

Translated extract from the novel *Du bist zu schnell* by Zoran Drvenkar

I became a different person. I took my medication regularly, stopped smoking and abstained from alcohol. I sweated away twice a week in a fitness studio and pored over vast numbers of books. I wanted to find out everything I could about psychosis. I hunted for case studies which resembled my own, anything which seemed to point in the same direction. How did other people cope with experiences like this? Did they attempt to overcome the condition, or just try to live with it? What cures were available?

Alongside my studies I enrolled to sit in on a Psychology course and, to supplement the existing research in the textbooks, began to go through the recommended literature in search of similar cases.

To earn money I worked as a waitress in a cafe, as well as doing occasional shifts in the fitness studio to help pay for the hours I spent there.

Studying became my life's mission, and time passed steadily by.

No-one wanted anything more from me than what I had to give. It was a completely new feeling. I made casual acquaintances; nothing serious became of them. I was, quite simply, myself and dreamt of helping other people. That's not quite how it was of course. No matter how I looked at it, it really only came down to one thing: helping myself. Since Asta's death I couldn't rid myself of this terrible anxiety, and was trying to find a cure for it. It was most vivid in my dreams. So many times I would wake up drenched in sweat and had to turn on the lights in the apartment in an attempt to calm myself down.

In my dream the woman's face hovered above me, and I heard her say: 'That's the third time'. To which I answered: 'I'm - I'm sorry'. The woman replied: 'Don't lie; you're not in the least bit sorry. This can never happen again. Every time you open the door, it will cost you. Do you understand?'

I understood. I understood perfectly well, and woke up in my sweat-drenched bed every single morning.

Jamie Lee Searle

Nothing helped. Not the books, not thinking things over, nothing at all would help with my fear of accidentally triggering off the psychosis and entering the world of the Fast Ones.

*Who will die next? I asked myself. And why don't they punish me?*

*Because you're one of them,* was the answer that came into my mind.

*So why the punishment?*

I didn't understand and was overcome by panic at the smallest sign of trouble. Countless times I took my medicine ahead of the prescribed time, just to be on the safe side. Purely just to be on the safe side.

The day I realised that my medication was no longer having the desired effect was a stress-free one. The weather was reminiscent of summer; I was in a wonderful mood and had been invited to brunch with two of my fellow students. In the afternoon I came back home, took a bath, worked on the computer, and was just doing a bit of reading when I heard a noise. I looked in the bedroom and then the kitchen. Nothing there. Then it came again, a loud scraping sound. I positioned myself at the window. Dusk was falling outside; the shadows looked grey and washed-out. I squinted to be able to see more clearly. Then I saw it – in the courtyard sat the caretaker's cat, scratching itself.

*See, that's all it was,* I thought and was just about to turn away when the smell flooded over me.

Heavy and sweet. Wild jasmine and the scent of freshly watered potting compost. I smelt cigarette smoke and a sharp perfume. In the same moment I became aware of a figure in the house opposite, leaning on the windowsill and smoking. I stood there, without moving, for going on twenty seconds. My apartment was on the fourth floor, the window was shut. I was back there again.

Without hesitation I turned away from the window and rammed my forehead against the kitchen door.

When I came to I was laid out on the floor. My head felt as though it were split in two. I pulled myself up on the doorframe and staggered into the bathroom to vomit. Overcome with relief, I fell asleep right there next to the toilet, waking only when the telephone rang. I washed my face and looked at

Jamie Lee Searle

what I'd done. The cut on my forehead was crusted in blood, but it had done the job. I'd hit the emergency brakes just in time.

An hour later I was in my new doctor's office.

'Of course I can increase your dose, if you're experiencing anxiety. That shouldn't be happening', he said, opening his calendar. 'We'll just go back to the old dosage. Why don't you come in next Wednesday. We'll do a short examination then and go through everything properly'.

'Next week?' I asked.

He looked at his watch, then at me.

'Is that a problem?'

I don't know why I shook my head. I think I'd suddenly realised that the normal dosage would be of no help to me.

'No, no problem', I said.

The doctor wrote out a reminder so I wouldn't forget the appointment and advised me to have a proper rest. Leaving the practice I crumpled the piece of paper up in my hand and let it fall on the street. This had clearly been the wrong course of action. The medication wasn't enough for me. I knew the normal dose; it was what I had been put on at the start, and it wouldn't help in the slightest. What I needed was something which could numb everything, absolutely everything.