

Andraž Rožman: **Tito's Son**

an excerpt from the novel translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh

Chapter 26.

I am slowly becoming your tourist guide. I spent enough time with Pedro to take over this responsible task. As I know you like stories, I try to get in touch from places connected to novels or rhymes. Today I found something else of interest. I am walking across a Roman bridge, allegedly one of the most beautiful in Spain. It's a long, narrow, uneven, stone affair.

I dialled your number as I stepped onto the bridge on the south bank of the river Tormes, now I am still walking and haven't even reached the middle. Right here, below the bridge, a few metres away, María and I went on a boat trip and admired our city the day after the night I had charmed her. Awaiting me on the opposite bank is proof that people really did live in this land long, long ago, as I told you last time. There is a statue the locals call the *Verraco del puente*, representing a bull. Let me enlighten you a little further, zoomorphic granite statues were erected in various places across the western part of the Iberian Peninsula by the Vettones in the late Iron Age. One of these has been standing next to the Roman bridge since the twelfth century. It's famous, this *verraco*, it even appears in literature, but more about this later.

Do you think I too could become a landmark? Down by the Butchers' Bridge they would erect a statue of Frenk the famous madman, great hero of *Tito's Son*, the novel or whatever literary genre you might call it (what do I know about literary genre, they seem to be mere labels for books, like diagnoses are labels for people). That would be grand. Then people would never forget me, and I wouldn't even have to get rich. You are the one who will bring me fame. Yes, you will. I have made my mind up. That is why I need to try and explain my cinematic story in the best possible way. I hope you don't think that I have once again been caught up in megalomania. I haven't, because it is with me all the time, it is just more pronounced at some times, less so at others. I sense that this is beginning to rise like dough. But it doesn't worry me, I have enough experience to know how to handle myself.

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So the stability provided by the squat and the street newspaper was not enough for me. If you live in a squat, you never know when a bulldozer might come along and demolish your home; if you sell newspapers on the streets, you depend on the weather, the goodwill of passers-by, and even the owners of shops and premises who would sometimes forbid us from standing in front of their entrance. Can you believe it? We were not allowed to stand there so as not to harm their business. Certain companies occasionally sent a donation for the poor, but it is much easier to give some money than to allow down-and-outs to go about doing their work and living freely.

People, bosses and consumers, don't want to see ragged homeless people who swear. It arouses unpleasant feelings in them, and unpleasant feelings need to be eradicated like cockroaches if you want to be a good salesperson or a good buyer.

I observed normal people more and more often, those unaware of any unpleasant feelings, buying stuff happily, walking down the street without anyone noticing them because they all look the same. I too wanted to become the same. For that, I needed a regular job and a flat.

I began looking at job advertisements, I even went to the job centre to ask whether it would be possible to find something permanent, full time. The girl I spoke to had a tag saying she was a *professional advisor*, though I am not sure what this title was supposed to mean. She smiled, said I was lucky because there is quite a demand for workers such as me. Employers can even get subsidies for employing someone with disabled person status, and that was me, even though I don't think there is anything disabled about me. What luck. This word annoys me terribly. Disabled! An invalid! Who has the right to abuse me this way? Just look up what the word means in the dictionary and you will see that it merely affirms from the onset the discrimination towards all of us who are not the same.

The professional advisor helped me to achieve this sameness, whatever this sameness was supposed to be. She found the Boss, or the Boss who found her. The essence of it all was that I ended up with him, initially full of hopes, which later began to dwindle. The more the balloon leaked, the more space inside me was taken over by megalomania and uncertainty over my own identity. Out of the minimum wage I managed to scrape together enough to rent a crappy room.

Not long after my wish to reach this sameness came true, I met you. You renewed my hopes that my high expectations could indeed become reality. Don't get angry if I tell you that you were slightly naïve. I don't know whether you were aware what a promise of writing a book means to a person with as much yearning as I have. At least you haven't broken it, at least not yet. Did you even think what will happen if it all stayed a mere promise? For one, you would disappoint me. I would be very angry with you. Of course, I still don't know if you will finish the work, since you have not shown me anything yet. But the fact that you are interviewing me and following me, is at least something. You see, the hardest thing is when nobody listens. Someone to listen is something I got from you, at least for now. But don't become sluggish. Just because I complimented you doesn't mean you can rest on your laurels. I am watching you, you rascal, you won't fool me! The book has to happen! It will, by hook or by crook.

