

SCHOOL REPORT

Chapter 1

Lenart tosses the money to Denis. – “I knew he was a cool guy!” – A furious question: “Who you trying to mix with, idiot?” – A thin t-shirt, riding up, and worn jeans, sliding down. – “And not a word at home!”

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“We don’t take babies,” said Denis, slurping the brownish liquid in the tall glass through a straw, “get lost!”

The boys at the table sniggered. Kaja and the two other girls giggled.

“I’ve got cash,” Lenart said bravely. He wanted to obscure the fact that he was only eleven.

“Wow!” said Dren, “the kid’s got cash!”

“Yes,” said Lenart with a nod, “ten Euros.”

Everyone stopped talking and looked at Denis. He was a rather fat boy with black hair, a little shabby and a little dirty. But it was clear at first sight that he was the one who decided everything.

“Clear off,” he said wearily, “I don’t discuss anything less than fifty.”

“No problem,” said Lenart with a grin, reaching into his pocket. He pulled out a roll of banknotes. He counted out five and tossed them at Denis. He had another banknote left in his hand.

“O.K.,” Denis replied calmly. “Give me that last ten so that I can get you a drink.”

“Get one for me, too!” said Kaja. “I knew Lenart was a cool guy!”

The cool guy turned red from his nose to the little toe on his left foot and handed over the rest of his money.

“The brat doesn’t talk too much,” commented Slim. “I like that.”

The group was sitting at a long table outside a cafe in the middle of the town, whiling away one of the last Friday afternoons in the school year. Most of them

were around fourteen, fifteen. School was mainly torment for them, something they were forced into by the state and their crazy parents, who had in the past read the slogan “Education, education, education!” and it now refused to leave their heads.

Matej, close to finishing compulsory education, came round the corner and spotted his younger brother Lenart at the table next to Kaja. He stopped and asked angrily:

“Who you trying to mix with, idiot?”

“Come on,” said Denis. “Leave him be, he’s one of us. He paid.”

“When and who for?” snapped Matej.

“Me. Just now. Fairly and squarely. That count’s for something nowadays,” explained Denis, rubbing the pocket on his t-shirt that was showing a pleasant fullness, with some banknote corners protruding.

“You’ve gone mad,” said Matej angrily and spat.

Lenart looked at him with slight unease and slight conceit. He quickly took a sip from Kaja’s glass.

“Here’s a drink for you, sit down Matej,” said Denis, pulling up an empty chair. “We’ll start now. Dren, what do we have today?”

Dren was a tall, thin, dark-haired boy from the vocational school. He did a lot of sports and instead of normal flesh he had muscles knotted around his bones. He kicked a black bag out from beneath the table and unzipped it.

“There’s a mobile phone,” he said, pulling it out. “Top class. Look at the screen. Listen to the music. See the camera.”

Lenart’s eyes grew large.

“How much?” he asked.

“God, stop!” shouted Matej, jumping up. “What’re you doing? You’ve dragged the brat into this now?”

Denis took two very long drags and then mumbled, narrowing his eyes:

“Calm down, man. The brat has paid and is one of us now. He has priority today.”

Matej took a deep breath, gritting his teeth:

“This brat will come home eventually. I’ll make him a priority. A real priority!”

Lenart flinched.

“I was only asking, I’m not really interested,” he said.

“There’s a ghetto blaster,” Dren said, reaching into the bag again. “Fifty horsepower loudspeakers. Knock you off your chair, man.”

“What about chains?” interrupted Slim. “You’ve been promising for three weeks.”

“I get what I promise!” said Dren, throwing a large knot of silvery sparkling chains onto the table. “Real fancy!”

Everyone leapt forward and began untangling the chains. Lenart was the quickest. He put one round his neck and went to look at himself in the window of a hairdressing salon.

“Yes,” said Kaja, “that could work. Now Gogo has to make a letter. A nice L for you, Lenart. A really cool guy has to have a chain and his letter.”

“Yeah,” said Lenart with a nod, “with a nice L.”

“What about that bicycle?” asked Matej, turning to Denis. “You said you’d sort it.”

Denis took another two puffs.

“Don’t panic. Shift your arse and look at the bike stand. Do you see something wild and red?” he said triumphantly.

In the concrete rack there was a red bicycle with a million gears, mega springs and impressive brakes.

