Tadej Golob: Chasm

translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh

to Rudi Plevnik
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Introduction

She was the first to enter their former, now refurbished office in the Ljubljana Police Directorate building on Prešeren Street. Surprised, she glanced at the four empty desks. After the interim workplace at the Mladika Complex on the other side of the road where she had been able to simultaneously see all her colleagues, the street outside and the clock on the wall, she expected to catch sight of Taras. She put her handbag with her laptop down onto the desk and heard footsteps.

'Home, sweet home,' Brajc entered, even more flushed than usual, so much so she began to worry until she realised with relief that the red face was the remnant of a subsiding bout of laughter. And, of course, following right after him… Oddly enough, it wasn't Osterc, but Taras. He walked silently across to his desk and, as if not a day had gone by, switched on his computer.

'I would never have thought I would miss this hole,' Brajc sighed, stepping past Taras's desk to the only window looking out onto the street. It would have offered a view of Rožnik Hill were it not for the Mladika Complex, the Foreign Ministry building, former military hospital and before that a girls' boarding school (or something like that) with a large clock on its façade that, at least since she had first joined the Ljubljana Police Directorate, had never worked. Now it was. Brajc glanced at it almost lovingly.

'And you, Tina?' he turned towards her.

She shrugged, unsure how to respond. She was particularly attached to this – she smiled, he was right – it was a hole, four by five, even though it had been her first workplace and she had come here straight after finishing her criminal investigation course. After her

first bout here, she had spent… she scratched her head, hmm, eight, nine years with a few interruptions at Computer Forensics, and then at what was left of the General Police Directorate next to the Nebotičnik Skyscraper. It made her remember her first week here, Drvarič who introduced her to Taras and how he had taken one glance at her, the truly short skirt. She didn't even know why she had worn it on that January morning and would now, ten years older, not even consider it. Taras had muttered with exasperation something about how she could not join him on the field investigation in a mini. So she ran to what was her home at the time, changed, and drove with him to Bohinj to take a look at a crime scene where a woman of her age had been found with her head severed. The corners of her mouth curled upwards for a third time, though with a touch of bitterness, remembering how it all evolved very shortly after – she had ended up sleeping with this very same Taras and even now keeps an eye out for him more than for Brajc, Osterc, or Ahlin, even though he never pretended that their… socialising would ever develop into anything more, which suited her too… Perhaps it was time she stopped doing so.

'Where is Osterc?' she asked. 'How come you didn't come together?'

They usually did, even though Brajc lived on the outskirts of town and Osterc in the foothills of Krim above the Ljubljana Marshes. She had often vowed that she would ask Brajc or Osterc how they managed to almost always appear at the same time in the morning, but this time Brajc arrived with Taras. Perhaps she will find out now.

'Osterc…' Brajc nodded. 'He called, but I said I would come with Taras. He'll be here any minute.'

That meant Taras is staying with him. She looked at him. In fact, she followed Brajc's gaze that was also turned towards him, hoping Taras would help him out. Of course nothing was forthcoming. Taras was staring at his computer screen, intensely watching the programs on the old box start up, as if the letters and numbers moving up the screen were going to give him answers to all the eternal questions of this universe. He probably didn't even hear what she and Brajc were talking about.

'Half past eight,' Brajc said looking out of the window to check the clock, then round the room at Tina and Taras who was still staring emptily at the screen. 'Perhaps we can have a work meeting at the coffee place over the road?' he went on when nobody reacted. 'To get us going and revive a tradition. We used to do it often.'

Indeed, they would start their day with a coffee, well, Osterc with a green tea, and have a good chat about things, sometimes also about work.

'Won't we wait for Zoran?' Tina asked.

'He'll find us,' Brajc said after a brief pause during which he figured out which Zoran Tina was thinking of. Everyone at the office and the entire Police Directorate called Pavle and Zoran, Brajc and Osterc, by their surname. Only with Taras they used his first name. Always. When she had first come here, Tina tried to use first names for everyone, but just gave up. With her it depended on who was looking for her, everyone in the office called her Tina, other people from the department usually called her by her surname, Lanc.

Without warning, Taras stood up and turned towards the door. Brajc followed him, but just as Tina was about to follow, the door opened and Osterc appeared. Right behind him was someone else, shorter. Ahlin. He glanced at all four of them, nodded with even for him an unusually glum expression on his face.