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Well, sorry, didn't mean it in a bad way. I believe you, you won't screw me.

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I've been talking so much I have long crossed the bridge and have been waiting on the far side for a while. Waiting for a reason. I would like to be your tourist guide for a little longer, so I hang around near the granite bull. I look towards both cathedrals, the old one and the new one, even though neither is particularly new. Behind them are all those narrow streets I told you about, and the frog on the façade of the university in Plaza Mayor. And here, but a few yards from me, is something Romanesque. Have you ever heard of Lazarillo de Tormes? He is the hero of the first picaresque novel. The first such novel ever! Even before Cervantes created Don Quixote, this novel was written by an anonymous author. Of course they had censorship at the time as well, even worse than today, so the author preferred to remain unnamed. But the work survived and here, ten metres from where I am, stand Lazarillo, the miller's son who was born in Tormes, and his first master, the blind and stingy beggar. They must have put them here because the location appears in the novel. Lazarillo's childhood comes to an abrupt end when the cruel beggar smashes his head against this very bull next to the Roman bridge, then they set off from Salamanca to beg in other, more profitable towns.

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I have to admit that I haven't been entirely honest with you recently.

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I have been focused explaining about my own history and the history of Salamanca, so you must be thinking, how wonderfully I function here. I don't deny it, things really are going well. I have avoided almost all stupidities. Almost all!

My insomnia is once again getting worse, so I went into Paniagua late the other night. This time I didn't open up my wings like a seagull, flying towards new friendships. No. Something more satanic had gotten into me, it was as if I had been touched by the Devil's tail. I kept pestering people, believing they were not showing enough respect to a person of such stature such as myself. I ended up – I don't even know why – fighting with the waiter. *Hijo de puta!, Hijo de puta!* I shouted at him, and walked off into the night, enraged. I charged about the streets for a while, thinking I might scale the shell-brickwork on the Casa de las Conchas and have a wonderful night view of the city. Then, this diabolical state within me fortunately eased. I slowly made my way back home to María.

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I still think about this sameness. I just don't seem to be able to accomplish it, at least not entirely. I have been so preoccupied with this that I am going crazy. I also don't want to be the madman in front of you any more. Do you think that this madness will stay with me until death? You see, at this point, you will have some artistic licence. You will be able to write that I am not mad at all, if you wish. I allow you to decide whether I am or am not for yourself. You don't need to be a psychiatrist for that diagnosis.

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I wouldn't have cared less about the madness, were it not for María. I am worried that it could ruin our relationship. My madness, I mean, of course.

You see, it's hard being alone. You have the feeling that the entire world has forgotten all about you. But you get used to solitude. In solitude there is not much pressure and even fewer boundaries. If you know how to surrender to it, you can indulge in it, big time. I enjoyed it for a long time, at the same time longing for the closeness of another person. Now that my wish has come true, I'd prefer to just jump back into the solitary hole. I discovered that it was not so much the solitude that I enjoyed as it was the longing. Can you sustain the enjoyment once the longing becomes true? There lies the conundrum. And María is serious. Dead serious. She would grow old with me, perhaps even with our children. I would be a rather old father, but it doesn't matter, today, I think, it's fashionable...

I will stay in Salamanca. Start working at the school. I would make an excellent janitor, better even than I had been at the Seljak building. It has just occurred to me, that I am probably not even employed any more because I had not told anyone I would not be coming in to work. Ha, ha. Does that mean that I quit and they didn't fire me? That's progress. I've dumped Gazda and Seljak, both rotten lice together. Serves them right for making fun of me. The losers probably think I am worried because I won't be getting my pay any more. A much better pay awaits me in Salamanca.

