

DEAD SERIOUS ABOUT GETTING STONED

by Desa Muck

(extracts)

Hey, we're here

The doorbell rang at seven the next morning. I was dressing my little girls for nursery. As it was so early, I assumed there must be something wrong. There was certainly something very wrong with what I saw outside my door. There stood Žuža and, leaning against the door frame, the spectral figure of a young man, overgrown and even dirtier than she was, staring at me with bloodshot eyes.

"Hey!" said Žuža cheerfully. "Here we are. Let's get down to work. Although a bite to eat might be a good idea first, get my strength up, and this friend of mine here needs a bit of a lie down. He's done in from Valium and vodka."

"I thought we'd agreed that we'd arrange something over the phone" I replied icily, through clenched teeth.

"The phone is the kiss of death to interpersonal relations. It was only invented so we'd have more time for shopping," she burbled in response.

Slogans again. She'd been full of them the day before. 'Rules are made to be broken' or 'You can't trust everything you see' and so on. Where did she get them from?

She went into the living room and ran straight into the two girls, who stared at her as if she'd just landed from Mars.

"Hey, you've got kids!" she screeched. "And I thought you were the type of woman who'd refuse to use her womb."

She bent over my daughters and I immediately thought of all the contagious diseases that spread among drug addicts - lice, if nothing else. I pulled the girls away. She straightened up: "Get up, Dolfi, we're off. They're afraid they'll catch something."

I was ashamed. At the end of the day, I'd have to take some risks if I was to enlighten Slovene youth.

"No, no, please," I said quickly. "My husband will take the girls to nursery, and we'll sit and have a coffee."

After all, I could make them a coffee and maybe extract some useful information. I forced a hospitable smile onto my face and gestured towards the table, all the while thinking: At least they could have a wash, the slob. There's no water shortage. And sew one or two buttons on. And the way they talk! Healthy young people should be doing something useful with their lives. But then again, whatever they did they'd probably end up stealing or causing damage - perhaps it's better that they do nothing.

Those were my thoughts, but for the sake of Slovene youth I gritted my teeth, although a glance at Dolfi, rolling in his dirt on my couch, caused me deep pain. Not to mention the bad vibes emitted by his socks, when he kicked off his shoes and immediately started to snore.

"We didn't get much sleep," explained Žuža. "We dossed down on a ping-pong table in somebody's cellar. So are you going to give me something to eat?"

I led her into the kitchen and, with the calculating eyes of a book-keeper, watched how she gulped down a kilo of bread and butter and a jug of white coffee. Then she belched in satisfaction and slouched across the table.

"That was great! I'm absolutely stuffed. Have you got a fag?"

"We don't smoke in this household."

"Hey, that's not fair. Though I had a feeling you'd be one of the 'die healthy' persuasion."

Where do they get these slogans, I thought and asked tetchily:

"Are you condemning me for not smoking?"

"I don't give a toss!" She gave a dismissive wave of the hand. "You're the one who's losing out. I'm just bothered you haven't got a smoke. Maybe your old man's got one somewhere in his pockets?"

That was impossible, as my husband strongly disapproved of smoking. If we go in a pub in the winter he starts opening the

windows and snatching cigarettes from the regulars' lips. Žuža speculated:

"I suppose you're not too interested in drinking, either?"

"Exactly."

"Jesus. What pleasure do you get out of life?"

"Many things."

"Such as?"

"Well..."

I racked my brain. Actually... Anyway, there are lots of things we enjoy, I just couldn't happen to think of them at that precise moment.

"At least we have a decent breakfast, if nothing else!" I bleated. And immediately regretted it, boasting in front of someone who has nothing.

"Big thing, breakfast," she replied happily. "But I've just had breakfast, without having to try too hard."

"So you're saying that a person has to smoke to be able to enjoy life? I used to smoke, but I can't remember my life being any richer or more exciting for it. I preferred to kick the habit, so as not to endanger my children's health. They shouldn't have to suffer because their mother walks around all day with a cig hanging out of her mouth."

"I knew it! Those who've given up are the worst."

"I didn't struggle to give up so that every badly brought up young fool can blow smoke in my face!"

"Yeh, yeh, I know. You deserve a medal for your heroic struggle against tobacco."

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With an alcoholic here, an alcoholic there...

