remembers the house at the top end of Misto in the street behind the church, the house in which she spent most of her life. Closing her eyes, Vesna can see clearly the arrangement of the rooms and everything inside them: the entrance from the small porch at the top of the stone steps; the glassed-off veranda; the living room; the kitchen and its terracotta floor tiles. In the living room stands a table and opposite the table a sofa of worn-out fabric. In the hallway is a metal coat stand, and next to the coat stand a door, the door to Silva's room, on which Silva has written *Keep out.*

Vesna remembers what the living room looked like that day: in the corner, a Yugoslav-made Ei Niš television; on the armchair, a pile of washing waiting to be ironed; on the wall, a

calendar of Canadian landscapes; and above the kitchen door, an oleograph of Jesus. The Jesus in the picture has watery, sleepy eyes, a bowed head and a wavy beard. His forefinger is raised, as if warning them of what is to come.

That's what their old house looked like that day – 23 September 1989.

A Saturday. And like every Saturday, they eat dinner together, all four of them around the table, Jakov at the head, Vesna opposite, and their children, twins Silva and Mate, on the side facing the terrace.

That's how the scene begins, the scene Vesna remembers: all four of them at home, seated around the table, dinner in front of them, the dinner she has cooked – runner beans with garlic, fried whitebait and bread. Just like any other evening.

The news is on the television in the corner of the room, dramatic news from exciting times: demonstrations in China; uprisings in Eastern Europe; talk of a new constitution in Slovenia; and calls for reform of the Yugoslav federation.

Everywhere, people speak of politics with a new, restive fervour. But she and Jakov aren't interested in politics. They firmly believe that if they stay as far as possible away from trouble, trouble will stay away from them.

Vesna remembers everything: the smells, the tastes, the scene. She remembers the tender whitebait melting in her mouth and the beans she garnished, as always, with chopped garlic. She remembers Jakov, as always, eating modestly, taking his time. She remembers Silva greedily devouring the fish, fighting with the bones and spitting them onto the plate. She remembers Mate too, of course. She remembers him eating carefully and calmly, arranging the fish spines at the edge of the plate, lining them up like corpses. Mate always ate slowly, methodically, cutting the food into small pieces as if feeding tiny, invisible Lilliputians.

Four silhouettes, four bodies hunched over the table, tucking into fish and spitting bones. That's how Vesna remembers that evening, the evening normal life ended.

In September 1989, Vesna and Jakov Vela have been married almost eighteen years. They became husband and wife in the autumn of 1971, on a Saturday three weeks before Christmas in a civil ceremony presided over by the Misto registrar. The reception was held in a hotel restaurant and they spent their first night in a room upstairs. Out of season, the room was cold and damp.

After the wedding, she and Jakov moved into a house in Misto, at the top end of the street behind the Church of the Holy Spirit. They shared the house with Aunt Zlata, Vesna's unmarried aunt, who would be their housemate for the next seven years.

Quiet and unseen, Zlata lived with them until one afternoon in 1978, when they found her motionless on the kitchen floor, struck down by a stroke. The funeral was quiet and proper, and a week later they emptied her room off the hallway. Zlata's room became Silva's. That Saturday in 1989, Silva is still the occupant of the room off the hallway, the room where she keeps her clothes, her knick-knacks and adolescent secrets. On the door, she has hung a sign in English telling the grown-ups to stay away.

Vesna and Jakov moved into the old house, Aunt Zlata's house, in the autumn of 1971, the day after their wedding. One morning, about a month later, Vesna felt sick and threw up in the kitchen sink before breakfast. The following week, the local doctor informed her that she was pregnant. Not long after that, a gynaecologist in Split broke the good news: she was carrying twins.

To look at Mate and Silva, one could see similarities: in the eyebrows and the profile of the nose, in the same fine forehead

and smile lines, lines that suggested stubbornness. But if Mate and Silva were physically alike, in character they could not have been more different. Mate was a sedate and responsible boy, conscientious and cautious, the kind you could rely on and who Vesna knew would support her and Jakov in their old age. Silva was different. Silva was a brigand, Aunt Zlata once said. Silva would go far, Jakov once said, because she always knew how to get her own way.

In September 1989, Mate and Silva are almost eighteen. Mate is in his final year of studies at the shipbuilding school. He plans to enrol in the university shipbuilding faculty the following summer, after graduating. Silva is nearing the end of her economics and administration courses; when quizzed by her parents about her future, she becomes evasive and carefully changes the subject. Both schools are in Split. When he started, Mate was working afternoons in Misto unloading the fishermen's catch. Not wanting to lose his afternoon earnings, he continued to live in Misto and travelled to and from school. For that reason, Mate wakes at six every day and takes the commuter bus along the coastal road thirty-five minutes to Split. Not Silva. Silva lives in the girls' student dorm on Ćirilometodska in Split. She visits Misto every Saturday, including that Saturday, the last weekend of the summer.

In September 1989, Jakov is forty-two years old. He is already beginning to lose his hair, but he is thin at this point and particularly proud that his stomach is still flat. Jakov is a bookkeeper in a factory making plastic goods. The factory is located in a metal and glass building above the main road, a building that today is little more than a ruin. The factory produces plastic balls, boat fenders and inflatable dinghies. Jakov works in the salary department. He works patiently and conscientiously, with care but without ambition.

After work, after finishing dinner, Jakov likes to relax on the sofa and read the newspaper. Then he goes down to the ground-floor *konoba*, where previous generations kept wine and tools for working the land but which is now home to Jakov's foremost passion: amateur radio. Jakov could spend all day long connecting, soldering and sticking, assembling appliances covered with little lights which to Vesna seem to hold some secret magic. When it gets dark, Jakov sits there in the *konoba*, twiddling dials and talking for hours in English to people he will never see. Vesna sometimes listens as her husband converses with strangers on the other side of the world. She will never understand the point of it, but never would she say that to Jakov. Vesna knows every man needs a hare-brained passion.

In 1989, Vesna is thirty-eight years old. For the past fourteen years she has worked as a geography teacher at the primary school in Misto. Monday to Friday, Vesna teaches the local kids about gulf currents, oil-exporting countries and the river basins of Yugoslavia. Misto is small, so Vesna often runs into her pupils in the street. They say hello in the shop and their parents nod at her in approval when they spot her in church on Sundays.

When she started the job, Vesna believed she liked school and liked children. Fourteen years on, she is not so sure. She is increasingly aware of the stifled irritation she feels when entering the classroom, the way the pranks the children play drive her to outbursts of rage completely out of proportion to the offence. After fourteen years, Vesna has the growing feeling that children are not inherently good.

Vesna will turn forty at the end of the following year. Sometimes, she thinks about that ugly digit, four, about the weight she has put on, how she is suffocating under the monotony of work and a marriage that is peaceful, happy, but boring.

Very rarely, during these moments, does it occur to Vesna that she is at a point in life when she could still do a lot with herself. She could change job or change address. She could lose weight, learn Chinese or change her hairstyle. But such misapprehensions quickly pass. Vesna doesn't really want change, and she knows that neither does Jakov. They have good lives. Monday to Friday, they do their boring, dependable jobs. In the afternoons they read on the terrace – she a book, he the newspaper – and in the summer they go to the beach. Saturdays, they head down to the shallow marina and buy fish from a fisherman. Sundays, in the yard, they light a fire and cook fish, sausages or chops on the grill. Jakov enjoys barbecuing, his forehead red, sweat beading above his eyebrows. He always overcooks the meat and ruins the fish, but it makes him happy, so Vesna lets him play.