'Greetings. I had hoped that I would be able to start your first working day back in this building in some way other than what I have to tell you.'

Chapter 1

Brajc had called it the atom bomb – the snapshot that, when he finally had to explain, he described as 'a few minutes when they happened to be, both she and Taras, in bed without any clothes on.' After the atom bomb Brajc allowed Taras to move into the empty room he had on the ground floor.

In fact, it was not empty at all. Brajc had filled it with various things he did not need. Initially he furnished the first floor of his house on the edge of the Ljubljana Marshes, or rather, from a technical point of view, on the Marsh itself, something that can be said for more or less all buildings in Ljubljana. His stood on stilts. When there was not much space left on the first floor, he stopped using the stairs and slowly forgot all the things he had crammed up there. He then continued to fill the ground floor and now, as he tried to arrange a room for Taras on that level, he did wonder why the hell he had a lawnmower there when it would have been much easier to keep it in the garage. It was Osterc who cut his grass

anyway, after visiting him once and getting all upset over the thicket surrounding Brajc's house.

'You're welcome to cut it, if it bothers you that much,' he had suggested and the very following day Osterc had turned up with a brand-new fly mower.

'Well, feel at home,' Brajc told Taras when he had tidied up, moving the essentials to make enough space for his new housemate, leaving him alone.

The following morning he woke up at half past six, made two coffees and knocked on the door of the room Taras was staying in. No answer. H knocked again and when there was still no response, he opened the door. He had clearly slept in the bed because there was a crumpled sleeping bag on the mattress. And his phone was charging on the bedside table.

The previous evening Taras had surprised him as he was flicking through TV programmes. The doorbell rang just as he had sighed, having found some private channel showing a football game.

'Not that again…'

Brajc was not interested in sports. Not on TV or any kind of sports. Perhaps a little more than before, since last year when he had tried to plod after Taras up Rožnik Hill for exercise, but definitely not as a viewer. He could not understand why he should feel any kind of sympathy for complete strangers on the screen, whether they were wearing blue or red. Or green. That one team was Slovene, if they happened to be, and the others were not was not enough for him. More Slovenes annoyed him than residents of any other country, he had fallen out with more Slovenes and had not fallen out with anyone beyond the borders. So why should he support them? He had only ever been to one sports event in his life: the Sky Flying Championships in Planica, and that wasn't for the sport. He would have great problems trying to remember who won that day, who jumped the furthest, the neatest, or how they calculate and add up the score. He had arrived there in the company of similarly-minded sports fans on a bus that dropped them off in Rateče where they, confused, tried to see where the ski jumps were. They then decided to follow the crowds – surely so many people can't be wrong. And yes, he remembered the *ćevapčići* and the brandy.

He was not at all interested in sports on TV, even though he spent a lot of time sitting in front of it. He would switch it on as soon as he returned from work or wherever he

happened to be and let it play even if he wasn't watching or when he was doing something else. Eating, washing the dishes, solving a crossword, hanging out the washing, in the winter in his living room, in the summer out on the balcony. The TV was better at conjuring up the feeling that he was not alone, that there was someone else there, than the small red radio with an alarm clock… While he still had it. It too had disappeared with Brigita. Allegedly it was hers. Just as she also took with her the potato masher. Out of spite, for sure. During their relationship it had always been Brajc who prepared mashed potatoes. He watched the news, the occasional quiz – his favourite was one in which participants competed for gift vouchers from one of the shop chains and he often thought about how he would fare if he had to connect three letters in front of a camera, for example, *e*, *t*, *r* into the word *aperture* were he to get through to the third round and be landed with the subject of photography. But he wouldn't get that far. Most of the time he had to admit this as he tested himself in answering the questions, he would end up among those told 'but you won't leave empty handed!' as they were ushered away with a box of collagen capsules or something similar. Osterc, the devil, fared much better. One evening he came round - Brajc couldn't remember what for – and the TV was on. It was quiz time. He knew all the answers, well before the competitors in the studio.

'You should go on that quiz!' Brajc told him.

Osterc didn't protest, saying no, that's not my kind of stuff, or anything like that, just muttered something in reply. Brajc didn't understand his answer and didn't really care, but the following evening, as he went to pour the coffee dregs into the toilet, he heard a familiar voice coming from the TV in the living room.

