Kazimir Kolar: The Befouler

translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh

Pro bono malum.

Part 1.

The Befouler

* * *

It was a journalist who first told me about him.

It must have been in 2022 or 2023, I can't say for certain because later events blurred my memory, though I do remember precisely some of the details of that meeting. The journalist and I sat in a restaurant having dinner, drinking red wine, while a snowstorm raged outside. We talked for about two hours and he told me about the mysterious occurrences.

Suddenly I had a hunch that I should not stay. I felt the entire weight of that day, reflected in the journalist's face. I told him it had been a long day and I was very tired, so I had to leave. Half an hour later I was sitting on an empty bus that was rushing down nocturnal streets, thinking for a long time about the mysterious man he had talked about, his letters, his messages, connections and conversations. Countless explanations came to the fore. My mind went over the evening's conversation. Trying to find a mysterious person means a long chain of reasoning, creating an inventory of crimes, interviewing witnesses, random conversations with strangers, and a frantic search of the seashore. All this was going through my head, I was becoming engrossed.

I fell into a fantasy world and at some point awoke from my thoughts, staring from the window at the snowstorm outside. To this day I do not know which part of town it happened in (it was around half past twelve at night) and because the bus was driving so fast, I don't even know why I woke up right at that moment – perhaps it had taken a sharp turn or I just happened to wake up for no real reason – and in the passing window of some old house, someone suddenly pulled back the curtain and looked out onto the road. It might have been an entirely routine gesture, like so

many we do every morning and evening, but to me it appeared incredibly personal and emotional. It is hard to believe that some random creature moved entirely out of habit and stepped towards the window. It was the point at which I decided to write down everything I found out that evening.

A Chronicle of Appearances

1

The first report goes back to 2016 in Ljubljana. In mid-July, an unknown man walked into a bookshop in the north-eastern part of town. He was wearing sunglasses and a baseball cap so it was hard to establish his age. He could have been thirty, forty, or even more. An indeterminate walk. The confused saleswoman from the bookshop said very little about him. The only thing she knew was that the stranger moved around like someone with back trouble, for he was, for some reason, stooped over as he went past her. This contradicted eyewitness accounts from the parking lot outside the bookshop. They described the man as walking fast, confirmed by the security cameras at the entrance. The stranger moved with great agility, as if he might be training for athletics or some other sports discipline. Neither did anyone know how to discern the man's psychological state, which, as nobody has seen his face, was understandable. The man was either masked or for some unknown reason hid his face and avoided the cameras.

In brief the events were as follows. When the mysterious man stepped into the bookshop, he slowly moved further inside, looking at stationery. Then he hid behind a tall shelf, which, interrupted by a column almost a metre wide, offered a screen, and stayed there. For about five minutes he looked at envelopes, shuffling his feet occasionally. That was all. He made no noise, there seemed to be no sudden movements. But when one of the staff later approached the shelf where the stranger had been standing she cried out when she stepped into a puddle. The floor was covered in a transparent sticky liquid. The saleswoman became totally flustered, briefly lost her wits, for there seemed to be pieces of fruit, probably kiwi or pineapple, in the puddle. But the liquid had not spread to the sales counter or anywhere else, so the staff at the bookshop didn't call the police. Perhaps the

mysterious stranger had spilled some juice or other drink on the floor. There was also a chance that it was completely unintentional, without any plan or motive, which would mean that the event was merely an accident or a slipup.

A week later, the same stranger appeared in the southern part of town in another shopping centre. This time he entered a clothes shop. Once again he wore a hat, so the salesgirls and the security guard could not provide much information about him. He was thin, seemed to be strolling around rather than buying anything. He behaved quite normally, the way all shoppers do – he stood for a while next to a certain item of clothing, inspected it, and moved on. What was unusual was that, once again, when he left, there was a puddle on the floor, containing a litre of more of liquid, probably water. So, the unknown person wet a few clothes shelves but left no mess behind. The sales staff found this odd, for they knew of cases when customers entered a store intent on damaging or soiling items, but nothing like that had happened here. However, the sales manager did inform the head of the department store and the security guard, based on video footage, wrote a report informing the police. The police only arrived on the scene two hours after the event, checked the security cameras, compiled their own report and interviewed the security guard. Not finding anything unusual, they noted at the end of their report that this was an event that only in certain aspects appeared like vandalism.