In the early evening calm, she and Jakov sit together on the sofa, a bottle of cheap wine on the coffee table in front of them. Around ten, when Vesna's eyes are starting to close, Jakov turns off the television and takes her to bed. Back then, in the summer of 1989, they still have sex. Not often, but slowly, skilfully, as if each other's body were a familiar, well-tuned appliance they are adept at handling.

In September 1989, Vesna is happy.

She remembers it all. She remembers the four people sitting at the kitchen table beneath a drowsy Jesus and a calendar of Canadian landscapes. Dusk is falling over Misto and from the small square in front of the marina can be heard the soundcheck for the fishermen's fair. She remembers the four shadows at dinner, pouring wine, talking. Jakov stands, takes his plate to the kitchen sink and puts the wine away in the cabinet. Silva rises from the table and lazily, coyly, withdraws to her room.

Vesna remembers what follows like a film she'll play back a thousand times. She remembers rinsing the plates in the

sink, Mate shaking the tablecloth and sweeping up the crumbs from the floor, Jakov sitting at the table buried in that day's crossword puzzle. Silva goes to her room. When she returns, she's dressed to go out. Vesna remembers exactly what she's wearing, as if Silva is still standing before her: a floral dress that's too short, red All Star high-tops, and a loose shoulder bag. She has a red jacket tucked under her arm, knowing that nights by the sea can get chilly during an Indian summer.

That's that moment: Silva standing at the door in her floral dress and All Star high-tops, standing there as if waiting for a round of applause. Then she says: "I'm off."

"Who with?" asks Jakov. "Brane?"

"No, not Brane," Silva replies. "Not today. He's not here. He's in Rijeka, for the maritime enrolment. He's back tomorrow."

"So where are you going?" Silva's father asks her.

"To the fair in the cove," she replies. "Don't wait up, I'll be late."

"Take care," Jakov tells her. He tells his daughter to take care, and to this day Vesna still wonders why.

Silva fixes her shoulder strap, lifts her bag and quickly, casually, says: "See you."

She steps out the door, quickly, silently, like a gentle breeze.

Silva leaves and Jakov pays not the slightest attention. As his daughter leaves, he is still doing the crossword and does not lift his head. As her daughter leaves, Vesna is busy drying plates with a kitchen towel. To this day she does not know whether she looked up at Silva as she walked out. She's almost certain she didn't say goodbye, because at that moment she could not have known. Now she knows. That moment, when Silva said "See you", flicking her dress as she headed out the door, was the last time they would ever see her.

2
MATE (1989)

Mate woke up with a hangover, the ceiling above him swaying and a dull pain pulsating between his temples and his forehead.

He opened his eyes, but the strong morning light made the pain even worse and he quickly closed them. He lay there, eyes closed, trying to sleep a little more, hoping it would drive away the headache. But it was too late for that. The sounds and the light had woken him for good, so he stayed there, prostrate, eyes closed, listening to the noises of the world around him.

At about seven he heard his father's footsteps in the hallway, then the sound of the shower, and again footsteps. He heard his parents talking quietly in the kitchen. The smell of Turkish coffee wafted to his room. He found the smell comforting.

He lay there like that, eavesdropping with his eyes closed. He heard the pounding of feet on the steps outside and then his father opening the *konoba*. From the *konoba*, he soon heard the sounds of work. Like every Sunday morning, his father was gluing and soldering something.

At 8.15, the bells of the Church of the Holy Spirit rang for morning Mass. Mate again heard footsteps on the porch steps. He heard Vesna leaving for Mass, and Vesna returning from

Mass. He heard his mother coughing in the hall, hanging the washing out to dry and – finally – opening the door to Silva's room, with the intention of waking her.

And then again he heard his mother's footsteps on the stairs, descending to the yard. She opened the door to the workshop.

Shortly before ten o'clock, Mate heard from the yard the sentence with which the turmoil would begin. Vesna entered the workshop and uttered the words that Mate heard loud and clear. "Silva's not here," she said. "She's not in her room."

It was 9.50 in the morning on Sunday, 24 September 1989.

That morning, they weren't worried. Mate would later think that terrible, but he knew it was true. They weren't worried – not his mother, nor his father, nor Mate.

So Silva wasn't home. She must have slept over somewhere or gone out early. She'd be back. Nothing bad could have happened. Misto wasn't some American metropolis. There were no kidnappers in Misto, no muggers or serial killers. Nothing ever happened to anyone in Misto.

When Mate got up, when he'd showered and washed his face, his mother casually asked whether he knew where his sister was. Mate told her what he knew. That she had been at the fishermen's fair, like him. There had been a band, followed by DJ Robi. Silva had danced. That was the last time he saw her, when she was dancing, about eleven o'clock.

That's what Mate told his mother. But that wasn't everything. He didn't tell her that he and his mates had left the fair at eleven because they had two bottles of Stock 84 and some good weed. He didn't tell her that he'd spent the rest of the night on the beach in Travna cove, trying to seduce a girl from Novi Sad in Serbia who spoke with a seductive,

drawn-out dialect. He didn't tell his mum that besides smoking a few joints he had drunk almost a litre of Italian brandy and that his head was killing him.

He didn't tell her either that at eleven, when he'd left the fair, he'd seen Silva dancing with Adrijan Lekaj, the son of the Albanian baker. Nor that Silva had requested "Red Red Wine" not once but twice from DJ Robi, and that as he left she was entwining herself in Adrijan's embrace to UB40's slow reggae rhythm. Silva wouldn't have told their parents about Mate's transgressions, so nor would he tell on her.

His mother heard him out, gave a reproving nod of her head, then returned to the kitchen and began peeling potatoes.

"She must be at Brane's. She'll be back," said Jakov. He went back down to the workshop, completely calm and unconcerned.

Jakov happily devoted the next hour and fifty minutes to his passion for amateur radio. Vesna placed the potatoes and chicken in a roasting tray, sat down at the kitchen table and began reading the Sunday papers. Mate surreptitiously popped a painkiller for his head and once more withdrew to his room – now darkened – to wait for the pain to ease. By the time he woke, the headache had gone. He looked at the clock: 1.15.

At 1.30 he entered the kitchen. The table had been set for lunch: plates, salad and a bottle of white wine, and from the oven the smell of roast chicken. But no Silva. Mate would remember that moment. For the first time he was ever so slightly worried.

At 2.15 there was still no sign of Silva. Vesna leaned against the fridge, a look of exasperated disapproval on her face. Mate's father stood at the kitchen table, next to the glasses and plates, and looked at the clock on the wall on which the big hand was approaching the number four. Finally, at 2.20

on 24 September 1989, he said: "Mate, go and have a look around. Find out where she is."

Mate didn't know it then, but his life's search had just begun.

At 2.20, Mate pulled on his shoes, left the house and set off to look for his sister. He walked the short street to the square in front of the church then turned sharply downhill, passing the van of the local cooperative parked behind Lekaj's bakery. When he reached the marina, he set off along the shoreline all the way to where the concrete waterfront finished and the houses thinned out.