“Will that do?” asked Denis, reaching out. He opened his hand and rubbed his index finger against his thumb. Yours for eighty Euros.”

Matej went over to the bicycle, lifted it and weighed it up, sat on it and tried the brakes, jumped up with it once or twice and then exhaled loudly twice.

“Yeah!” he said. “This’ll do!”

He got off and put the bicycle back in the stand. He glanced at Lenart and said to Denis:

“I’ll take the lot. The bike, the ghetto blaster and the mobile. I’ll give you my old mobile and pay the rest in cash. What do you say? I can add a basketball.”

Denis did some calculations. Slim and Dren watched him silently. In front of the class, Denis would be doing similar calculations until the teacher had a nervous breakdown. Now he immediately said:

“Thirty, minus two for the old mobile, and I’ll add a chain as a gift for the brat. Deal?”

Matej nodded. He turned to Lenart.

“Did you hear? You’ve just bought a chain for 28 Euros and got a few presents for your older brother. Well, thanks, you shouldn’t have.”

“Lenart, you rule,” said Kaja, clapping. “You’re so cool.”

What can I do, thought Lenart, if I’m a babe magnet?

The fact that Kaja was about five years older, didn’t bother him at all. What really mattered was that she was tall and blonde and considerably better looking than Tina and Ana, who chewed constantly and pretended they didn’t care about it. His conceited view of girls was momentarily clouded by the fact that Matej had just concluded a deal, using his money.

“Lenart!” said Denis, holding up his hand. “Come here!”

Lenart came over and they did a high-five.

“You’re one of us now,” said Denis. “That’s a fact. If anyone doesn’t like it, send them to me.”

“OK, man,” said Lenart with a grin. In his head he was already acting out all the shows he would put on in the school corridor.

They spent a little longer rocking on their chairs, talking about this and that. Then Denis called the girl who was serving and asked for the bill. Between the thin t-shirt that was riding up and her well worn jeans that were riding down, appeared her belly button with a metal stud in it.

“What are you staring at?” she asked Denis sharply. “The bill is on the table, not in my pants.”

“Sorry,” said the round table boss. “My thoughts strayed a bit and I don’t know what I’m looking at.”

Then he turned slowly to his companions.

“I’m thinking,” he said, “we’ll have to get down to some work. No work, no dosh. My pocket should never be empty.”

Matej and Lenart got up. Matej got on the bicycle and put his new mobile in his pocket, while Lenart grabbed the ghetto blaster.

“I’ll wait for two days,” said Denis, “otherwise the deal’s off.”

“Understood,” nodded Matej.

Lenart shuffled alongside him towards home.

“You’ll lend me the money. I’m skint right now,” said Matej.

Lenart tried to object.

“If you’re with us, act like one of us,” Matej stopped him. “And not a word at home!”

“Obviously,” said Lenart smugly. “obviously!”

When they got home, mum met them at the door.

“Does anyone want to eat anything?” she asked, looking worried.

“Yes,” said Matej. “Spaghetti with tuna. And lots of it.”

Mum didn’t notice that her first-born was riding a new red bicycle and that her second-born was staggering under the weight of a huge ghetto blaster.

“Get everything ready for school,” she said and rushed into the kitchen.

Chapter 2

Why something fails to have a calming effect. – How a distraught mother crushes all hope. – Who does the form teacher rapidly approach? – The problem with common sense? – What the brat has no idea about.

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Mrs Marija Pirc was staggering up the stairs to a door behind which her unsuspecting husband, Mr Stane Pirc, was sitting at his computer. His colleagues had just toddled off for a coffee.

“Disaster!” exclaimed Mrs Pirc.

With one hand she firmly shut the door behind her. This was supposed to ensure that not a single sentence would escape the insurance company office. With her other hand she wiped her perspiring brow, at the same time pushing away the reddish brown curl that clung to her face.

Mr Pirc, an insurance agent dealing with car claims, lifted his eyes from the papers in front of him to his wife and bravely said:

“Come on, sit down, it’ll all be alright.”

Such a calming sentence would make sense in a normal situation. But it soon transpired that this situation was not normal. Which is why it failed to have a calming effect.

“Disaster!” Mrs Pirc repeated and sat on the chair at the other side of the desk.