Every morning I will happily get up, kiss María, then we will have some *hornazo* and *jamón* and set off for work together. She will go to her classroom full of children, I will make sure that the children and María are always safe. At the weekends we shall travel. To Porto, Asturias, Galicia, Segovia, Avila, Madrid, Toledo... How much history, so many sights... And we shall take Pedro along as well, so he can explain all about the past.

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No, I shall go home. My home isn't here, my home is in the tiny room I barely managed to scrape together enough funds for, and at the squat, that is also where my home is. I have two homes in my hometown. Where is my home town? Salamanca, or that other place where I stroll by the river Ljubljanica down to Špica, thinking about what it might be like if I could swim along with the fish? Both my towns have a river. What would I do without a river? The town back to the East might not be the most beautiful town in the World like Salamanca, but it is the only one I really know. I have not really truly lived anywhere else. Do you know how many people will wonder what happened to Frenk who used to wander the streets? They might think I've died. And my fellow sufferers? How will they survive without me? We are only as strong as the support we give each other. What about my train trips? The trips I can only go on alone and nobody else but myself can understand... Not even María can understand them.

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That's it. I'll go home.

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But how will I survive? Oh, fuck! I no longer have the job with Gazda and Seljak. I am certainly not going to grovel before them, begging them to take me back. Nevertheless, it is still easier to work for Gazda and Seljak than cutting onions in the basement of some restaurant, putting up with the abuse from the boss. How will I survive? No! I will stay here, in my dear Salamanca, with my dear María.

I will stay! Unless I leave.

What should I do?!

I don't know! I don't know! I don't know!

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Friend, I am going crazy. What should I do?

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PART FOUR

Chapter 27.

I don't mind at all. Even if you have the Dictaphone switched on all the time. You can also record the sound of the car, if you want. Listen to it humming sweetly. This Berlingo of yours is in a good condition and spacious enough, so we will be able to quickly move all my stuff. We have to be careful with the picture of my old man on top of the pile in the back of the car. I already know where I will hang it. I will nail it to the wall opposite the bed, so I will see it every morning if I want to. I hope I won't get confused at some point, and think that I'm looking at myself in the mirror.

His high forehead tells me he was clever. No, you can't really deny that I too am not exactly stupid, and I don't have a low forehead. When I comb back my hair, as I did the night I enchanted María, I look just like him. And I can also put on a stern look, see, I'm as important as the Marshal, and I can also put on a soft, debonair look, as only he had. Or lustful. Charming. Serious. Self-confident... Me and my old man are persons of a thousand expressions, and, what the heck, a thousand personalities.

I just remembered myself, as I explained to you about that flat I set fire to. First I thought I had set it on fire, then that I hadn't, that I had, and now I know I didn't. In as far as the truth goes, this is similar to my old man. I think all these ideas are being forced upon me by the outside world. Sometimes it is enough to believe that the most impossible things are true. But I don't allow myself to always be convinced by my surroundings, because I prefer to rely on my own experiences. This is not simple. Have you ever tried to venture into such conflict? Only the bravest of us ever dare.

It doesn't matter. What matters is that now the aluminium door of my new-old home will be open and you will be able to turn left through it. I am happy for you, because you are stepping for the first time into this wonderful courtyard which shows no signs that all these buildings once housed a factory, a true pride of Socialism. Isn't the street art of the woman Partisan on the wall of the middle building, the building I will live in, wonderful? Gazing upon it, you know what we fought for. This is a space of freedom. Here we do not chase away chicken thieves and dissenters, but racists, homophobes, xenophobes, and all the other hatreds of the world. The girl's smile represents all of this and not, this I must also admit, all the horrible things my old man did, dazed by the power of authority. In truth, I am not really convinced that I want a father like that. He was important, but he was also... He was many things. Sometimes I say to myself it would have been better if I had had some other, entirely ordinary father. One resting in the village graveyard.

Oh, once again I have veered towards him. I've had enough of him for today. We can place his photograph into one of the boxes and close it, so I don't have to look at him for a while and spare myself intrusive associations. Now let's carry all my stuff out of the car. Hang on, I will first show you how Jure and I have fixed up my flat. Don't be bothered by the ivy that has grown all over the building, including the front door. We took out and restored the bathroom, put down flooring, replaced the kitchen...