He continued walking the coastal path, between drystone walls and the pitted grey limestone along the shore. The path went from concrete to gravel to trodden earth, taking him all the way to the headland and the tiny Stella Maris chapel. There he caught sight of the place he was trying to reach. Far from the village, isolated behind the headland, was the home of the Rokov family.

That summer, 1989, Silva had been going out with the Rokovs' son, Brane. They had got together just before the summer, at the end of May or beginning of June. One evening, after a party of wine and weed, Brane and Silva had disappeared somewhere by themselves. When they returned, they were arm in arm and Brane was glowing with happiness.

"Me and your sister are together," Brane told him the next day. Mate was too stunned to reply.

He had known for a while that Brane liked Silva. All the guys in Misto liked Silva. He remembered everyone going together in the first year of school to prise mussels from the rocks in Travna cove. Fifteen of them, tourists and locals, went in three small plastic boats. Early evening, when they'd finished plundering mussels, they'd tied up the *pasaras* and lit a fire

on the beach. Some lads from Zagreb started playing guitars and a bottle of bad local wine was passed around the fire. At one point, Mate noticed Brane looking at Silva. It was as if he was devouring her with his eyes. But that evening Silva was all over one of the Zagreb guitarists. She let herself be cuddled up to and by ten o'clock they were kissing, his hand wandering far down her waist. Mate felt uncomfortable and wanted to look away, but the only other thing to look at was Brane. Brane stood by the fire, sullen and stern, a look of complete despair on his face.

Silva had gone back to school in Split in the September and Brane seemed to cool down. His patience had paid off, however. The following May, Brane and Silva finally got together and their relationship lasted in spite of Silva's absence. From Monday to Friday, Silva was in Split, living her life. She spent weekends in Misto, when she and Brane would be together. Brane would come knocking for her and they'd go out to one of the two and a half cafes Misto had to offer. It seemed like Brane wanted them to spend as much time as possible together, preferably just the two of them. But Silva had other plans. Silva would steer them into company, drinking and laughing, and to wherever Mate might be. Mate had the impression Brane wanted something else. But it had become plain early on that Silva was the leader in the relationship and Brane an unswerving follower.

After a short walk, Mate reached the Stella Maris chapel. Before him lay the headland, the point where the land protruded farthest into the channel. It was exposed to the south; grey, bare, salt-whipped rock stretched high up the cliff. The headland had once been spoken of as dangerous for sailors, hence the shrine to the guiding spirit of those at sea. The chapel was small, no bigger than a doghouse or an outdoor grill. It sat hunched on the peak of the headland, above the

exposed limestone, pitted and grey. It had a gable roof and a small metal cross on the ridge that had been eaten away by rust. Beneath the ridge, in uneven letters, was carved the name *STELLA MARIS*. A plaster statue of the Virgin Mary stood inside, locked behind bars. It looked to Mate as if the Virgin Mary was a prisoner in her own small, private jail.

Mate continued along the path between the cliffs and the high drystone wall. On one side of the path was bare, grey rock washed by waves that were whipped up by southerly winds. On the other side, behind the wall, was a vast stretch of untended land covered with carob, brambles and olive trees left to grow wild. The locals had named it after Brane's family: Rokov's Land. He walked across Rokov's Land until he reached Brane's home.

The Rokov house stood alone on the coastal plateau. In front of it was a dry dock – a sloping concrete slipway that finished in the sea, with rails running down the middle. Brane's father, Tonko, had inherited the slipway and the boat repair business. He worked with plastic. He applied filler to plastic boats, patched them, reinforced them with webbing and treated trapped moisture. It was a noisy, dirty, toxic job. He could only do it in a place like that, as far as possible from other people or houses.

As he neared the house, Mate heard the buzzing of a sander. He approached and called out. The sander went quiet. Tonko popped his head out from behind one of the boats. His beard and hair were white from plastic dust, like a badly disguised Santa Claus. He spotted Mate and motioned to him with his head to go into the house.

The Rokov house was no ordinary house. When he was a boy, Mate had thought of it as a kind of castle, a big castle ringed by a wall that enclosed the courtyard inside. To enter the courtyard, one passed through arched doors beneath a

pediment on which were scratched the words ROCCO ROCCOV AND HIS CHILDREN and the year 1812. The sign was carved in the old dialect in an unskilled, uneven hand, as if by someone who barely knew how to write.

But if it looked like a castle from the outside, inside was a very different matter. Mate was used to Vesna's insistence on order, a fastidiousness that sometimes grated. So every time he went to the Rokov house, he was amazed at the all-encompassing, indescribable mess. Scattered around the courtyard were wooden planks, blocks and logs, scrap metal and machine parts. On the concrete terrace in front of the *konoba* he saw several outboard motors without cowlings. There were open cans of filler and rolls of white, woolly material Tonko used to repair plastic. The pickled foods prepared by Brane's mother only added to the air of a witch's grotto. Uršula Rokov pickled shallots, capers, onions, olives and sea fennel, filling jars that sat around on the floor, on the steps and on the porch, green, brown and dark blue.

Mate entered the courtyard, listening for Brane's voice or Silva's, looking for either of them. But there was no one in the courtyard. Finally, unsure what else to do, he called out Brane's name.

A slender, dark-haired woman in her forties stepped onto the porch. It was Uršula, Brane's mother. Seeing Mate, she smiled kindly. "Brane's asleep," she said. "He came back this morning from Rijeka. He went to enrol in the maritime faculty. Is it urgent?"

"Might be," replied Mate. "We don't know where Silva is."

"She's not with Brane," said Uršula. "He got back this morning and went straight to bed. Hold on, I'll wake him."

Uršula went into the house and a feeling of shame washed over Mate. Brane wasn't in Misto last night. He was travelling on a night bus. And his girlfriend, Mate's sister, was knocking

back brandy and Coke and wrapping herself in Adrijan's embrace to the sound of "Red Red Wine". He had come to ask Brane where Silva was, when in fact Mate was the one with the dark secret.

"He'll be out in a sec," Uršula said, stepping back out onto the porch. "He's washing his face." But she didn't come down to the courtyard or call Mate up. She just watched him from above with her light grey-blue eyes.

Uršula was still an attractive woman. According to Mate's father, Uršula had been the prettiest girl in Misto twenty years before. Jakov would say this in front of Vesna, but Mate never had the feeling that it made Vesna jealous. Uršula's beauty was admired in the same way people admire a Greek vase or archaeological artefact, ruined long ago and now beyond repair. *Who'd have thought she'd end up out there in the sticks,* Vesna would say. *Everyone thought she'd go far,* she would add, *but look where she is – on Rokov's Land, with Tonko, in a filthy house covered in plastic dust.*

That was how Mate's mother and father spoke of Uršula. Waiting in the courtyard for Brane to rouse himself, Mate saw the scene in front of him through their eyes: disarray, rust and filth; a decaying house, tiles falling from its roof. And in the midst of it all Uršula, who despite the years still stood proud, walked tall, her grey-blue eyes hinting at past beauty.

There they stood, Uršula at the top of the steps, Mate at the bottom. They heard the dull thud of footsteps and the sound of running water in the bathroom, and Brane finally emerged onto the porch, still wet from washing, his hair barely combed. When he saw who it was, he went red with discomfort. As Silva's brother, Mate knew that Brane always liked to leave a good impression on him.