'Three. Masochism.'

He ran to the screen and there he was, Osterc. He went on to reach the final three times and became a kind of hero at the Ljubljana Police Directorate, then he lost to a chubby housewife called Anica from the remote settlement of Nazarje in the Savinja Valley whose hobby was making model airplanes.

'And what airplane was your last model?' the show's host asked, finding out it was a Messerschmitt Me 262, known by the nickname Schwalbe, swallow.

'The button got stuck,' Osterc found an excuse when Mrs Anica shot him down. Osterc gave Brajc some of the coupons he was given from the sponsor firm, so he had not

responded with something along the lines of, *Come on, the woman was simply better at it*. Well, and because he also knew he himself would be eliminated in the first round.

So, the morning after getting a house mate, he was sitting alone at the table, thinking about things, when he heard the doorbell and the front door opening. A moment later he saw Taras, not in trainers, shorts and a sweaty sports top but jeans and a T-shirt.

'I went out to get some fresh air.'

'You could have woken me up and I would have joined you,' Brajc blurted. 'Perhaps we can go running together before work some time.'

He wasn't being serious. He was not at that stage yet and did not believe there were people who get up in the middle of the night just to satisfy their need for exercise. He thought such talk was part of urban legends that reach their momentum when the Olympics are on, just before the Ljubljana Marathon, or at similar outbursts of mass sports euphoria. He was convinced nobody actually did it, and certainly not the people who do not do sports for a living.

'You'll have to go on your own. I won't be running for a while.'

Brajc looked at him in surprise.

'Why not? What will you do?'

'I was given a date for my operation. I can cycle. It does not hurt when I cycle.'

'Operation?'

Brajc was the first to find out. An operation on the hip. A hip replacement.

'Is that not something you do when you're about eight?' Brajc scratched his head, looked at Taras and bit his tongue. 'Is it to do with Krep and Klara Zupet? About what happened at Grmada?'

Taras shrugged his shoulders.

'Don't know. Apparently.'

After the accident on Polhograjska Grmada, when he woke up from the coma, and it seemed that he could speak normally, turn his head, and after he walked, it looked for a while as if there would be no lasting damage from the fall. That he would fully recover and be how he was before. He had forgotten that nothing can ever be the same. *Panta rei*!

During his rehabilitation at the spa resort in Dolenjske Toplice, he had gone running for the first time. A circular route for the Cooper test, through the forest beyond the Sušica stream. Just before reaching the finish line, at the wooden bridge across the stream near a fish-filled lagoon, his knee had hurt when he twisted his foot awkwardly but the pain gradually eased and he began thinking about running again, even joining the Polhov Gradec half-marathon, for example. He went to check out the route, getting lost in the forests above Puštal where the route was not yet marked. The following day he could not walk, even though he had not tripped over or fallen trying to figure out the possible route. A sharp pain in his groin spread along the nerves down his leg all the way to his toes. He thought of sciatica, of course, pay up time for his winter ascents and especially bivouacs, freezing in snow holes without equipment. And Dr Čopič wrote a referral to neurosurgery, and EEG, and a nerve conduction study of his spine. He had also sought a solution with various physiotherapists. He also took to sleeping on the sofa in the living room because it felt firmer than the mattress in the bedroom and because he could find a comfortable position by supporting his knees allowing him to sleep through the night. And because the TV was next to the sofa. Dr Čopič also sent him for ten sessions at the Soča Rehabilitation Institute which felt like coming home. He first called Tatjana who had looked after him for four months and took her out for a coffee. Then he called in on Dr Loparnik who listened to him, told him to do exercises in the gym and sent him for an X-ray.

'But I have already had an MRI,' Taras objected.

'This is something for an X-ray,' Dr Loparnik insisted.

So that very same day Taras called the clinic in the technological park near his home and booked an x-ray. Paying for it himself, because he could not wait and an X-ray was the cheapest radiological procedure on their list anyway.

Dr Loparnik looked at the images and nodded.

'Thought so. Your right hip is messed up. You'd better get on a waiting list for a replacement.'

'But it wasn't that long ago we climbed Triglav together,' Brajc was thinking out aloud. 'Did it not hurt then?'

Taras waved his hand dismissively. It had.

‘Basically,’ Taras cut Brajc short because he did not want to discuss it and they needed to get a move on if they wanted to get to the office on time, ‘in ten days’ time I will have a hip replacement in Novo Mesto hospital.’

