

A fly landed on a lock of Jesus' hair, then abruptly moved to the poster of FC Hajduk and climbed up the thigh of some young soccer player gazing into the future. Then it flew up and smashed several times against the pane of a still closed window looking for an exit from this room in which I stood waiting for a man whom I'd woken from his afternoon nap to write down my ID number, my first and last name, my cell phone number. That's the procedure, he explained while rummaging through a cabinet whose tiny door irreconcilably entangled into a rosary and searching for the key to the guard's post. He told me that one of his men would take me up there, but only in the evening, when the sun dropped a bit and people got free.

That was all, after his release I was already standing in the street, these were the first days of June, and the asphalt already melted and the heat slammed into the back of the neck like a warning. I looked for a shade and decided to stay right next to the Javorna Voluntary Fire Brigade's facilities, a place I had just left thinking about the freedom that sets onto this place at one moment of the afternoon, here in this small place at the end of several worlds and at the end of several centuries packed into a single afternoon.

I didn't ask anything, I barely managed to mutter out my own name, what happens happens, I thought. The only thing I didn't know was what to do with this lethal silence, with that muteness to which my contempt and tiredness of people gave such a painful birth. I could no longer deal with them, I felt like they were ripping the flesh off of my forearms, eating me alive with their relentless babble and questions. They beset me, asked for something that didn't belong to them or that I couldn't give. Without exception, in those feeble bodies of theirs, they were magnificent artists, writers, important journalists, historic characters from the realm of politics and glossy pop scene charmers. They'd all discovered the secret of life, happiness and success. What did they need me for? In the end, why did they need all those exhibitions and books they barely managed to type and put on my desk, to make a career for them, to somehow put on television, in front of a camera that's dying of boredom because of them. Who needed them but themselves, while they ordered special cakes and bouquets

for me in return for their book promotions and exhibition openings? That civilized yet horrible arrogance they so abounded with became intolerable for me.

Fishing nets stretched out on the town quay dried in the wind and, in an incredible image, an old man and a young boy sewed their ends. Some sick electronic rhythm was pounding from inside a cake shop that had a huge refrigerator built into its wall. At its door stood a stern, swarthy man in a white shirt, and with the same intensity observed the passers-by and two younger men, also in white shirts, who wiped the tables and watered the flowers on the terrace. Here and there, a backpacking tourist sat on concrete rings around the palm trees, there's one in a bicycle helmet holding his iPad on his knees and typing. He immersed in what he was doing and the screen ate half of his torso, his hands from elbows up and parts of his legs in robust sneakers were all that remained.

At a nearby store I bought two cans of beer, a half a loaf of bread, some mortadella, two tomatoes, and a small packet of salt: while I'm waiting, I'll eat my lunch. And I will need salt up there anyhow, someone will probably tell me how to go about groceries, what to do with water, there has to be a solution.

From here, from the town quay, the guard's post couldn't be seen, did it even exist and on which side of the island was it, what would I be looking at for the next three months, all of this remained a secret, at least for the time being, at least for the next couple of hours until one of the town's firemen got free.

On my knee, using the knife, which, at the time when I still went on summer vacations, I used to hunt octopuses, and which I decided to take with me on this uncertain trip, I cut the bread, put mortadella on the two halves, its biting smell almost splitting the palm tree under which I was sitting. I quartered the tomatoes on the waxy paper, salted them heartily and regretted it the very next second: what is waiting for me on the way to the guard's post, is there any water, and will I get in trouble because of all this salt on my very first night up there?

Is this salt just the fear of solitude I am yearning for? The fear of nights in the wilderness, those forgotten rustlings and movements, night flutter and footsteps, the sounds of birth and death far away from people and their liberation in this tiny place by the sea, which, if everything turned out fine, this summer I will be guarding from fire.

Having one beer on an afternoon as hot as this doesn't mean anything, quickly finishing the other one means forgetting the silence I've been mastering and admiring for the past two years, it means having a conversation with a young man who is taking me up the narrow alley to the very end of the town and showing me the monastery visited every summer by a couple of priests who offer some kind of renewal, he says.

Does he mean spiritual renewal? Yes, he does, foreigners go too, they don't know the language, they just stand there and pray, and then later there's a lot of work on the town quay, in the coffee shops. He's a waiter, his father is a diabetic, he has an elder sister who hasn't married yet, but has a boyfriend, they even have the same last name, but, you know, they are not related.

Behind the monastery, behind the cemetery, behind an olive orchard, there is a Fire Brigade's garage, in it one polished old Man truck, a lot of equipment, fire extinguishers and water drossers, in front of the garage there is a huge pile, almost a mound of sand, and behind it, the wrecks of two Land Rovers, with no wheels, no doors, their windshields smashed, but unusually clean. I notice a brass plaque on one of them. The engraving says: JAVORNA – VELEBIT 1992 – 112th BATTALION.

"Is this a war booty?"

"Nah, my father drove that down here, he felt sorry, didn't want to leave them up there. I mean on the Velebit. And how the cars got wrecked or what happened to them, I don't know, they say our guys used them while up there, but some say they did, some say they didn't, my father says they did, my uncle says they didn't. Who would know, bah, it was a long time ago, now they just stand here, tourists sometimes take pictures in them. And you see some parts are missing, the other night someone removed the axle and took it, maybe for his motor hoe, who knows."

Dino took a small green bag holding the two-ways out of one of the cabinets.

"Someone took the batteries again, must be the jerks that go after the pigs, stupid motherfuckers, now we have to go back to the village, you can't go up there without those things. Leave your stuff, you'll spend the night here and then in the morning we'll pack you up in peace. Let's go back."

"It's okay, I'd stay, you bring the batteries, tomorrow, if that's all there is to it."

"God, what will you do up here all alone?"

"Well, I'll be here on my own for the next three months, what difference does a day make?"

"Yeah, you're right, you're crazy. I can tell."

"Hey, Dino, what pigs?"

"Wild boars, what else. The island's full of them."