"I'm looking for Silva," said Mate. "Do you know where she is?"

"No," Brane replied. "I came back from Rijeka this morning. I was going to call her after I'd got some sleep."

"When did you last talk to her?"

"Day before yesterday."

"Do you know where she might have gone last night?"

"Nowhere. She said she was going to stay home last night."

But she didn't, thought Mate.

"Nothing bad's happened, has it?" asked Brane.

"Doubt it," replied Mate. He said goodbye and left.

Mate set off on the path home. At the Stella Maris chapel, he turned and looked back. Uršula was standing at the door, watching him go.

Heading towards the centre of Misto, Mate came to the church, but it was locked. He went to the cafes instead. It was a warm Sunday and all the locals were sitting out: sailors on leave, students on vacation and the local riff-raff in their Ray-Ban sunglasses. Employed or unemployed, everyone was there, lounging in the heat like lizards, holding forth on politics, slurping espressos. Only *she* wasn't there. Silva wasn't anywhere to be seen.

Finally, Mate headed to the only place left – Adrijan's father's bakery. It was afternoon, and the bakery was shut. He entered the yard and found old Lekaj dozing beneath a fig tree after working all night. Mate greeted him from the gate and old Lekaj mumbled drowsily in reply. Mate went on in, but as soon as he saw Adrijan, he knew Silva wasn't with him any more.

Adrijan was sprawled on the sofa in a pair of Adidas shorts, naked from the waist up, watching Italian soccer on the television. He looked at Mate with surprise.

Mate asked him where Silva was and an awkward look came over Adrijan's face.

He didn't know where she was. True, he said, they'd been together last night. They danced until eleven, when Silva suggested they go somewhere alone. Those were his exact words – "go somewhere alone" – and it was obvious he felt uncomfortable. Yeah, he said, they'd been together till about one o'clock. They'd been at Cape Cross, by the big cross on the mound above the old water cistern, a dark, hidden spot they both knew had been used by generations of Misto residents for clandestine sex. Mate remembered feeling a wave of shame sweep over him, as if he had never really known his sister.

"When did you split up?" Mate asked, trying to remain calm and businesslike.

"About half past twelve, maybe one," Adrijan replied. "Silva said she had to go, that she was in a hurry."

"A hurry to get home?"

"She said she had to get up early, that she was travelling somewhere."

"Travelling somewhere? Where?" asked Mate.

"Don't know," replied Adrijan. "Reckon you and your parents should know that."

Mate suddenly had a bad feeling. The sound was turned down on the television but the commentator could still just about be heard; Fiorentina were attacking Inter, or Inter were attacking Lazio. For the first time, Mate had that leaden feeling in the pit of his stomach, a feeling of dread at what might be to come.

He hurried out of Lekaj's house, past the church and up the street. Bursting into the house, he found his parents at the kitchen table, waiting for him. Mate said nothing. He went into Silva's room and opened her desk drawer.

It was empty. No purse, no phone book, no passport.

He knew Silva had a secret hiding place. He knew that was where she kept her savings. He squeezed his hand under

the closet and pulled a wooden box from the false bottom of the drawer. It was the box where Silva kept her secrets. He opened it.

The box was empty. No money or anything else.

Mate returned to the kitchen and sat down at the table. Then he spoke the words. He spoke them as calmly as possible, so as not to trigger even greater panic. He told his parents they should call the police.

The police officers came that afternoon, three of them. Two were in uniform and were obviously junior. The third was in civvies and clearly the boss. He was in his late twenties and carrying a few extra pounds. He introduced himself as Gorki Šain. Mate had never heard of anyone called Gorki.

Although the two uniformed officers walked around the yard and looked in Silva's room, they showed little real interest, as if they found the task unimportant, irritating. Meanwhile, Inspector Šain sat down at the kitchen table and opened a large notebook with a vinyl cover. He listened to what they had to say, taking notes, and asked some general questions. Then he asked to see Silva's secret drawer.

Inspector Šain looked at the drawer and then at Silva's room. He looked around with a kind of indifferent nonchalance, as if it was all the stuff of teenage cliché. He returned to the kitchen and sat down at the table to write something down. Closing his notebook, he stood up and headed for the door. He told them not to worry. *When teenagers disappear,* he said, *in eighty per cent of cases they come back of their own accord. They turn up within twenty-four hours without a word of warning, just the way they left.*

Those were his words. He wrote his name and number on a small piece of paper and handed it to Jakov. He told him to call the next day if Silva still wasn't back.

When the police officers had left, Vesna sat down at the table and sank her head into her hands. Jakov went out onto the balcony, as if the balcony were a crow's nest from which he'd be able to spot his daughter. He showed no sign of anxiety. But Mate knew him too well. He knew a nervous restlessness was eating him up inside.

Lunch was still on the table, untouched. In the roasting tray rested a now cold roast chicken, surrounded by cold potatoes swimming in congealed fat. The kitchen still smelled of chicken skin and grease. Suddenly, Mate could hardly bear to look at it.

Mate stood up. He put the bottle of white wine back in the fridge. He threw away the salad and the potatoes. He took the chicken, sliced it into pieces with a knife and put the pieces on a plate. He put the meat in the fridge and then, finally, took a wire sponge and scoured the roasting tray.

When he had finished, he sat at the table across from his mother. Vesna had not moved, seemingly impervious to anything happening around her. He waited, as if expecting some kind of reaction from her. When it didn't come, he picked up the unused plates and placed them in the kitchen cabinet.

The next morning, Silva was still not back.

At exactly eight o'clock, Jakov called the police and told them there was still no sign of her. By midday, the house and the streets were full of police. The same day, Silva was officially declared missing.

Police officers crawled all over Misto. They searched the drystone terraces and olive groves above the old part of the village. They trawled the harbour floor and the dark rock at the water's edge. One patrol went behind Cape Cross to investigate the area around the barracks and the old naval tunnels. Another climbed up the cape to search around the water cistern and the stone cross.

Mate and his parents stayed at home and waited. Jakov mooched around the yard like a tormented spirit. Vesna lay on the sofa, numbed by sedatives, her eyes bloodshot.

Around mid-afternoon, Inspector Šain came round and sat them at the table. He explained what they had found out – that numerous witnesses had seen Silva at the fishermen's fair; that she had spent the whole evening dancing and had requested "Red Red Wine" by UB40 three times in a row; and that she had slow-danced with Adrijan Lekaj. At least four people had seen them leave together at about eleven o'clock. Lekaj said they were together until one o'clock. At some point, she'd told him she was leaving, that she had to go home because she was travelling early the next morning. They parted at the old water cistern below the stone cross. Silva had said goodbye and headed downhill to the first houses. That was the last time Lekaj had seen her. He had also been the last person to see her.

"We checked him out," Inspector Šain said, as if trying to soothe their doubts. They'd checked his prints and under his fingernails and subjected him to a lie-detector test. He seemed to be telling the truth. "Have a think," the inspector told Jakov. "Where could Silva have been going in such in a hurry?"

"Nowhere," Jakov replied. "She didn't go anywhere. She was supposed to go back to the dorm on Monday, to school, in Split."

"Are you sure?"