The last thing I felt like doing that lazy afternoon was visiting some hysterical, stubborn young fool in a half-way house, who was threatening to commit suicide. When I stepped outside, I saw autumn was already with us. The wind was twirling the first fallen leaves. It was getting dark. I decided I needed to fortify myself for my demanding visit and went into the delicatessen for twenty sandwiches, a kilo of hazelnut chocolates and a large pack of custard creams. Because I was still feeling well-inclined towards the human race, I intended to give Žuža what I didn't manage to eat on the way. At the corner of our street I ran into a tall male figure, whose scent and tracksuit seemed somehow familiar.

"Hello, Desa. I was just on my way to your place," said Žuža's father, Miro, with a voice like a roast chestnut in a cold hand. "I finished exercising early so as to catch you."

His forget-me-not blue eyes stared emotionally into mine, which hid modestly behind the lenses of my glasses. For the first time since my marriage I really minded that I'm no beauty. And why the hell do I have to eat all the time? From this moment forth - and I want the whole world to know - I'm DIETING!

"Have you got time for a drink? I hope you're not heading for some important appointment?" he ventured, like some timid young lad.

"Of course not. I'm not going anywhere in particular, just a little walk..."

I sat at a table in a smoky cafe. He went to order us a litre of mineral water. While I waited for him, I overheard a conversation at the bar:

"If I was President, I'd soon sort things out. Women in the kitchen, nowhere else, and kids given a good hiding now and then to toughen them up a bit. They can hardly get across the road now without falling over, they're so spoiled. And then when you run them over it's your fault for driving under the influence!"

I looked round and saw a red-faced man with his flaps open and an interesting arrangement of the few hairs on his bald head.

On one side, his long red hair hung past his shoulders, on the other he had none. The glassy-eyed flock around him nodded their heads which, as they were having trouble staying upright, almost threw them off balance. Then I looked at Žuža's relaxed, handsome father, who was looking at me warmly from the bar and thought: What a little liar Žuža is - he can't be an alcoholic!

"I'm an alcoholic," said Žuža's father when he returned with the mineral water. "You've probably heard already from someone else."

What now? Perhaps it really was possible that he was the one to blame for Žuža's problems!

"Now you're probably thinking that I'm to blame for Žuža's problems," he said humbly.

"Of course not! It's not a matter of... it's no-one's... I don't... I'd never condemn someone without knowing the reasons for his actions."

"I knew it!" he exclaimed, triumphantly raising his arm and downing his fifth glass of mineral water. "I knew you'd understand. Finally, someone who doesn't think that I'm to blame for everything. Whereas my wife... well, never mind. You've met, haven't you? Wonderful, isn't she? So patient. I'm not worthy of her."

"Your wife threw me out!" I said, feeling he would appreciate what I was saying.

"So, maybe you understand me better now. My wife really is a wonderful woman, as I said, but she does have her little quirks..."

Over the next bottle of mineral water I found out what these quirks were. How calculating she was, never satisfied, interested in only two things: money and what other people would say. Yes, I quickly affirmed, I'd got exactly the same impression. I understood so well what he meant when he said that he sometimes wished that he had beside him a warm, feeling, understanding woman. Perhaps a little more rounded (only temporarily!), with glasses?

Over our third bottle he revealed that he would never have started to drink if he had not been forced to do so by circumstances. He had problems with stomach acid, which were greatly helped, he soon established, by alcohol. In any case, who'd ever seen a grown man drinking juice! And as a travelling salesman he often found himself in situations where it was impossible to say no to a drink - otherwise he'd risk losing his job. Then there were parties at work, and quarrels at home from which he needed to wind-down somehow...

"But I've never fallen as low as that," he gestured towards the group at the bar. Their leader was just explaining that, as President, he would introduce a law allowing each man to have a number of wives, all of which would go out to work while the man would stay at home resting, so that he was always in a good mood and ready to lend a sympathetic ear to their problems.

"People obviously say all sorts," continued Žuža's father. "That I would beat my wife and daughter! There's no bigger softy than I am - I cry at almost every film I watch. Not that they wouldn't benefit from a clip round the ear now and then. My wife can be very provoking, and our Žuža's tongue is so sharp I'm surprised she doesn't cut herself on it."

"I know what you mean," I said warmly. "People are such shameless liars. But I know you wouldn't smash up the flat, or chase them with a knife, or set fire to the parquet and toys and so on, as Žuža tried to imply."

Then we laughed heartily together at mankind's vices and stupidity. How nice that we were above all that! Over our fourth bottle I confided in him my own dissatisfaction over the man I had at home in front of the television. Then we swore that would not allow this newly-born and beautiful friendship to die, and parted with a feeling that we were born for each other.