As I stand in the doorway, hands on my hips, taking a look at my refurbished home, I wonder why I ever even left it. So what if I heat the place up with a wood burner, get electricity from a generator and another secret source which will remain secret also from you and your pretend book, or if I heat the water for a shower with a gas cylinder. These are little things compared to how tiny and expensive the rented room is. Three hundred and twenty euros for that dump of a room. The government should cap rents. Stipulate the highest allowed amount per square metre. Simple as pie. But not, it seems, for those who rule. Because our every government is a bad government. This was a phrase I had learnt from María, and she had been taught by the Zapatistas that Capitalist, neo-liberal, colonial governments, basically all governments in the world apart from the Zapatistas, are bad. María and the Zapatistas are right. They are most certainly right.

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Oh, my friend... María!

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It breaks my heart.

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Last time, when I contacted you from Salamanca, did you expect that a week later we would be conducting the interview here? You didn't, did you? I know that you didn't. Even I didn't imagine that I would return. I didn't know what to do. I was getting lost

in my own indecisiveness. The feeling that I could no longer hold on to anything often pervaded me. And you need to hold on to something if you want to climb a mountain.

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The route to the summit I wished to reach was always too difficult for me. Perhaps I will be successful another time. But I also didn't have enough help.

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Listen. First, I will tell you what it was like when we first split up years ago. Though we only had a couple of weeks of love behind us, it was enough for me to begin doubting. I loved her, and I still love her, believe me, that I know for sure. But, is love greater or more important merely because you spend time with the person you love? Is not love more elevated if separated by hundreds of miles? When I was first with her, she wanted me to stay, and there was nothing stopping me doing so, but I wanted to feel our love in the old-fashioned way I was very familiar with. I explained that to you. The way where you see and feel the beloved person through the clouds, this way, without touching, physically at least, can drive you to ecstasy – I could even say orgasm. And I left her. When I returned home, I transposed my feelings of love through my body, but I wanted to return to her.

I said to myself that I would not repeat the same stupidity. And I didn't. This time it was different.

After our last telephone conversation, I was confused. I rushed round the streets of Villa Mayor like a headless chicken. The sensation that I had no support was becoming unbearable and I was not sure whether I should go home to María or turn into the bar to have a beer. I was lucky. Just at the right moment, I met Pedro. What Jure is to me in my beloved squat, Pedro is to me in my dear Salamanca. Of course we went to the bar. I urgently needed some cold liquid and a conversation.

'I can discern fear on your face. What's up, *amigo*?' he said with the most calming voice I have ever heard. His smile slowly spread through his thick beard. He reminded me of the kind granddad I never had.

'I am probably just tormenting myself. But why?' I asked myself. I stopped talking but inside my head a torrent set off. I think Pedro knew this. He was silent, slowly sipped on his beer and waited. I was angry with myself inside, in my thoughts. I kept telling myself I should not be as stupid as I had been last time. I said to myself that I would sooner find support with the beloved person in the beloved town than in my past life, steeped in huge but unclarified wishes. Well, my wishes were always clear, it was just their execution that limped a little.

Basically, I remembered the sand castle, I have already mentioned to you. Always, absolutely always, I have destroyed it afterwards, no matter how beautifully I built it. And, as I thought about this, I said to myself that this was my moment.

'Your moment is not winning the lottery. Your moment is not flogging artwork. Your moment is not business success. Your moment is in love!' whizzed around in my head.

I raised my head and looked Pedro straight in his dark-brown, almost black eyes. 'You don't happen to be a psychotherapist, do you?'

He laughed out loud. 'Far from it, though I might need one myself. Do you know anyone good?'

'With a single question you redirected my thoughts. Even if you don't admit that there is something of a therapist within you.'

He shrugged his broad shoulders. 'If you say so, perhaps it's true. What upset you so much?' he continued with the same softness as before.

'My thoughts. I get the feeling that a new horizon has opened up for me and that it is only from this moment onwards that I am capable of thinking. Whatever the case, I will go to María right now and tell her that I never want to be away from her again. Thank you, friend.'