"We're sure," Mate's mother said.

"Are you? Because that's not the way it looks to us."

Nor me, Mate thought. He sat there, not speaking, but composed enough to know how it must look to the inspector. Like a premeditated escape. Silva had taken her money and her passport. She must have planned the whole thing.

A police officer entered and asked Inspector Šain to go outside. The inspector followed him into the yard. They spoke

to each other quietly, heading to the top of the garden and a drainpipe behind a cactus. Stooping, the officer inserted a long stick into the pipe, rummaging around for something. The officer put his arm deep inside and pulled out a plastic bag. Gorki and the officer studied the bag. Returning to the house, Inspector Šain entered the kitchen holding the bag, his face tense and dark. He tossed the bag onto the table. "I'd like to hear what you know about this," he said.

The inspector opened the bag and took something out. It was a small brown bundle wrapped meticulously with adhesive tape. Mate knew immediately what was inside and his head began to pulsate with terror.

Inspector Šain cut through the tape and a brown powder spilled from the small bundle onto the table. Mate's mother and father both seemed to know what it was. There was a mixture of rage and shame on Vesna's face; she looked at the bundle as if an ugly, poisonous insect were on the table in front of her.

"Heroin," said the inspector. "But I think you already knew that. Tell me, is it hers? And what do you know about it?"

Mate's father said nothing. Vesna said nothing, but looked at Mate. She looked at him, scowling, full of accusatory rage. A look that said: *You must have known something.*

Mate dropped his gaze. He looked at the table and at the bundle from which a dry powder was slowly spilling.

After dusk, the police left. "There's no point searching in the dark," Inspector Šain said, and at nine o'clock he ordered the officers to their cars. Ten minutes later, peace was restored. Street lights blinked in the cove, television screens flickered behind window shutters. The streets were empty. But Mate knew: behind all those shutters, slats and porches, his

sister was the only topic of conversation. While the television droned in the background, while they ate dinner, made tea or cleaned the dishes, the neighbours were talking about Silva's disappearance.

The three of them were left alone in the house. Mate's mother was beside herself, lying on the sofa in a foetal position, moaning intermittently. At some point, Mate's father motioned with his head and the two of them took Vesna in their arms and carried her to the bedroom. They placed her on the bed, and she curled up once more.

Mate's father returned to the balcony, where he had again spent the day. He stood leaning with his elbows on the rail and stared into the darkness, as if convinced he'd find Silva if he looked hard enough. Mate approached him and Jakov placed his palm on his son's hand.

"Don't be mad at her," Jakov told him.

"Mad at who?"

"You know," replied Jakov. "It's not easy for any of us."

Neither of them said anything for a while.

Then Jakov started up again. "What they found in the drainpipe. Did you know about it?" he asked.

"No."

"You didn't know she kept drugs?"

"I knew she had weed. She used it, a lot of it."

"This wasn't weed."

"No, Dad, it wasn't. This is much worse."

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"Would you have done in my position?"

"No."

"There you go then."

They fell silent again, but remained standing there, as if soothed by the evening air.

Then Mate felt the cold. "I'm going," he said.

"Sure. I'll stay a bit more," Jakov replied, and continued to stare into the darkness, not moving.

Mate entered the house, which still smelled of roast chicken. Before going to bed, he peered through the door to his mother's room. Vesna still lay curled up. But she wasn't moaning any more. The sedatives were working.

He went to his room. He didn't undress. He just lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling, wide awake. His body needed rest, but he knew neither he nor his parents would fall asleep that night.

Silva's disappearance became news over the following week.

The media then was not what it is now. There were no satellite uplink trucks or packs of journalists with microphones hanging around in front of the house. But Silva's photograph was in all the newspapers and an appeal went out during the evening news on state television. Within a week, everyone knew that Silva had vanished.

During the first week, the police combed Misto and the surrounding area. With dogs, they searched the mound where Silva and Adrijan had been that night. They searched Rokov's Land, the mountainsides and the Prosika canyon, a narrow mountain passage where bandits had once lain in wait for Turkish caravans. Inspector Šain and his officers went house to house, questioning people one by one. Where were they that night? Did they see or hear anything? Everything he found out, Inspector Šain wrote down in that vinyl notebook Mate had seen the first evening.

After seven days, the police withdrew from Misto. On the seventh evening after Silva's disappearance, Inspector Šain told them there was nothing else the police could do in Misto – they had searched everywhere, questioned every witness. He

said he believed Silva had indeed left, just as she had informed Adrijan. Either she had been taken away or she had run away, and he would try to find out where.

They spent the following days in a state of uncertain anticipation. Inspector Šain would get in touch every second or third day, usually in the evening, usually by phone. He would update them on the police search of bus and train stations, motels and border crossings. They had questioned bus drivers, ticket sellers, train conductors and border officers. They had taken cassettes from CCTV cameras, but there were lots of them and it was slow work. Inspector Šain's updates grew shorter and emptier as the days passed.

On the fifth day, Mate's father slipped into Silva's room and began digging among her things. He came out holding the best picture of Silva he could find. The photo seemed new. It showed Silva looking straight at the camera, bold and brazen, a lock of hair falling across one eye. They had no idea who had taken the photo or when. Suddenly, it looked like Silva's life was full of secrets and this was just one of them.

That morning, Jakov stuck Silva's picture on an A4 sheet of paper. Beneath it, in neat, bureaucratic handwriting, he wrote her name and a description of her, her height, the colour of her clothes and a contact telephone number. Then, in letters that screamed, he wrote: MISSING PERSON.

Jakov made 800 copies in the printer's shop near the post office. The next morning, Mate suggested they go together to distribute them.

Every day they got in the car and spent hours wandering the roads. They pinned and taped up the posters at bus stops, post offices, shops, travel agencies and public buildings. At first they kept to the main coastal road and the area around it. Then they began to widen the circle. By the end of the second week they had gone inland to Vrgorac and Imotski,

and into Hercegovina. Over the following ten days they took the coastal road north to Zadar and Rijeka, then south into the Neretva valley towards Sarajevo in Bosnia. They plastered posters across Imotski, the port of Kardeljevo, to Lištica on the road to Mostar, and Duvno. One morning, Jakov sat in the car alone and headed for Bosnia. He came back late in the evening and said he had left posters along roads from the Kupres plain to Jajce and Banja Luka.

In return, Mate took Split. Over the course of a long weekend, he covered Split with 300 photocopied posters. He wandered between socialist high-rises, visited shopping centres and warehouses, hotel receptions and schoolyards, discovering parts of the city he never knew before: endless newly built neighbourhoods, DIY stores, rows of tyre fitters and brick-built workshops on the rough edges of the city. By the time he'd finished, Silva's picture hung in the entrance to every school, at every tourist information point, in the guard booth of the shipyard, the port and the cement factory.

By the end of the following week, Jakov had made another 300 copies. One day he left early and was away for the night. When he returned, he told them he'd been plastering posters across Ljubljana and Zagreb.

For a few days, they neither saw nor heard from the police. Then one afternoon Inspector Šain called. He had nothing concrete to report, but said cryptically that "new circumstances" and "new developments" meant he would have to question them again, one by one, in Split. Mate thought it all sounded ominous.