At home, Television Man was waiting for me in the hall, which was quite unusual for around news time. He was almost beside himself:

"Where have you been? They called from the halfway house! Žuža waited for you all afternoon, then she locked herself in

the toilet. When they finally broke in, she'd gone, climbed through the window."

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Things get complicated

The serial with the title *How I helped to destroy some young lives* had entered a new, dramatic episode. So I was in the bathroom, having a serious talk with my reflection: You traitor! You abused Žuža's trust. Now you can hang your halo in the budgie's cage and let him swing on it. And then I laughed so much, the whole bathroom was sprayed with toothpaste. Žuža's flight from the halfway house had put me in a good mood, because it gave me a good excuse to call Miro at work the next day and tell him how worried I was.

I barricaded myself in the bedroom with Radko the cat and some books on alcoholism. And just a small packet of coconut biscuits, as I was slimming. I must tell you that books on alcoholism really get hold of you. The best are those which movingly and dramatically describe cases from real life, while those in which alcoholics describe their own experiences are hard to put down - you have to keep reading till you get to the end. While Radko purred in my ear, I feverishly looked for cases like Žuža's father. But the books were obviously lacking, as I found no descriptions of a young, sensitive, beautiful, noble character, driven by the mean tricks of his nagging and demanding wife, his jealous colleagues and his disrespectful children to reach for alcohol against his better judgement. I simply couldn't find Miro in these books, but I did come across heart-rending stories of women rolling in ditches while their children went hungry for food and love, and many examples of men whose wives had to pull their vomit and urine-stained clothes from their bodies as they lay in a drunken stupor. At the end of all these stories were moving descriptions of their rescue from the hell of alcoholism, with the help of their doctors, of course.

Truly heart-rending and gripping reading. I recommend them to younger readers, too.

And then, around one in the morning, the doorbell. The doorbell makes me nervous at any time, but in the quiet of the night it was like an electric shock.

Maks hissed from in front of the television:

"What now?"

"I don't know. We don't have to answer."

"What if it's the police?"

Yes. What if it was the police with news of Žuža? Perhaps they'd just pulled her shoes out of the river or scraped her off the railway line. I put my dressing gown on and hurried to the door.

Žuža was alive, but only just. She was swaying between Dolfi and one other representative of the unshaven, untrimmed and unkempt human sub-species. She had a stupid grin on her face and stared through me with enormous dark eyes. You're right, at the start of the book they were light blue, now they were like two enormous prunes.

"Listen, we're in a terrible fix. The police are after us and we've nowhere to leave Žuža. You've always been too good to her," said Dolfi.

"What's wrong with her?" I asked, worried.

"She's tripping," replied Dolfi. "We got them almost for nothing from some guy who's going to his guru in India and has laid off the drugs. We wanted to take one each to celebrate Žuža's big return, but then the police turned up. Žuža had already swallowed hers, there was nothing we could do. We only just got away."

So that explained the dark staring eyes. She watched me with interest.

"And what's going to happen to her now? Is she going to jump out of the window? What do I do if she passes out?"

"Nothing much'll happen. She'll be stoned all night, maybe she'll act a bit weird and talk nonsense. Just have a look at her from time to time. We've got to be off now. Here's her stuff if you need it..."

Bye, and the darkness swallowed them up.

I stood in the middle of the hall. Maks on one side, hands on hips, Žuža on the other with an angelic smile and enormous, vacant eyes. In my hand I held three small tablets, like artificial sweeteners.

"I'm calling the police!" said Maks.

"Oh, no you're not! Or I'll soak the remote control in hydrochloric acid. Get back in there. Your programme hasn't finished yet. I'll deal with this."

I was fortunate. He'd probably have called the police if there hadn't been some discussion programme on. Muttering that this was his house, he went and reinstalled himself in front of the television.

I took Žuža down to the cellar, because I was afraid she'd be taken with a desire to start breaking things. I put an old mattress on the floor. She lay down obediently and stared at the ceiling. I don't think for a moment she knew who I was or where she was. Then I put the three pills in a coffee cup at the top of the kitchen cupboard, so that the girls wouldn't get their hands on them.

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Willpower is best

"So, you see!" cried out Žuža triumphantly when I finished my story of the mystical experiences of the saints. "I'm a bit more practical. Instead of going on a one-month fast, I'd rather knock back some vodka and blow a joint, and a god shows up, whichever one I want"

"But when the alcohol and drugs wear off, no god is going to help your hangover, or convince the police to keep away from you, or give you a penny. You'll be left as you are - a kid with no school, no home and no future."