Pedro gave me a strange look. He was even more surprised when I called the waiter, paid him and even left him a small tip.

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As if in the middle of an Olympic race walking event, I hurried off to find María. She was not home yet, she had been delayed at work, so I had time to put my thoughts in order. To no use. The more I tried, the more feverish my consciousness.

When she arrived at the flat, I leaped out of the sofa. She didn't even have time to take off her jacket, when I was on my knees.

'María, you know that I have been recently full of doubts. Now I know everything. I know! I want to stay with you for as long as I breathe. I am sorry, I didn't have the time to buy you a ring, but I cannot wait. Allow me to hold your hand, kiss you, and ask for you.'

I took her hand, cold from the Castilian chill, held it against my face and asked her, 'Would you like to spend the rest of your life with me?'

She drew a deep breath in order to answer me but the pocket of air stuck in her throat. She began coughing uncontrollably, then got hiccoughs. After drinking hectolitres of water, she asked me, her eyes red, whether I was being serious. 'Dead serious, *mi esposa*,' I said bravely.

There was silence. I knew that this silence would not bring anything good.

'I am sorry, Frenk. I am afraid you've got the wrong impression.'

Tiny hazy men began dancing in front of my eyes. There were more and more of them. They were having fun, there in front of me, grinning right into my face. Then all I saw was darkness.

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I grabbed my backpack from the third floor and rushed down the stairs. It was the last time I would run through the beautiful streets. First I went past all the points in town I had fond memories of, then I turned towards the railway station and waited for the train to Madrid. María knew where to find me. She came to the platform but we just stood in front of each other, gazing at each other as if in a duel, waiting only who would fire first. But neither of us did. I got on the train. I watched her through the window, she watched me from the other side of the glass until our eye contact was interrupted by the train driver taking the carriages towards the nearest airport.

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That is what my life is like. Just as I think that I might finally be able to preserve the beautiful sandcastle that I have built with such great effort, someone else destroys it. In this case a person I will never be able to stop loving.

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Come on, let's not be all gloomy. That's how it is. Today we have quite some work to get on with, so it's best not to slack off. We will need to do a few more runs and then I invite you to the next building along, a space we call Andá's, for some cabaret, a beer and *chili con carne*. Shit, the taste will once again remind me of María. What can I do... I cannot forget about her, nor do I want to. We will still have fun. Jure will probably come along too, so you can meet him, and a whole bunch of my male and female comrades. Things are never boring in our squat.

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Chapter 32.

I have made up my mind! I am going to hand in my notice at work. From now on I will engage professionally with madness. At first glance, the idea seems mad, just as madness itself is mad. But when you come to know madness up close, you realise that it is not as mad as it seems. The same is true of my decision. I will read up on the

subject, get some proper lessons. Basically, I will just listen to people, just as I had listened to Frenk, use my experiences at the same time, and also gain a formal qualification.

Mental distress is common and on the increase. You must have noticed that society is not moving in the direction of understanding and connecting between people, so I am forecasting an epidemic and pandemic of madness. It could happen very soon. I could become an epidemiologist for madness. Until then, I will help Laura in promoting her work. She makes jewellery from all kinds of material. If you need a bracelet, a necklace, or a ring, just tell me, and I can arrange for a price with a discount. I recommend her punk creations. I think a bent fork around your wrist would suit you.

It is probably not hard to guess that she was the one who encouraged me. We talked a great deal about her story. Voices had set off a number of landslides in all areas, at work, in her family, in her relationship with friends. She could not handle the stress at the pharmaceutical company. Interestingly, she is a pharmacist with a grudge against the products of pharmaceuticals. She had to tackle the lack of understanding from her father and mother, certain friends and acquaintances began to avoid her, her partner divorced her and (fortunately) unsuccessfully demanded custody over their daughter. I have already met six-year-old Eva. I think we are slowly becoming a family. I have no misgivings. To be honest, I had been even thinking about another child, our child. After a while, of course, when Laura and I will have been together for a while.