His father went first. He returned in the evening, quiet and looking even more sullen than before. Saying nothing to Mate about what had happened, Jakov withdrew with Mate's mother to their bedroom, where they spoke quietly for hours. When she emerged, Vesna's eyes were bloodshot.

Mate could see something was up, but he didn't have the courage to ask what. The next day, his father readied to return to Split; when Mate suggested they go together, Jakov abruptly turned him down. He was gone the whole day, and when he came back his mood was worse than ever.

They ate dinner in silence. Afterwards, Mate tossed the remains of the boiled cabbage in the trash, washed the dishes and dried the glasses. And then his father asked him to sit at the table.

"Does the surname Cvitković mean anything to you?" Jakov asked. Had Mate ever heard of anyone who went by the name Cvitko? Had Silva ever mentioned anyone with that name? Had he ever seen that person in Silva's company?

"No," Mate replied, telling the truth. But Mate could tell his father didn't believe him.

"If you hear anything, please, tell me," said Jakov. He paused, then added: "Tell me first. Me. No one else. Got it? You tell me, and I'll tell Mum and the police."

Two days later, Inspector Šain summoned Mate to the police station. That week, Mate had morning classes at school; he went to the central police station on Sukoišanska after lessons had finished. Inspector Šain had scheduled him for two o'clock, but Mate was already at the guard booth at 1.15. He hung around in front for a while until the uniformed officer in the booth noticed him. He approached Mate and asked him who he was there to see. "Either go in or take a walk and come back later," the officer told him.

Mate left his ID at the booth and climbed the stairs. The central police station consisted of a row of straight, identical corridors with light wood floors. Along the length of the corridors were rows of identical rooms with fanlight windows above light plywood doors. Mate was disappointed. The police station had the air of a banal, bureaucratic office.

He wandered the building for a long time, reading the names on the doors. At the end of one corridor, he found a door on which was written GORKI ŠAIN. He knocked. He heard Inspector Šain's voice calling him to enter. He went in.

Two officers were inside: Inspector Šain and another man Mate did not recognize, a bigger, older man who introduced himself as Tenžer. They were sitting in an office full of papers, with plywood cupboards. An Olympia typewriter sat on the desk in front of them. On the wall above Inspector Šain's head was an oversized portrait of Yugoslavia's late leader, Tito, in profile. Mate recalled such portraits from his school classroom. Wherever you stood, you had the feeling Tito was watching you.

Inspector Šain and Tenžer questioned him carefully, for a long time. Mate expected to be asked about the evening of the disappearance and the people in Misto. Surprisingly, the officers weren't at all interested in that. For two hours, they didn't mention Misto. All they cared about was Silva's life in Split. They asked if he ever visited her in the student dorm. Did he know her room-mates and friends in the city? They were interested in whether he usually went home straight after school, or whether he sometimes stayed in the city for a while. They got him to list the people he knew Silva hung out with in Split. They asked him a series of specific questions concerning Silva's life in the city. Did Silva's room-mates do drugs? What was her attendance like? Did he know where Silva had been on a certain Tuesday? Or where she had been on a particular Wednesday? Mate surprised himself with how little he knew. Silva's life in Split, he realized, was a secret to him too.

Finally, Inspector Šain mentioned a name and asked if it meant anything to him. It was the same name: Cvitko. Mario Cvitković. Waiting for his answer, Inspector Šain regarded him suspiciously, as if watching for the slightest sign of a lie.

Mate shook his head. “No,” he said. He had never heard Silva mention any Cvitko. “Who is he?” Mate asked, but Inspector Šain didn’t reply. The other officer, Tenžer, nodded darkly and said it didn’t matter.

At five o’clock Mate left the station, genuinely scared. He didn’t feel like going home. He walked the city for a while, taking in its streets and houses, its familiar places. He had the feeling they had taken on a whole new meaning. A place he had known so well now hid a threat.

When he got home that evening, his father looked at him with an unsettling curiosity. Jakov made him a toasted sandwich and poured him a glass of milk. He asked how it had gone with the police. Mate told him briefly.

Mate bit into the sandwich, then asked his father: “Who’s this Cvitković the police are asking about?”

His father didn’t reply. He rose silently and began to rinse the dinner plates in the sink. He had his back to Mate, and Mate had the feeling it was so he wouldn’t have to lie to him to his face.

“Do you know this Cvitković?” Mate asked again.

“No,” his father replied. “I don’t know him.” He turned off the tap and left the room.

3
JAKOV (1989)

After he left the police interrogation, Jakov went to Silva's student dorm. He went without a plan. The day felt heavy, the sky was dark with October clouds, and from the south-east the *šilok* had begun to blow, bringing damp, close, hot air to Split. On the ground floor of the police station, a mass of people waited at counters for passports and driving licences. The wind had electrified them. They were sticky with sweat, short-tempered, hateful of themselves and everyone else.

At first Jakov intended to get in the car and head back to Misto. Then he changed his mind. He slipped the car keys into his pocket and set off on foot for the city centre.

Until that morning, Jakov had thought they led a normal life – a normal family with normal, petty problems. He believed his daughter to be headstrong, capricious and uninhibited; how often had he wished her mild-tempered, meeker and less rebellious. But he'd thought they were minor, adolescent issues. Since her disappearance, he had come to realize he was wrong. Silva's problems were bigger. If he hadn't understood before, he certainly did then.

Jakov had spent three hours in the interrogation room. For those three hours, two officers – Šain and Tenžer – had questioned him about every detail of Silva's life: her social circle, phone calls, nightlife. They didn't ask him about Misto or about that night. They asked him about her life in Split and who she had been in contact with. They asked him about the parcel they had found in the drainpipe, the parcel that had sat there under his nose for God knows how long, and about which he had no idea all that time.

"Did anyone from Split drop by to see her?" Inspector Šain asked. "Did she go to see anyone? Did you notice whether she had more money than usual? Did you notice anyone loitering around the drainpipe?"

The questions kept coming and Jakov didn't have the answers.

At one point Tenžer glared at him angrily. "This isn't a fucking joke," he told him. "Do you know what was in your drainpipe? There was a year's salary in that parcel. That's serious stuff. That's not something that just falls into a girl's lap."

That's something lives are lost over, Jakov thought. He thought it, but didn't say it.

At some point the officers mentioned that name: Cvitković. Cvitko. They asked if he knew him, had heard of him. Had Silva been to the cafe – The Butterfly – where he hung out? In the Manuš district. Jakov knew only vaguely where Manuš was. He had never heard of any Butterfly cafe.

Finally they showed him a picture of Cvitko. Looking back at him was a man with a shaved head and an earring. He had the air of an affable rogue. Jakov shrugged and passed the picture back despairingly to the officers. He'd never seen him in his life, not in Misto nor in Split.

He was broken by the time he left the police station. He headed for where the car was parked, but realized on the way

that he couldn't simply go home. Instead he turned towards the city centre and into a narrow street that curved between the student canteen and the theatre. He passed the Franciscan monastery and a department store. Finally, he found himself in front of the building he was looking for – the girls' student dorm.

Jakov had been inside only once, three years before, the day Silva had moved in. When they visited Silva in Split they never met there, always somewhere else, in the school hall or the cafe, and Jakov always found it unusual, bordering on suspicious.