"My god has looked after me pretty well up to now," she said, with a wily look. "He sent you."

Then we finally said our goodbyes, a little too warmly for my taste.

As the train took me towards Ljubljana I felt terrible, worse than I'd ever felt in my life. My safe little world of gleaming kitchen tiles, vases of flowers and a well-stocked pantry had started to crumble, and through the cracks ever more painful apparitions appeared.

FIRST APPARITION:

I'm sitting on the freshly Hoovered carpet in the living room, playing with the girls. It's about time, as recently I've been paying more attention to other children than my own. Maks is slumped in front of the TV. Everything is as it should be. Suddenly, there is a muted pounding on the door and: "Police, open up!"

Four uniformed police armed with machine guns and two plainclothes officers charge in. Close behind them stumbles Rezka, screeching:

"They've probably got her hidden in the cellar. She had me locked up there when she tortured me with poison gas. Be careful, she's probably armed!"

They stampede across the Hoovered carpet, crushing Barbies and Lego bricks beneath their heavy boots. They tear the house apart, but they don't find Žuža. They handcuff me and take me away. Behind me, children's small hands reach out beseechingly. During all this rumpus, Maks doesn't take his eyes off the screen. At the police station I am beaten and tortured for hours, but I give in only when they threaten to raid my fridge and set fire to the pantry. Žuža is locked away at the Višnja Gora remand home, where she lives to a ripe old age. Thanks to her, whole generations of warders go mad.

SECOND APPARITION:

I'm sitting on the freshly hoovered carpet in the living room, playing with the girls, etc. The phone rings. It is Miro, who tells in a shaken voice the following story:
Night. Two escaped criminals fleeing through the woods of Dolenjska come upon our weekend cottage. They look through the lighted window and see a young girl, alone and vulnerable, reading the Bible by the light of a spirit lamp. They break in and... rivers of blood...

Miro finishes his story:

"You've ruined our life. I never want to see you again. Now I'm going to drink myself to death."

Through the long days when I sit on the hoovered carpet and weep, Maks doesn't take his eyes off the screen.

The train was full of youngsters en route to Ljubljana for afternoon classes. The noisy buzz around me only increased my sense of isolation in a world full of catastrophes. This would happen right now, when I've started to diet! My thoughts are already way ahead of me, coming out of the railway station, where lurk malicious kiosks full of the most delicious junk. My saliva starts to drip onto the floor and to spread across the carriage until we are ankle-deep in it.

When I get off the train I almost trip over a drunk rolling in his own vomit. In disgust, I stagger past him and almost into the hamburger kiosk. I stand uncertainly in front of its window. Miro's smiling eyes seem to appear in the glass. I clench my teeth and determinedly drag myself away, as far as the *burek* kiosk. I stand there for a minute or two, walk away as far as the corner and then come back. Beneath the suspicious gaze of those in the queue, I shamefacedly go to the front and buy one meat *burek* and one cheese one. Then, like a criminal, I rush to the nearest litter bin and throw them in. (What a pig I am, some people are starving. I know, I know, I know!) I dash past the chip kiosk quite decisively, but at the one with ice-cream and cakes my tears finally start to flow. Curse this life! With the last of my strength, I drag myself to the bus station. But then I am gripped by an unknown force that carries me back to the kiosk. Before I know what's happening, I find myself in the park opposite the station, sitting between two drunks who are knocking back a bottle of plonk, and in the space of a few minutes I wolf down four cold, greasy, burnt pieces of chicken, one meat and one cheese *burek*, two walnut slices, two hotdogs with mustard and two slices of chocolate cake that smell of old ashtrays.

It doesn't matter, I say to myself, as I greedily swallow the food. Tomorrow I'll start for real, word of honour. Tomorrow I'll become a new person and from then on everything will be different. I'll begin a total fast, I'll start jogging and join the

gym. In a few months I'll be a slim, decisive, active and attractive woman. A new Desa. In fact, I might even change my name. I'll finally complete my university studies and get rich. I'll be so popular that I'm a bit worried I'll be asked to run for President. I'll breeze through life, slim, elegant, attractive and self-confident. The Prime Minister will send me a red rose every morning and every Slovene writer will have a small shrine at home with my picture. These thoughts were disturbed by someone muttering. An drunk old lady approached, with a purple face, worn-out slippers on her feet and dressed in smelly rags of unrecognisable colour. Slurring her words, she asked me for some change. With a mouth full of hot dog, and dripping mustard, mayonnaise and fat, I drove her away, telling her she should join some rehabilitation programme for alcoholics.