2

In August 2016, about a month after the first instance and about five kilometres away, an unknown man, frail in stature and ailing in appearance (as told by witnesses who saw him from the nearby block of flats) appeared at the local bus stop. He waited for the bus in the eastern part of town, at least so it seemed, although he was turned with his back to the road most of the time, stuffing something into the garbage bin or looking for something in his backpack, occasionally nervously turning around. Every so often he left his bag on the aluminium bench, scurried across to some nearby bushes, glancing at the cars in the distance. He then hurried back to the bus stop, grabbing hold of the bag, waited for a while before placing it back on the bench again. This person, it seemed, was a little restless, or worried about something and wanted to walk around a little. He was also noticed by people in the park but, in

fact, for a long time nobody suspected that anything unusual was going on, for it seemed the stranger was there by chance. Then, all of a sudden, the stranger disappeared, almost as if he had vanished into thin air. Perhaps he had made his way across the parking lot towards the road leading to the eastern part of the country, for none of the visitors in a bar half a kilometre away recalled seeing him.

At half past nine in the morning the first passengers arrived at the bus stop only to find a giant puddle of urine extending all across the pavement and out halfway into the road. The metal garbage bin was also befouled. It was almost half full of thick yellow urine. At that point it seemed that the act must have involved more than one person. That there might have been more people remained a mere speculation. The summer heat made the stench even worse and people waiting for the bus were angry. Others who happened to be walking past and chance dog walkers also got involved in what was going on. Soon someone called the police. An hour after the call, two crime investigation vans with a team of forensics appeared. The investigators made notes, photographed the scene, and soon after that workers from the city sanitation services washed the pavement and the road. The perpetrator had disappeared without trace and did not return to the scene.

This happened on 28 August at around nine in the morning in the eastern part of town. News of the mysterious man who leaves a mess behind wherever he goes spread fast. The media reported widely on the unknown man, calling him the garbage bin friend or the *befouler* for short.

3

On 15 September, he appeared in the north of the country. Motorway camera footage showed he came from Ljubljana, turned off the motorway and continued towards Velenje. He was driving an old Volkswagen. Appeared in the street at dusk. Hood over his head, dressed in a tracksuit, he walked around the parking lot swiftly, as if looking for something. He fooled passers-by, most of them thinking, because he occasionally stopped briefly, that he was walking a dog. Nothing dubious had happened on this spot for a long time, so nobody paid much attention to the strange person or took any action. Two hours later, however, it emerged that the unknown person had soiled a number of cars with human faeces. The excrement was smeared

on windscreens, side windows, and door handles. All this had happened in the parking lot in front of the Velenje Sports Centre, outside the famous Red Hall, where a handball match was taking place. The match had begun at seven and the CCTV camera on the edge of the parking lot showed that the stranger came to the scene twice (at twenty to eight and after the first half-time, at a quarter past eight in the evening). Subsequent searches and investigations confirmed that the man had carried the human faeces in a shopping bag that was found discarded by the river a kilometre or so away. When visitors to the match came out of the hall, they were angry, some of them felt sick. The stench caused some people to vomit. The sports centre's security informed the police, the municipal services and the local authority.

4

On 23 September, the primary school in Bežigrad filed an unusual report with the police. It was sent by the headmaster who had called a hastily convened meeting of the school management that afternoon. They discussed a case they had never encountered before. That morning an unknown man had stepped into the school from the street, approached the on-duty student and politely asked to see the headmaster. The pupil on duty at the school gate that morning initially wasn't sure what to do. He tried to find a the on-duty teacher to help him but, unable to find the teacher, eventually let the man in. The stranger was polite and the student took him at his word and directed him towards the headmaster's office. The man walked up the stairs to the second floor where the school administration, the secretary and the said headmaster's office were located. It later emerged that the headmaster did not receive any unannounced visitors, nor did anyone call in at the office, or admin, or the staff room. The school librarian was also asked about the incident and confirmed that everything at the school was as planned and she had not noticed anything unusual.