Mr Pirc had only a few seconds to think that his wife was being affected by the unbearable summer heat that had been hanging over the town for days. Everyone was turning off their televisions in the evening furious that the weather forecaster with the frozen smile had announced that the warm weather, too warm for the time of year, would continue and there would be no rain.

“Lenart!” With this the distraught mother crushed all his hopes. “Lenart has gone completely off the rails. I’ve just been at the school. In the past week he got three fail grades in a row!”

Mr Pirc became a surprised father with wide open eyes.

“Lenart?” he asked, as if he couldn’t believe his ears. “Lenart?”

The school year was approaching its end. Matej was just finishing his final year of primary school and there was a lot of tension in the air over whether he would be able to go to the secondary school of his choice. He had achieved exceptionally good test results and was placed among the three percent of those with the sharpest brains. Otherwise, he was as lazy as all sloths since prehistoric times until today. He paid no attention to minor details like grades. But those minor details were what the school authorities had chosen as the criteria that would or would not

open doors for the boy's continuing education and at which school. Mrs Pirc had worn out her tongue and nerves trying to explain this to her son. He just ignored it all and only wanted to know why she was nagging him.

The younger Lenart stayed out of all these battles. He said that everything at school was fine and that he was getting nothing but good grades. He had already begun diplomatic negotiations with his grandmother about the presents he could expect after successfully completing year five. The list was varied and very long, and adorned with bright examples of grandmothers and grandchildren from near and far.

And today Mrs Pirc had gone to sign some papers in connection with Matej's enrolment in secondary school. Suspecting nothing bad, she walked along the school corridor towards the school psychologist's office. In her head she was looking for the right way to confirm that yes, Matej was lazy. But he was bright, just not taking things seriously enough, and it would be a shame to impose a punishment on him with such serious consequences straight away. He should instead be given an opportunity to channel his talents in a brand new environment.

She was still perfecting what she would say when she was stopped by someone calling:

"Mrs Pirc! Mrs Pirc!"

Mrs Pirc stopped and looked back. Her younger son's form teacher was rushing towards her.

"Mrs Pirc!" said Lenart's teacher again as a way of greeting. "You've finally come!"

Lenart's mother inhaled and asked in agitation:

"Where have I finally come?"

"For two weeks," said the teacher firmly, "I've been asking Lenart to tell you to come to school. Several times I've called your home and Lenart always answered and promised he'd tell you. Are you really so busy that you don't have time to come even when explicitly requested?"

Darkness came over Lenart's mother's eyes. Not have time for her son's school?

"I know nothing about this," she said, barely able to keep calm.

And then it all came out.

For the past month, Lenart had been acting like a tourist who had accidentally strayed into the classroom. All he wanted was to have fun. He didn't do any work and his notes resembled scattered salad leaves in a hen house. He had received three negative grades. He spent all the time chatting and threatening his class mates with beating, flattening and hammering for the slightest little thing. Everyone was wondering what was wrong with him.

They may have been wondering. But not quite as much as Lenart's mother was doing now.

She was trying to catch her breath, staggering along the corridor. Sweat was pouring out of every pore in her body.

"Lenart...", she sobbed. "Lenart ..."

The form teacher didn't need to ask her whether she knew anything about this. It was quite clear that she didn't.

"So," the teacher said, "he hasn't told you I've been trying to reach you?"

Lenart's mother shook her head. After her breathing and heart rate had calmed down, they sat on a bench and slowly put together a plan of how they would make the brat climb over the obstacles to the final positive grades. When the form teacher had gone, Lenart's mother spent some time leaning against the corridor wall, trying to reconnect her nerve endings. All this meant she had missed the morning office hours the school psychologist had set for parents.

Lenart's story had caught up with her before she could end Matej's. She swiftly went to see Mr Pirc. The more she thought about it, the clearer it became that Lenart's story may turn into a true tragedy, if not worse.

As she was rushing along the town streets, three forms of heating were turned on full: the sun was roasting from above, the asphalt from below and in-between there was the combustion inside the distraught mother. Almost too much for any human being.

So now, in Mr Pirc's office, there were two of them dealing with it.

"Damn!" said father Pirc. He got up and began pacing up and down his office. But all this movement didn't calm things down at all.

"And where's the little devil now?" he asked, pausing for a moment.

“At home!” explained Mrs Pirc. “I stopped him going to his sports practice and told him which maths exercises to do by the time I come back.”