To let herself go like that, I thought, haughtily. Some people simply have no willpower.

Then I set off for home. Maks was due back from work at any moment.

* * * * *

Where have all the children gone? Long time ago...

I felt as if I had irrevocably closed the door of hell behind me and said farewell with the words: "Hang on in there, girl. It'll be alright. They'll fry you in boiling oil a bit, maybe put an eye out and stick you on a fork just for fun, but that's nothing."

In reality, I had no idea what cold turkey was actually like. I'd read a bit, but thought they probably exaggerated the withdrawal symptoms in order to have a more educational effect. When I thought about what was happening in my cellar, I almost choked with anguish, but then I said to myself: it doesn't matter, my life is in any case such a disaster area that one more act of stupidity (it might even be a good work, as history will no doubt show) is neither here nor there. When it all comes out I'll most likely have the police at my door, I'll be condemned by the public, my relatives will disown me and the neighbours will demand that I move out. One half-dead dread drug addict in the cellar or not. On top of which, my carefully constructed list of those guilty for the drug addiction of the young had collapsed like a rotten staircase. Where could I find

new ones? Which came first, the chicken or the egg? If it was the chicken, who should get their ears boxed first? The parents? School? Society? The system? And what if it was the egg? Who's to blame?

When I returned to the kitchen I came across Žuža blowing a hearty raspberry at the window.

"That ridiculous neighbour of yours is always gawping in this direction through a telescope!"

Of course, why didn't I think of that before? Rezka! It was all Rezka's fault. So if anyone asks you who's to blame for the growing number of drug addicts in Slovenia, tell them it's Rezka.

We were in the middle of lunch when Žuža's mother came buzzing along. I went to get her a plate.

"There's no need. I don't want to disturb you," she chirruped. She seemed to be in an excellent mood, as if all the bruises on her face were the result of being showered with diamonds. When I ladled out some warmed-up soup for her, I deliberately lent closer. No, she didn't smell of alcohol.

"I was at the doctor's, you know, and he gave me a written confirmation of my injuries that I'll use for the divorce. So that's it, I'm starting a new life! The doctor was great. It's wonderful to find someone who's willing to listen to your troubles and show compassion."

"Instead of him giving you one on the nose!" muttered Žuža at the heap of mashed potato in front of her. Maks and I tried to tell her off, but her mother simply waved her hand.

"Leave her be. She's not having any effect, I'm on tranquillisers."

She said 'I'm on tranquillisers' as if she was saying 'I'm honorary head of the UN'.

"Yeh, of course. You dope yourself with tranquillisers and then watch dumbly while my father hits you, cheats and drinks away your money, instead of fighting back!" said Žuža angrily to the mashed potato.

My heart jumped with joy. They were finally talking to each other!

Cvetka responded benevolently: "You know what, you've got no right to poke your nose into my affairs and criticise me, because you've no idea what I'm going through!"

"Of course, I'm only your daughter, I've got no right to interfere 'cos I haven't been through it all with you! The doctor and all the others you show your bruises to have, I suppose. And so has everyone who says what a poor little thing you are and what a bastard dad is! The only ones who haven't are those who say some of the blame's yours and that you should do something to change things, and that tranquillisers aren't the answer."

Maks discreetly took the girls, who were listening open-mouthed, into the garden. Silence reigned. Then Žuža got up and ran after them. In spite of the tranquillisers, Cvetka's lower lip was trembling.

"Now you see what it's like! My own daughter doesn't understand and is turned against me! After everything that I've gone through because of her! I sacrificed myself for her! It's only because of her that I went on living through hell with Miro. And this is all the thanks I get! She's heartless, deceitful and stubborn, just like her father!"

"I'm sorry, but Žuža isn't like that," I heard myself say, with surprise. "There are lots of good things about her."

"Oh, really? Such as?"

I was even more surprised at what I came out with:

"She knows how to be a true friend. She risked a lot to help Lena. She's honest. She could've stolen from us long ago if she'd wanted. She's observant, and she knows how to use her head. She likes children and she knows how to behave with them. She's got a vivid imagination, it's true, but she's no liar! And she's a lot more open than most of the people I know."

I must be under hypnosis, I thought. If anyone had said a month ago that I'd be talking about Žuža like that I'd have spat at them!