He hesitated and then entered. Jakov had an overwhelming urge to go to her room, to see and touch Silva's things, to feel them under his fingers.

Climbing to the second floor, he stopped before a white-painted door. From inside, pop music could be heard playing low on a transistor radio. It didn't sound like a place of poignancy or mourning.

He entered. In the room were four beds. One was unmade and empty, and on two others were sprawled two teenage girls. One was blonde, her face scarred by acne, the other brunette, with braces on her teeth. From Silva's stories he knew they were called Mirna and Nina, but he didn't know which one was Mirna and which Nina.

Silva's bed was in the corner by the window. The bed was a mess and her things were still all over the place.

When he entered, Silva's room-mates looked at him with hostility. "You a journalist?" asked the blonde, her tone one of undisguised insolence.

Jakov stopped for a second before replying. "Yes," he said. "I'm a journalist." No sooner had he said it than Jakov was shocked by his lie, as if he had leaped into ice-cold water.

"Your colleagues have already been," said the blonde.

"But you won't find anything here," added the brunette. "The police already took everything. Everything that was suspicious."

"Suspicious?"

The girls laughed conspiratorially and then, as if realizing how inappropriate it was, fell silent and grew serious. "They took her things. The things they needed for the investigation. That's what we meant."

Jakov approached his daughter's bed. There weren't many of Silva's things left – some pyjamas, underwear and an orange alarm clock. But looking at those few items, he felt a sharp pain he hadn't expected. He looked at Silva's clothes, her pens, her hairbrush, and he felt the realization of her absence all over again. He noticed there were no family photos anywhere. If the police hadn't taken them, that meant she hadn't had any in her room. That explained why the girls hadn't recognized him.

They looked at him suspiciously.

This isn't a good idea, he thought. It wasn't smart to come here.

Jakov went out into the corridor. Stopping briefly, he leaned on the cold wall and took a few deep breaths, allowing the weakness to pass. Then the brunette followed him out. Mirna, he recalled. Silva had said Mirna wore braces on her teeth. The girl approached and spoke to him under her breath, as if they were conspirators in a plot. "I didn't wanna say anything in front of her," she said. "But this had to happen."

"What had to happen?"

"What happened to her. It had to happen. No one's gonna tell the truth here. And the truth is that she had it coming."

Jakov looked at her, stunned. "Had what coming?"

"That. Everything. Whatever happened, she deserved it, the bitch. She got half the girls in the dorm hooked on smack. It must have been her dealers who killed her."

"Her dealers?"

"Them. That Cvitko. He used to come here to see her. What a guy."

Jakov stood in the corridor and listened to her. He listened to a girl with braces as she trashed his daughter. Right then, he wanted to throw her onto the linoleum floor and lay into her with his fists and his feet until he reached hard, raw bone.

"But please," she said, "don't write that. Don't say that I told you, you hear me?"

He nodded, and the girl looked relieved. She motioned to leave and Jakov watched as she waved goodbye and disappeared back into the room.

Jakov left the building. The south-easterly wind had picked up. A wave of heavy, suffocating rancidity almost knocked him to the ground.

The next day, Jakov resolved to find Cvitko. On the way to Split, on the coastal road, he noticed his hands trembling as they gripped the wheel. He became aware of a new and unfamiliar feeling: fear.

He arrived in Split just as the city was taking its morning coffee. He parked on Manderova and walked around Manuš looking for a cafe called The Butterfly. It didn't take long to find it. The cafe was located near a garage and consisted of a small, dark interior and a terrace with a cover of plastic and glass. The cafe looked ordinary, no different to dozens of others.

Sitting down on the bench opposite The Butterfly, Jakov opened a newspaper, pretending to read it. He was prepared

to wait for hours if necessary, but the man he was looking for was already there.

He recognized him immediately. Cvitković was sitting at a table by the door, in a green Adidas tracksuit. He looked like any other local lout, an unshaven dropout with the beginnings of a beer belly. He looked at ease, relaxed, like a man without any serious problems in life, swigging from a bottle and reading the write-up on Hajduk Split's away win at Spartak Subotica in Serbia. He took a gulp of beer and started talking to the server. Jakov couldn't make out exactly what they were saying, but it was obvious it was about soccer.

Jakov sat in wait for almost half an hour. Finally, Cvitko finished his beer, left some money on the table and stood up. It was only then that Jakov saw how tall he was. Despite signs of gaining weight, Silva's dealer was a well-proportioned and athletic man.

Cvitko pulled on his sunglasses, stuffed his rolled-up newspaper under his arm and left in the direction of the city centre. Jakov followed.

After a while, Cvitko turned into a side street in the direction of Veli Varoš. He walked through a labyrinth of abandoned, ruined hovels, once home to small farmers who lived in the city but had rights to cultivate land outside it. He turned into a secluded courtyard; Jakov stopped and peered inside.

The courtyard was in fact the empty cavern of a building that had long ago fallen into ruin. Rubble and burned timber lay on the ground and the remains of ceramic tiles stuck out from the wall of the adjacent house. It wasn't immediately clear to Jakov what Cvitko was doing there. Then he understood. The man in the green tracksuit set his newspaper and sunglasses on the ground. Then he turned to face the wall, unzipped his trousers and started to piss. It went on for ages, and he was obviously savouring the moment. When he finished, Cvitko

left the courtyard and continued zigzagging through the maze of pedestrian streets towards the south, then the west. Jakov followed. At one point, the man in the tracksuit stopped at the window of an optician. Not wanting Cvitko to notice him, Jakov continued down the street and hid around the corner. When the man set off again, Jakov set off too.

Cvitko turned onto Lenjingradska and headed north. He walked for a few minutes and then turned east into a narrow street that led to the Church of the Holy Cross. Jakov followed.

When he reached the church, the man in the tracksuit cut through the churchyard. He again headed west until he came out near the old gasworks. He headed south. Jakov followed, increasingly aware how pointless it all was. Silva's dealer was walking in a circle, his route empty and aimless. He made a figure of eight within a hundred metres, and Jakov did the same.

They were back at the same rubble-strewn courtyard where they had already been. When he turned the corner, Jakov lost sight of Cvitko. He thought briefly that he had lost him. But there he was, standing tall at the same spot where he'd pissed against the wall. He looked at his watch, clearly waiting for someone.

And someone arrived. A skinny girl with long hair entered the courtyard carrying a limp backpack and dressed in a coat that was far too warm for early autumn. She nodded at Cvitko, and he nodded to her.

Jakov looked at the girl. In contrast to the heavy coat, she wore light linen tennis shoes without socks. She looked abandoned. She was roughly Silva's age, but her face had a disconcerting maturity about it.

When the girl arrived, Cvitko glanced around and called her into the nearest doorway. They didn't stay long. When they emerged, the girl hurried away.

Jakov waited for Cvitko to go too. He thought for a second, then decided to follow the girl instead. He quickly caught up with her in the street below the Church of the Holy Cross. The girl was walking towards the city centre. She crossed Prokurative Square, cast a cursory glance at the cinema billboard and continued in the direction of the fish market, which by that time of day was already empty. She entered the Roman city-palace built for the emperor Diocletian and continued east along the main pedestrian street. At the adult education centre she turned the corner and came out in a square between houses. The skinny girl leaned against a wall and lit a cigarette. Jakov hid in a doorway waiting for her to set off again. But she didn't. For a long time she stood there doing nothing. Jakov began to think it had been a mistake to follow her.