Isn't life funny? To some, madness muddles life up, to me it sorted it out. It was due to madness that I found love, will acquire further education, work, I have met new friends. I also found the hero of the book which is missing only a few paragraphs to the end, and, I shouldn't forget, also revealed some truths about my own family and established a better relationship with my mother. None of this would ever have happened, had I not first turned my gaze inwards. When I stopped being ashamed of my own madness, I could pick up a sledgehammer and, with big swings, smash up all prejudices. When I think of all the fears I had at the beginning of my friendship with Frenk, all I see are prejudices. Today there are considerably fewer, because I have gained experience. Similar is true of the process between the two of us.

I feel ridiculous when I recall that I was afraid what would happen if I built a closer relationship with Frenk. I was afraid I might hurt his feelings, that I would not fulfil his expectations, that I too would go crazy with him, I trembled before his aggression, and trembled in general. What nonsense!

When he called me ten times a day and shouted beneath my balcony in the night, I was afraid of him. I had to keep convincing myself that there was nothing to fear from the man, especially not a man who had been a victim since the day he was born. This is difficult to handle, when madmen are presented to us throughout childhood and later as dangerous. They are not dangerous. It is others who try to make them dangerous because they are afraid of themselves, or to be more precise – their own mad side, something every person has.

How often do you hear a public discussion about anger, aggression, violence, hatred, envy, (self)destruction? Yes, you hear about it, you hear all that, but only when it comes to accusing others with these words which are used as insults.

You don't however, hear thoughts on your own anger, aggression, violence, hatred, envy, (self)destruction and, in this sense, relationships with others.

You see how afraid people are of themselves. We madmen do not harbour such fears because we are forced to face up to all that is beautiful and all that is ugly within us. You probably noticed that I am using the first person plural. On purpose. Now that my lounging on the couch is coming to an end, I have reached the highest level of this two-way process – I have become a madman. I had to get rid of a lot of ballast in order to succeed. There are years of clearing out dirt behind me, and only now do I understand what Frenk meant when he said at the beginning of our acquaintance that madness is man's purest form.

I have reached my goal. I have become a madman. That is my black belt.

I have often wondered how you know when you have reached the end. You were all wisely silent about this. I sensed that the end was ever closer when new viewpoints were opening up and then there was ever more silence in my speech. This was followed by a feeling that I needed less and less help to solve my own conflicts. I now feel autonomous and think I don't need any kind of crutches. I am capable of coping with my own life. I don't entertain any false hopes that there will be no more problems. A black belt does not guarantee you this. Problems will exist, some of them major, but I will have the strength to face them. Yes, I have gained a lot of strength over the years. I could say that I have become empowered. With your help, of course.

I think I now know when I have reached the end.

Before I can say farewell, we need to speak a little more about Frenk. Had I not rid myself of ballast, I would now feel guilty that madness brought me something new and beautiful, and to him just revived old problems that were ever deeper. If I was still afraid, as I was at the beginning, I would probably tremble in fear when Frenk basically moved into my flat. Where was he supposed to go when his home was demolished? Because madness had become normality for me, I didn't see it as a problem if he stayed with me for a while. Together we shall find some kind of solution. Laura will help, as will our group, and others, as well.

Frenk's problems will not be solved by this. Frenk's problems can never be solved. Not in this world. Unfortunately. But together we can all work on his problems and live with them. He is not capable of doing that on his own. Not in this world. But with support, he will cope.

I would once again like to hold up a mirror to myself, or should I say, my previous self.

When Frenk talked about his alleged father, I never said to him that Tito wasn't his old man. I let him deliberate and interpret his roots as much as he wanted. But I would be lying if I suggested that I ever believed his claims about Tito. 'Come on,' you're probably thinking, 'it is clear that Frenk went through episodes when he talked such rubbish.' Most likely anyone who has not been through what Frank has been through would think that. As did I.

But I have once again learnt that you should never underestimate the understanding and experiences of others.

Here is what I discovered.

Do you remember the cardboard box I carried out of Frenk's former abode when we broke into the place with the cops? I put it away in the cellar. With all the things that happened in the meantime, I totally forgot about the box. When the security guards threw Frenk out of his first real home, I remembered it. Just as well that I kept it, because otherwise, Frenk would have been left without some very important documents.