‘Replacement? Do they take out yours and put in a plastic one, or what?’

‘Something like that, yes.’

A six inch incision is made into the skin, up to the muscle, then a special spatula-like retractor is used to separate the muscles until they reach the bone, the femur, the top of which is sawn off. What is left is hollowed out and the hip replacement is malleted into place, the joint stabilised with staples. This was approximately what he remembered from the talk at the pre-op workshop.

‘And why in Novo Mesto?’ Brajc asked.

‘Another long story,’ Taras replied, having had enough of medical complaints for one morning. ‘For another day.’

‘I will fry some eggs,’ said Brajc. ‘Do you want coffee with breakfast or afterwards?’

Taras shook his head. ‘Yes to the coffee.’ And he disappeared into the bathroom. Brajc made himself the eggs and fresh coffee as the previous brew was already cold. He then checked the fridge. Butter, some jam and a pot of cheese spread he had forgotten he had. He threw the spread into the bin under the sink.

‘If you don’t want eggs, you will have to make do with bread, butter and jam. I don’t have anything else,’ Brajc was apologetic when Taras appeared in the kitchen.

‘I don’t want any food.’

Brajc shrugged. He scoffed down the two fried eggs, even though he now no longer really felt like them. His phone rang. He answered without looking to see who was calling.

‘Thanks, have already had breakfast.’

‘It was Osterc,’ he explained to Taras, adding, as if he only realised after uttering the sentence, that an explanation was needed. ‘After the divorce, Brigita also took the alarm clock. And the phone I had at the time didn’t have a wake-up function, or I didn’t know how to set it. So Osterc offered to call me every morning so I would not end up without a job as well as without a wife. The habit kind of stuck. Sometimes he also collects me on his way to

Ljubljana if he is driving in alone and my Passat is playing up. Anyway, where did you go to this early?'

Taras had not been able to sleep. He lay in the new bed covered with his old sleeping bag, thinking. About work, about Klara Zupet, Alenka, sleepless nights, routes he would never climb again, the minutes it took him to cycle up to Rakitna which seemed to increase constantly, about Alenka… About what awaits him back at the office. Boredom probably. More cases like those he has had to deal with hundreds of times. And his hip hurt more and more – he had forgotten to bring his pain killers with him. At five o'clock when it was beginning to get light outside, he got up and drove to the centre of town to the on-call pharmacy next to the hospital to get a packet of diclofenac.

'Tell you what… you'd better give me three.'

He swallowed two pills and drove back, still ruminating… about work, Klara Zupet, Alenka, being unable to sleep, the routes he will never climb again, the increasing minutes it takes him to cycle up Rakitna, about Alenka… almost as if he was on autopilot and before he had a chance to question what he was doing, he ended up in Vrhovci, in the street outside his house. His former home. There was a light in one of the windows. Alenka was probably in the bathroom.

When he returned to Brajc's house, he found an elderly man on the pavement in front of the gate to Brajc's property, pulling out the weeds from the cracks in the asphalt. He stopped his car in front of him but the old man did not budge. He waited a few seconds, then beeped his horn lightly. The man turned round slowly and stood up but did not get out of the way. Taras lowered his window.

'Would you mind stepping aside a little, please. I'd like to park.'

'But,' the man rejected him. 'This is the garage belonging to Pavle Brajc.'

'Yes, I know…'

'He never has visitors. Occasionally his colleague Osterc comes to see him, but you are not Osterc?' He looked at him intently and shook his head, 'No you are not.'

'I am not,' Taras nodded. 'But Brajc is my colleague and friend too.'

The old man then slowly and reluctantly stepped to one side, just enough for Taras to manage to drive his car into the yard. He got out of the car and almost bumped into the man who was suddenly right at his door.

‘So you have come to see Pavle Brajc?’

Taras gave him a surprised look. The man must have been about eighty, short, probably around five foot five, wrinkled, scathing. Around nine and a half stone, dressed in inconspicuous grey trousers and a chequered shirt.

‘I think I have already told you that.’

‘I saw you yesterday, when you arrived,’ the old man continued from Taras’s sentence without a pause. ‘If you leave the car like that again I will call the tow truck.’