“Aha,” mumbled Mr Pirc. “Right.”

Mr Pirc believed in trust and common sense. His approach to his two sons was: let’s trust them. The next part of his trust was: common sense will tell them not to do anything stupid. But there was a minor flaw in this approach. Common sense kept telling their sons many things. The problem was that the boys usually ignored it.

“Aha!” repeated Mr Pirc.

He remembered that in the morning, on his way to work, he’d run into the mother of Lenart’s school friend Vlado. She told him anxiously that she was very worried whether Vlado would manage to turn his negative grade in English into a positive one. This latest grade was on top of another negative grade the previous week. And so the night before, the unhappy mother and the correspondingly unhappy son had spent the whole night revising irregular verbs and everything else from his English lessons backwards and forwards.

Poor thing, father Pirc thought as they parted.

Little did he know that very soon he would give Vlado’s mother the opportunity to say something similar about him.

“Well,” said Mr Pirc out loud, gently bending over his wife, “we’ll come down on him hard and pull him through. And for next school year, we’ll give him a home timetable. He’ll work until there are sparks flying!”

Lenart had no idea about the imminent threat. He was lying on the rug in the living room, playing with his grey cat. Before this, the cat had rubbed himself against his legs until Lenart, in spite of his mother’s prohibition, reached into the fridge, pulled out a bag of cat food and shook its contents into the cat’s plate on the floor. Now the cat was full. It lay on the floor next to Lenart and licked his ear. Lenart was in heaven and felt like the lord of the cats.

A key rattled in the door. Mrs Pirc’s hands were full of shopping. On her way home she had bought everything she needed for lunch. The delay by the door was long enough for Lenart to jump up, sit at the table, open his maths book and lean his head on his hand. He created a very convincing impression that he had spent

the whole day buried in maths, while the rest of the world was out in the sunshine, playing basketball or on bicycles, jumping on and off the pavement.

“Well,” shouted mother, “have you been good, Lenart?”

Every kid, let alone Lenart, answers a question like that loud and clear:

“Yes, mum!”

Luckily, she didn't have time to check the truthfulness of his words. Lenart noticed this and quickly asked:

“Can I go and ride my bike for a bit now? I can do maths after lunch again.”

Mum didn't show any great enthusiasm for letting him go out. So he put on an offended, irritated voice as he said:

“Everyone else met up in the park straight after school. They're riding up and down the hill on their bikes. I'm the only one not there. I'll be back by lunch.”

Mum had a slight headache. If she continued this tense conversation with her son, the headache would definitely not go away.

“All the others didn't get loaded down with negative grades in the last week of school,” she managed to say coldly. Then she said slightly more warmly:

“Show me what you've done so far.”

“I've just closed my book and notebook and tidied them nicely into my school bag, like you always want me to. Should I take it all out again?” said the boy cunningly. “I'll definitely be back by lunch, honestly I will!”

Mrs Pirc very clearly felt that a shower would feel much better than any kind of negotiations with her son. In this overheated atmosphere she silently nodded. Even before she had spread her shopping bags around the kitchen top, Lenart had already gone through the garden gate.

Chapter 3

“I don't have any money,” replied Matej, “sorry.” – “Why are you all filthy?” asked dad. – “Yes,” said Lenart, running his hand over his spiky hair. – “Sorry,” said the waiter and became serious. – “We wish you many sons,” says mum.

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In the evening, life became well and truly complicated.

“We’ll meet at seven instead of half past,” mumbled Matej casually away from the phone. He had just been having a discussion with Timothy about the end of year dance.

“What?” exclaimed his mother from the ironing board. “In the morning you said that we’re meeting at half past seven.”

“Yes,” replied Matej with a nod, “I was wrong.”

“Do you realise what you’re saying?” said dad through his newly capped teeth. “We’ve got to leave in five minutes?”

“Yes,” said Matej, “sorry.”

“Lenart isn’t even home yet,” said mum with a temporarily broken voice and then exclaimed with full force again: “Matej, call him!”

Then she rushed to the bathroom.

The family had spent the whole week slowly getting ready for Matej’s prom. The preparations were being carried out at a suitably nervous tempo. All the important finishing touches were to take place in the last thirty minutes before departure. Now those thirty minutes were suddenly gone, but all the necessary tasks remained.