When he moved into my place, I brought him the box. Together we looked through all the papers it contained. Right at the top were his school reports, all four years of secondary school and his matriculation certificate. His grades weren't that bad. Mostly Bs, a few Cs. He wasn't very good at maths, but absolutely shone in history and geography. Straight As! After we looked through and analysed his marks, we looked at his old passport. It turned out he was much older than I thought. For the first time, I saw what a younger Frenk looked like. He was about my age on his colour passport photo. His hair was not wavy, as I was used to it, but sleekly combed back with gel. I thought his eyes looked lighter and he had a fleshier face. His skin was smooth, as it still is. I don't know what he drinks so that time has left so few wrinkles on his face. It is true what he claimed – he does have a high forehead. He did have then, and he does now. And he still has the perfectly shaped nose, just as the sculptor had created.

Then we went on to something more important. His birth certificate! Now, this is interesting, so listen carefully.

Entered under the father section on his birth certificate was the name *Oto Zagorac*, born *7 May 1892*, while the place of birth was too faded to read. That date! It is the very day Tito was born. The name Oto and the surname Zagorac can both be found among the numerous fake identities that Tito used. Frenk hadn't even known that his birth certificate was in the box. In the chaos of stuff that he kept, he had forgotten that he had thrown documents with important information that he received after the death of his mother into some corner.

When we found this first proof, his eyes became even lighter than in the photograph in his old passport. They were light blue, just as Tito's had been. Like the combed back wavy hair.

He started hugging me, cheering, screaming... Laura heard him from the bedroom. She rushed in and the three of us hugged, jumped up and down in a circle, yelled unstopably. Then Frenk shed a tear. He sat down on the sofa. But this was not the end of our research. Right at the bottom of the box we also found a letter. I don't know what the hell Frenk had been doing all his life that he never opened it. It was written by a man who signed it as Oto. He was short on detail and the letters were rather faded, but we got the gist of it.

Tito and Frenk's mother met each other during one of the Marshal's visits to Ljubljana. The Litostroj machinery factory was mentioned in the letter, though we could not figure out in what context. Frenk remembered that his mother worked in the canteen at the factory for a while, so we assumed they must have met during one of Tito's many visits. Clearly Tito was that 'worker from Litostroj' that Frenk's mother had once told him was his father. In the letter Tito wrote to her that everything had been arranged for his son's wellbeing, but that she was not allowed to ever talk about it. Clearly she stuck to his instructions. What is more questionable is whether the Party ever really took care of Frenk.

When my friend and I began conducting our interviews, his desire that along the way he might discover who he really is, seemed utopic, to say the least. But where would we be without utopia. Would Frenk have found out who his father was? Would Frenk even still be alive? Would I now be lying here before you, you sitting behind me? Would the world still be spinning?

...

But when I think about it carefully... Could Tito *really* have been his father? Is it possible that he had a child when he was seventy? Well, with Tito, everything is possible, but I wonder... Did he really use the name Oto? And with the surname Zagorac? How many people use the surname Zagorac? And how many are called Oto...? Is the birth certificate genuine? Perhaps Frenk's father was some other high party official... Or wasn't an official at all...

Does any of this really matter? I don't know why I am bothering with paper sources when I have the best source next to me all the time. Man is the best source of all. And the truth... Whose truth? Who does the truth belong to?

...

Whatever the case, this is the end. I will stop coming to your couch. I know that you will ask me one last time how I feel. And for the last time I will tell you that I am not sure. It seems as if I am floating through the air like a feather. Inside, the joy and pride mix with a tinge of melancholy. After all, something that was very important to me will no longer be part of my life. But something new is beginning. We will no longer see each other in your office, but, if we want to, we could go out for a coffee. We could do things we hadn't been able to do until now, without it interfering in the process that was most important to both of us, the one that happened here in this room.

The time for lying on the couch has run out. So I will stand up, shake your hand, embrace you. I am grateful to you for everything. Frenk would be too, if he knew the extent to which you also influenced him through me.