To cover up my senile sentimentality I went into the garden to tell Maks to come and drink his coffee. He was rummaging around his boat materials and patiently giving instructions to Žuža and the girls, who were enthusiastically bringing planks of wood and piling them in a heap. I suddenly felt tears forming in my eyes. For heavens sake! Enough's enough. I don't even let them help me do the washing up in case they break something, and Žuža's mum doesn't let her do anything in case she screws up. Maybe Maks - unwittingly, of course, as his knowledge could not possibly compare with mine - had discovered the direction in which every family should go if its children are to be more balanced and free from addiction. How wholeheartedly the girls were taking part in the work, how important they must feel to be contributing to something that would change our lives for the better. In their opinion, of course. Yes, my nose told me this was the way to go, and I would have joined them if I had not heard a wild howling from the cellar.

In the corner of the cellar slumped suffering personified. It was as if Lena had no skin and her eyes were without eyelashes. Pain, pared down to its core. She fell silent when she saw me, only the chattering of her teeth echoed round the cellar like the sound of castanets. And worst of all - this creature shaking, scratching its legs till they bled and sweating horribly - was a child. Barely fifteen years old. A child I wanted to bathe, dress in warm flannel pyjamas, heat up caramel milk with sage, and hold in my arms until she calmed down and fell asleep. And why the hell wasn't her own mother here to do all that and where had she been all this time?! I dashed off to buy some heroin, I couldn't let any child suffer as much as this.

[...]

There was vomit everywhere and... I'd rather not say what. But no sign of Lena. I rushed upstairs, where I came across Žuža's mother standing confused in the middle of the hall.

"Žuža just dragged something into your bathroom. It threw up on your stairs. What was it?"

Lena lay limply in a bath full of hot water. Her eyes were closed and she was panting like a young dog. On the floor lay a heap of her black rags, giving off a powerful smell. A trail of vomit

led from the cellar to the bathroom. I silently got down to wiping it up and ruminated on how much of this dumb love I had inside me. Enough to clean up for a fortnight after someone else's child? If she was mine, then maybe... And what then? Didn't the young chap say that I'd have to stand beside her later? But I don't even have enough time for my own children! Do I have the strength and the nerves to spend years breaking through the labyrinth of distrust, excuses and hostile thought patterns with which this child's heart was long ago smothered and teach it everything afresh? Is there anyone on earth who would have enough love for that?

I said to Žuža, who was wiping Lena's face and neck with a sponge:

"I'm sorry, but I can't do this! I can't take the responsibility. I've got two children, who can't live in such... I mean, I think it'd be better for everyone if I called an ambulance for Lena. I'll make sure she's admitted to the best rehab clinic and in really good hands."

"God, you always know what's best for everyone else, don't you?" said Žuža, hurling the sponge at the wall, so that the whole bathroom was splashed. "Do what you want, but if you do call an ambulance it'll be worse than a mad house in here. The police'll be here in a flash, and I don't know if you're bright enough to answer all their questions. In your wonderful institution she'll be locked up with other junkies and they'll spend the whole time talking about nothing else other than how they can score. The first day she came out she'd be shooting up again."

"What about that religious commune? Run by those Italian priests? I've heard they're very successful."

"Before you can get in there you've got to be clean for a year."

"I'm really sorry, but I just can't..."

"I'll do it, I'll look after her! I've got tons of time and nothing else to do. I'll make sure your kids are not walking in shit and puke, they'll have no idea what's going in. It'll only be this bad for a couple of days. Then I'll take her to that weekend place of yours. Go on, please! Don't be a bastard! She's finally showing some guts and if you screw up now no-one'll ever convince her again that grown-ups are anything other than a load of

hypocrites. This'll be the first time any adult has done anything for her who hasn't been paid by the government."

"I really don't know. It's such a risk..."

"You know, when she gets it into her head again to shoot up and says it's all the same if she snuffs it from dope as life's a load of shit and the world's just one big mistake, then I'll be able to say to her: Hang on a minute, it's not all shit. They're not all sell outs. What about old Desa. She helped you, even though she didn't have to. You've no idea how much she risked, just because she believed in you. You're not going to screw up old Desa now, are you? You get what I mean?"

I got it. I said okay and went downstairs, to find Žuža's mother in the middle of a heart-to-heart with Dolfi.

"Hi there, I missed Žuža so much I just had to come," he said to me. "I'll only stay a couple of nights until I find somewhere better to crash. Hey, have you still got any of that great whisky?"