

FROM LIFE AS A MISSING SPOON (PART 1)

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translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

I turned out to be a hardcore heroin addict. When the nurse brought the test results and read what was written there, my legs turned to rubber, but my dad quickly brought me back around with an aggressive shake, after which he told with a smile that I could no longer deny it.

“Everything’s clear now, Nikola. You’ve hidden it from us for a long time. We never expected this from you. Your mother and I have been fooling ourselves, thinking you’d gotten into drugs recently, feeling sorry for you, wracking our brains trying to figure out how to help you, but you? You!”

What? How was something like this possible? Before taking the samples, the nurse had assured us that the likelihood was so minimal that it was essentially nonexistent. In principle, I would have believed her if it hadn’t happened to me.

But whenever things involve a person, they can always get screwed up. The wisdom of the ages has shown that everyone royally fucks things up at least once in their lifetime, or at the very least makes an impressive blunder that he pays dearly for. “Human, all too human!” I murmured the words of a brilliant philosopher whom some say caught VD, but my father was in no mood for philosophy just now.

“No, save your explanations, don’t even start with me! I don’t want to listen to you! I don’t even want to think about! You’re not... you’re no longer my son! No... but unfortunately you still are! That’s something that can’t be changed. But I don’t understand you. Why did you do it? Why?”

After that impressive string of no’s, I got the feeling that the situation was worse than bad. It was impossible to remain calm, yet I tried. The result? A short, few-seconds-long meditation. I imagined the absurd situation I had found myself in as a side effect of the engine powering the space ship which two hitchhikers had found themselves aboard following an unbelievable fluke – seconds after they were thrown into the open cosmos by the Vogon Constructor Fleet. This involuntary literary association crystallized in a fleeting smile across my lips and under its influence I bravely objected with a: “But...”

If I had the opportunity to expand on this thought, I would take an aphoristic approach and conclude that the history of humanity is nothing but the story of various mistakes, which began way back with Adam’s original sin and which continues throughout human history to

this very day. I was getting ready to let loose with some impressive verbal improv, but my father's "no" cut me off like a razor.

I fell silent for hours.

Now forget everything I've said until now and just imagine for a second that the test really was positive. That there was no mistake. What then? Do drug addicts even exist at all? What does it really mean to be a drug addict? If it means getting intoxicated with illegal substances, then everything depends entirely on the government. Why is a joint illegal, but alcohol and cigarettes legal? Why were morphine, amphetamines, heroin, cocaine, LSD and who knows what else all legal at first? One hundred years ago, right after Bayer invented it, I could have gotten high on heroin – with no hassle whatsoever.

Aspirin and heroin are distant cousins, isn't that funny? The latter's name came from observations that people taking it felt heroic. After a few years of heroism, horse's golden years were over and the noose tightened – heroin crossed over into illegal territory.

Let's not forget prescription drugs. Gulping down a handful of pills in a struggle with your mental problems – Diazepam, for example – is a form of getting high for some and of getting healed for others. But where is the border between the two and isn't it arbitrary? Isn't getting high healing in a certain sense of the word? Could it be that all those folks popping prescription pills are really junkies? Then what should we say about the alcoholics and hardcore smokers? Sometimes I get the feeling that we're all drug addicts, other times – that no one is.

But now let's return to the hospital, where I was still standing bug-eyed and wondering how this had all happened. Despite my bewilderment, I immediately recalled a story about a medical error that had happened to my grandmother. Once she had gone for a routine check-up, given whatever was needed and sat down to wait. She wasn't worried, she felt terrific, she hadn't been sick in months. As she was sitting there, a nurse opened the door with a stony expression. Her hands were shaking as she read the diagnosis: cancer of the something-or-other in an advanced stage. My grandma panicked. The nurse called the doctor, who looked at the results and couldn't believe her eyes. There was no way my grandma could've been that sick. At that moment she turned over the sheet of paper and realized that my grandmother's results were on the other side. The action took place at the very height of socialism, at a time when hospitals were required to conserve the forms used for diagnoses. So in the space of fifteen minutes, my grandma had gotten cancer and was miraculously cured. I wanted to remind my father of that story, but he kept fixing me with such a look that I was in no condition to say anything at all.