Then a lad, slightly older, approached the girl. He wore a Spitfire jacket and an earring in one ear. He said something, and the girl nodded. He gave her some money and she gave him a packet wrapped in cellophane. Jakov didn't know much about drugs, but he knew enough to know what that was called: smack. She had sold him smack. The girl was dealing, and obviously for Cvitko.

Jakov stayed there, standing in the doorway and watching the scene in silent consternation. A girl, probably no older than Silva, perhaps a friend, was dealing drugs in broad daylight on a square in the city centre. She had three or four more customers over the next hour. They'd hand her the money and she'd give them the goods from her backpack.

At about four, Jakov considered calling off his surveillance and leaving. But then another buyer turned up, a thin, stooped kid with shaggy hair. He looked a little scared. He approached the girl, but timidly, as if he didn't know her or didn't trust her. He mumbled something and she nodded.

He took out the money and offered it to her. She gave him a package. And then the skinny kid asked her a question. He asked it loud enough that Jakov could hear: "Where's Silva?"

The girl replied, but too quietly for Jakov to make out what she said. Nevertheless, it was clear to him what he had just witnessed. The buyer knew Silva. He was surprised not to see her. He had expected her to be there. He had expected to buy from her.

Jakov waited for the buyer to leave. He left the doorway and headed in the direction of his car. He passed the Museum of the Revolution and the main post office and came out on the square by the theatre. It was at the theatre that he felt his heart beating irregularly, felt that he was suffocating.

He stopped by a wall and swallowed a pill, without water. He walked around the city for a while, aimlessly, until the tablet started to work. Then he got in his car and sat behind the wheel. He remained there, calmly, for half an hour, until he felt his blood pressure come down. Only then did he set off back to Misto.

Jakov didn't go straight home. He left the car in front of the house and set off on foot to the village centre and then the other side of the cove. He took the path behind the last houses, the path that ran along the wall of the cistern and up the hill. Within ten minutes he was at Cape Cross, at the spot where his daughter was last seen.

The cross stood at the top of a round hill above the village. It had been raised by the Brotherhood of St Spyridon at the time of the phylloxera as a pledge to God, who had sent them the plague and mercifully destroyed the vineyards. The cross was the peasants' pledge, and it looked like one – plain, without decoration, made of four rough limestone slabs. It stood

on a platform of steps, and on those steps, in the summer months, would sit the more adventurous tourists, taking in the vista. The steps afforded a view of Misto and the bay, the first row of islands and the sharp, serrated ravines of the nearest mountains.

Jakov sat down on the platform and looked out towards Misto. The sun had just set in the west, the aureole darkening to crimson as it slipped behind the Prosika ridge. There wasn't a hint of wind. The surface of the sea was as flat as a tabletop, and the houses and harbour were barely visible through the early evening mist. Beneath Jakov's feet stretched the old municipal cistern. Before the water system had been built, the locals had cemented the steep slope of the hill to catch and contain rainwater for the summer during the wet months. Then, in the 1960s, Misto was connected to the water system and no one ever needed the cistern again. Moss and mould grew over the cement slope and marjoram and fennel sprouted from the cracks.

When he was younger, Jakov would go to the cross for the same reason as Silva had done that night. Couples would go there for the seclusion, to touch, nip and lick in the dark, far from prying eyes. Jakov had last gone there with Vesna, a few months before their wedding. They had laid his coat on the ground, had sex and waited, locked in each other's arms, for dawn and the sun to rise. Jakov remembered how terribly cold he had felt without a coat on before dawn.

Now he was looking at that same spot, twenty years later. But he didn't think about that distant morning, about shivering at dawn in just a T-shirt, with Vesna's arm around his shoulders. He thought about Silva, who had been in that very same place on the night of 23 September; Silva, who had led Adrijan to that dark, hidden spot, or had been led by him. And something had happened, there or somewhere else.

He stood up and looked around. He looked in the bushes under the cross and spotted a discarded condom wrapper. A sharp, unsettling shiver shot through him. Then he saw another discarded wrapper, and another. He saw used and discarded condoms, one after another. Jakov couldn't tell how long they had been there. There were too many to count. The bushes under the cross had patiently archived the traces of decades of fornication.

Looking around, Jakov tried to imagine the spot where Silva and Adrijan had lain. He searched for where the ground looked soft and trampled, without stones or brambles. He spotted a place that seemed to fit. He felt the ground with his fingers, as if the grass and earth might have preserved Silva's warmth. He poked around in the surrounding bushes with a stick. Then something caught his attention. In a clump of Spanish broom he spied an off-white object, plastic and cylindrical. He picked it up. It was a syringe, the leftovers of an injection.

He studied the cylinder and tried to determine how old it might be. It was smeared with earth, dirty and battered. It seemed to Jakov that it must have been there for some time. He wished that were the case. But he couldn't be sure. When it came to Silva, he was no longer sure of anything.

Meanwhile, the sun had gone down behind Prosika and small boats began emerging from the harbour. The locals went out trolling for fish at dusk. *Pasaras* and *gajetas* slipped through water smooth and dark like ink, and the quiet, intermittent rattle of diesel boats could be heard from the cove. At 7.30, the bell of St Spyridon rang for evening Mass. By way of defiant reply, the sound of a trumpet came from the Communist army barracks as the flag was lowered. Night after night, church and army battled it out for the soul of Misto. Another day was coming to an end, another ordinary day. So ordinary, Jakov thought, that it stung.

He stood up. He still held the ugly, dirty syringe in his hand. Unsure what to do with it, he slipped it into his pocket. Jakov set off on the steep goat trail, then the wider dirt path that led past the cistern. He soon reached the first houses.

If Adrijan was telling the truth, Jakov was at the exact spot where Silva had last been seen. She had taken that same path, trodden the same furrows over the same sea-beaten stones pressed into bare earth. Then she had missed a turn and vanished as if in a puff of smoke.

Jakov still had the remains of the syringe in his pocket. He wondered what to do with it. Finally, he came to the first fork, where a trash can stood. He looked around. There was no one there. He wrapped the syringe in a tissue and threw it away.

He walked down to the village centre and headed for the old part. Darkness had fallen, and as he walked between the houses he saw windows illuminated by the light from television screens. He could hear the evening news. There were demonstrations among Albanians in Kosovo, in the south of Yugoslavia.

When he got home, Jakov quietly took off his shoes and coat in the hall. He opened the living room door a crack and saw Mate poring over his homework. Mate looked at him quizzically.

He entered the bedroom and Vesna rushed in after him. She had clearly been nervously waiting for him. "Did you find him?" she asked. "Did you talk to him?"

Jakov fell silent, as if unsure what to say. "I found him," he eventually said.

"And? What did you find out?"

Jakov hesitated, as if weighing up the best response. And then he decided. He decided on the least painful course. "Nothing," he said. "I didn't find out anything. He's never

heard of Silva. And he didn't recognize her from the photo either."

"I knew it," said Vesna. "I knew it. I know my Silva. Someone planted that stuff on her." Closing the bedroom door, Vesna said it again, only quieter, so as not to be overheard.

"Someone set her up," she said. "And that someone is *here*. In Misto."