When Taras had driven up to Brajc’s house the previous day, he was not sure he was at the right one, so he had left the car half on the pavement, half on the road, checked the letterbox that had Brajc written on it, and then left the car where he had stopped as it did not appear to be in anybody’s way. The street seemed like one of those where nobody lives.

The old man continued to mutter.

‘If you find yourself without your wipers next time, don’t be surprised.’

Taras smiled. He could not be bothered to argue.

‘Yes, yes, without your wipers,’ the old man would not stop, clearly misinterpreting Taras’s smile.

‘Move out of my way,’ Taras said quietly.

‘You just turn up and think everything is yours. I have spent thirty years chasing people like you away from our street.’

Taras grabbed him with both hands, lifted him up and put him down on the bonnet of the car. The old man stared, tensing up, which was probably the closest he could get to resisting. He glared at him open mouthed as Taras went into the house.

‘Shall we go with mine?’ he asked when Brajc appeared from the bathroom, and when he saw he was hesitating, added, ‘I parked in front of the garage anyway, otherwise I will have to move it.’

‘Alright, right,’ Brajc mumbled. ‘Listen… How is it with the car? Is it yours? Is it not Alenka’s?’

Taras shrugged. ‘I don’t know. I suppose I should look at the logbook.’

He checked. It was registered in Alenka's name.

When he and Brajc drove out into the street, the old man was still there. Taras waved at him but the man angrily turned away. Brajc gave him a surprised look.

'I see you've met Mr Krmelj.'

'The on-call busybody?'

Brajc nodded.

'Yes. But he's harmless. Thanks to him we don't need cameras on our street. He knows everything that is going on. Who arrives, who leaves. He's probably already called the local police station, trying to find out who you are and where you came from. When did you meet?'

The local police station at Vič was something Taras thought about when he found the work at the Ljubljana Police Directorate too much. And all the Mr Krmeljs in all the small town and rural police stations in Slovenia who exhaust one even when there is no need. He told Brajc about their meeting. Brajc listened and shrugged his shoulders.

'As I said, annoying but harmless.'

Ahlin leaned with his back against the edge of the table – with their heights, Taras, Osterc and even Brajc would be sitting on it.

'Unfortunately I have bad news,' he repeated with a grim voice. Then he raised his finger. 'Two bits of bad news, in fact...'

Tina glanced at her colleagues. Brajc and Osterc waited motionlessly for the bad news. Taras wasn't paying attention. He was still staring at his computer screen which must have been up and running by now, but he didn't click anything. From behind her desk, Tina could not see. Ahlin also checked their reactions, and continued, somewhat disappointedly, it seemed to Tina.

'Well, the first isn't that bad. More of a bother. Because you are now once again employees of the Ljubljana Police Directorate and not the General Police Directorate, you will need to go for a preventative medical check-up...'

'Thought they were only for new employees?' Brajc questioned this.

'An initial preventative medical check-up is undertaken by any employee...' Ahlin was prepared and pulled out a printout from his briefcase on the desk, waving it about. He had printed the Rules on Preventative Health Checks from the internet, expecting this question, only that he was not sure whether it would come from Taras or perhaps Brajc. Neither of them took much notice of formal rules. None at all, in fact... So, Brajc then. He moved his finger down the page to article five and quoted:

'Before initial employment – as you say, novices – or after ceasing to work in a certain post for over twelve months...'

'Were we really away for an entire year?' Brajc was shocked and began counting the months on his fingers.

'We shall combine it with the regular check-up, getting both out of the way in one go,' putting away the printout, thus letting everyone present, Taras, Tina, Brajc and Osterc, that he did not intend to waste any more time on the subject.

Tina scratched her head. This was supposed to be the bad news? Looking at Ahlin, only then did she notice his smirk. The man was kidding, but because they were not used to Ahlin making jokes – he never even smiled – in fact, this was his first attempt in the last two years – nobody had doubted him when he had somewhat theatrically made his announcement. She looked at Brajc and Osterc. They too understood and smiled, only Taras was still staring in boredom at his computer.

'And the second?' he asked without looking at Ahlin.

'The second, ha, ha...' Ahlin continued, '...is worse. We have been informed by the General Police Directorate that they have prepared for us a course on blood pattern analysis and have kindly requested that each Directorate in Slovenia send one person, they will also send people from their department. The lecturers will be foreign and it would not be nice if they talked without an audience. If they are prepared to come and lecture for free, or come here within some international exchange, the least we can do is send someone to listen,' he chirped.