“Don’t call from the stationary phone to a mobile! How many times do I have to tell you?” the father hissed as he hastily cleaned his shoes.

“I don’t have any money on my card,” Matej replied calmly as he continued to dial the number. “Sorry.”

At that moment, the doorbell rang loudly. Lenart came in, he had only rung the bell out of habit. His sweaty t-shirt was stuck to his chest and back, his hair to the top of his head and his legs were nice and black below the knees. In his pocket, his mobile phone was ringing.

“Where’s mum?” he asked innocently.

“Leave her be, just have a wash and get dressed, we’re leaving in three minutes,” said dad quickly.

“Where?”

“To the dance, idiot!” explained Matej, who’d put the phone down. He walked up and down the living room in his underpants, looking for his trousers.

“Why are you all filthy?” dad asked Lenart. “Don’t you know we’re going to the dance?”

“Yes,” said Lenart uncertainly, looking at him in surprise, “the chain on mum’s bike fell off and I had to put it back on.”

Dad didn’t want to go into the issue of why the chain on mum’s bike always fell off when Lenart borrowed it. He just added in a very low voice:

“Get washed and dressed. Now. We’re leaving in three minutes.”

Matej went to the bathroom and banged on the door.

“Mum!” he shouted. “Where are my trousers?”

“Look in your wardrobe, where trousers are supposed to be,” came mum’s voice through the closed door.

Dad was simultaneously shaving, changing his shirt, tying his tie and begging himself to keep his cool as he would probably need it. He needed it straight away. Lenart appeared in his underpants, looking for his trousers.

“They’re on the ironing board,” said dad, seeing them there quite by chance.

Matej went to the bathroom and banged on the door again.

“Mum!” he shouted, “where are my trainers?”

“Look in the shoe cupboard!” came through the closed door., which then opened and mum appeared. She was slightly flushed. Her hair was bewitched into a new, fresh hairdo.

“Ooooooh,” said dad in astonishment, but mum didn’t have time to receive compliments.

“Lenart!” she shouted. “Have you combed your hair?”

“Yes,” said Lenart, running his hand over his spiky head.

“Lenart!” shouted mum. “Did you wash your hands?”

Lenart turned his hands over and they were black from the bicycle chain. He replied slightly surprised and uncertain:

“Not yet.”

“Let’s go!” announced dad as he put on his shoes in the hall. Matej stood next to him. Cologne was running in streams down his hair. The streams were combining into a river that ran down his neck.

“Damn it, son,” moaned the male half of the parents, “you’re going to suffocate us.”

Then mum, dad, Matej and Lenart rushed in a light trot towards the car and jumped in.

“Put your foot down,” Matej told his dad.

“Don’t be silly,” dad said to Matej and put his foot down.

Driving through the town, they found that the red traffic light always came on automatically when their car approached within fifty metres.

“Have you got the tickets?” dad asked mum as humbly as he could, while they sat waiting for the green light at one of the many junctions.

“Didn’t you bring them?” said mum as humbly as possible after she had taken a few deep breaths during two waits at a red light. “I put them out in the living room.”

Now dad began to breathe deeply. The hot evening of the approaching summer still offered the odd breeze that provided some relief.

“I’ve got the tickets,” said Matej from the back seat and tossed them into mum’s lap.

They arrived at the hall where the event was to take place. A few groups of boys and girls stood in front of the entrance. Dad looked at his watch.

“Didn’t you say seven?” he asked Matej.

“Yes,” replied Matej. “We get together at seven. You parents come at half past.”

He got out of the car and joined one of the groups. Lenart trotted after him. Mum and dad exchanged astonished looks.

“I’ll buy you a coffee,” said dad.

“I think I’ll need more than that,” said mum, putting her head on his shoulder.

Dad parked the car. Then they walked to a cafe across the road and ordered a drink. A tall boy with black hair, whose downy moustache had not yet been blown away by the draught, brought them a tray with two coffees and two glasses of wine and said with a grin:

“A hundred and eight Euros fifty.”

“Don’t,” said dad, “we’ve just brought our son to his final-year dance and our nerves are rather frayed.”

“Sorry,” said the waiter and became serious. “In that case it’s only eight fifty.”

“That’s more like it,” said dad, giving him a ten Euro note.

“Enjoy!” said the waiter.

“We wish you many sons,” said mum, when after the first sip her eyes came to life again.