He looked around the room. Brajc was staring at the desk. Osterc was indifferently staring at Brajc, Taras gave no indication that the message had reached him and Tina, whom he looked at with the highest hopes, simply looked away. He sighed.

'They kindly requested...' Brajc spoke. 'Why doesn't Marn go?' he said, his finger raised, happy he had found a solution. One that sounded reasonable. After all, Marn was a criminal technician, always first on a crime scene, in charge of interpreting material evidence.

'I think Marn has already been on such a course but we will send him anyway, if we have to. I am asking because nobody has put in for any holiday at this time and we don't have any other work at the moment. Come on!'

He once again looked at Tina who was prepared for this and just in time followed Brajc's tactic of lowering her gaze to the desk. She might not have planned any leave but she was not wasting a week of her life on training in Gotenica or whatever place nobody in the entire country has ever heard of and where nobody would go by choice. If they had a choice. Clearly she has? He was asking, wasn't he?

'A week's holiday in Kočevje? It would look good when you sought promotion,' Ahlin tried again. 'No?' Nobody?... Alright, I'll sort it out somehow…' he muttered. 'So we'll be the only police directorate not to send someone. It won't be the first time.'

He waited a second for any possible response and when there was none, disappeared down the corridor.

She caught Taras looking at the clock across the road. Bored, fed up, tired. She waited for Osterc to find the small change for the coffee machine and followed him into the corridor.

'What's up with him?' she asked as he pushed the coins into the slot and waited for his herbal tea.

'With whom?'

'Taras. He keeps looking at the clock, waiting to go…'

'To Brajc's,' he helped her. 'He stayed with him last night. Can I get you a coffee?'

She nodded and as they were returning towards the office down the corridor, he leaned towards her, as if worrying Taras might hear him,

'It's not just that. Add the bad weather…'

She looked at him. What is the bad weather compared to your wife throwing you out of the family home?

‘Whenever I surf the internet, thinking that nobody is looking, I go to hardware store sites and stuff like that. Brajc used to, and I think he probably still does, look at cooking sites, browse through recipes, you look at what’s on at the cinema, concerts, horoscopes…’

She frowned. She would have preferred to keep this guilty pleasure to herself. Of course she knew very well that the position of planets when you are born does not and cannot mean anything at all, but there was something unstoppably alluring in all this fortune telling. At breakfast she would read her own horoscope. It was fun reading things like: Things might seem under control and because you will be so enthusiastic, nice things can happen…

‘Or things like that,’ Osterc tried to make his comment sound less judgmental.

‘And Taras?’ she asked.

‘Taras checks long-term weather forecasts. As if in doing so he could affect the weather.’

They reached the door.

‘Add to the weather and his enforced stay at Brajc’s the current situation at work.’

She didn’t understand.

‘Nothing is going on. Nothing interesting. I’m fine with that, Brajc is anyway, perhaps even you, but for Taras… you can see for yourself. Nothing to keep him busy. Keep his mind off his own troubles. Basically,’ he sighed. ‘he’s just being grumpy in his own way.’

He’s clock watching, she thought to herself as they entered the office. Taras was indeed staring out of the window.

Chapter 2

Dr Tarjana Rojc sighed when she checked her list of appointments for that day and realised a block of the slots were booked for the police. She didn’t even know why she sighed, she had no issues with the police, no especially negative or particularly positive views, and, coming to think about it, she would probably have reacted in the same way regardless of who was on the list, so the problem was not in the names that came up on her screen. But it was not like that… she had to think… twenty years ago when, after graduating and getting work in a private clinic that was granted a concession from the State for preventative, systematic and

managerial check-ups for certain public service employees, among them was also the Ljubljana Police Directorate. The clinic was in a modern building in the technological park on the western outskirts of Ljubljana. A divorced mother of two growing children, who lived alternately one fortnight with her in her flat on the far side of town and then the next fortnight with their father, an orthopaedic surgeon in the centre of town. Birsa, Brajc, Lanc, Osterc, she went down the list. Birsa? She had known someone with that name years ago. She was about to tell the nurse to call the first patient, Birsa, but there was a knock at the door.

'Yes please?' she responded.

The door opened enough for her to see the rounded face of the person standing outside…