The alarm was raised when the school psychologist spoke about the man in a coat. She had been called to the office by the headmaster who asked her to go over the events of the day. The psychologist, visibly shaken, said the unknown man had caught her eye because he seemed very suspicious when she noticed him walking along the first floor of the building, and that her gut feeling was that he had come to

the school with malicious intent. She also thought that he somehow didn't fit into the school environment. Up to this point, the headmaster showed no concern, believing that the school psychologist was someone who invented fears and dangers at every opportunity, so he doubted anything serious would come of it. But the school psychologist's story developed in an unexpected direction. After she began following the unknown man who appeared in the public institution, he, as if suspecting something, disappeared into the men's toilets, though there was a possibility that this happened by chance. The school psychologist followed the man and stood outside the toilet door, waiting for him. She waited for about five minutes, almost entered the toilet, and then changed her mind. She waited for a further five minutes and calmed herself down by pacing up and down past the toilet door. A good fifteen minutes passed. She occasionally put her ear to the door to hear what was going on inside. She could not hear anything, no running water, no steps, nothing at all. So she eventually decided to enter the toilets and find out what was going on. Once inside, however, she checked the entire area and realised there was nobody in there. Once again she checked both cubicles and the area with the two urinals, and stood there, petrified. In horror she thought about the open window. Approaching slowly, she opened it wide and looked down towards the ground. The stranger had vanished into thin air. She checked the time, found her phone, took snapshots of the toilets including the ceiling and the area where the sinks were, because, as the school psychologist later admitted, she thought she was going crazy and couldn't believe her eyes. She then hurried down to the ground floor to find the on-duty student. He confirmed to her that about half an hour earlier he had let into the school a man with a long beard wearing a coat. That was when everything was set in motion.

The search of the building that happened at six fifteen in the afternoon took less than an hour (it involved the police unit trained in detecting explosives) and brought up no results. The following day it was all forgotten.

5

On 14 September, an anonymous complaint was filed at the railway station in Zalog near Ljubljana about the cleanliness of the station underpasses. There was allegedly

a lot of rubbish around but the person using the station's services was particularly offended by the unbearable stench in the underpass. Passengers in the early morning encountered a vast stinking pool of human urine and people were forced to cross the rails and jump over fencing in order to reach the platform. Reports of pools of urine also appeared at other stations such as Polje, Zgornji Kašelj, and Jevnica. On the twenty-fifth of November CCTV cameras were installed in these pedestrian underpasses. The footage from the cameras showed nothing unusual and the puddles also disappeared.

On 17 September, the wanted stranger was seen by farmer Anže N. From Ljubija in the Savinja Valley. It was a cold, foggy morning. Through the misty veil he noticed on the edge of the forest the silhouette of a man behaving strangely. The man seemed drunk, occasionally stopping still at some bush, or wandering around the trenches in the field with an unsteady gait. Every so often he sat down in the tall grass, right there in the soggy marsh ground, almost as if he were playing a game. It also seemed that the man was singing some kind of children's marching songs to himself. The farmer didn't pay much attention, for he had to scatter two cisterns of manure onto the fields before he went to work in the afternoon and when he was asked why he didn't approach the person acting strangely, he replied, 'If someone's gone crazy, that's none of my business. We have the police, doctors and other public services to deal with them.'

That farmer Anže N. had indeed seen the wanted person on that foggy morning was confirmed by the rumours from the neighbouring village, Zapoge in the Savinja Valley. A number of people had apparently seen a weird person hanging around the pigsties, walking through the orchards, behaving as if he was looking for something, though he had not said a word to anyone. When people approached him to a distance where they might address him, he changed direction or moved further away. He walked onto a number of farmyards but when he realised he was at a dead end, he turned around and walked off. A number of people out for an evening stroll also saw him. He appeared to be gathering mushrooms as he had two large bags with him. Witnesses were able to say he walked slightly stooped, as if he was having back problems. The last sighting of him was as he was getting into an old Volkswagen and drove off towards Ljubljana. Nobody could remember the registration number of

the car. A few of the most curious walked along the edge of the forest where the man had been spotted, occasionally picking up on the stench of urine. This was all the strange man left behind. He never again appeared in the area and nobody ever talked about him again.

6

On 24 September 2016, the mysterious stranger appeared in the Church of Saint Andrew in Jezersko. It was a day when the temperature reached thirty degrees Celsius and the scorching sun turned the sky a heavy lead grey, as if promising a storm. It was half an hour before afternoon Mass. Already sitting in the front pews in the church were three elderly women, staring straight ahead in a deep silence, clattering their rosaries, deep in thought. The stranger slowly made his way down the side aisle towards the altar and sat down in a pew. There, hands clasped, stooped over, he prayed. The women heard him cry quietly, sniffle into his handkerchief, before he slowly rose and turned towards one of the side altars. He seemed particularly interested in the image of Saint Roch, covered in a cape ripped by thorns, being dragged along by two Roman guards.

Soon after, the stranger whom they had never seen in the church before, loudly unzipped his trousers and began urinating on the church floor, quite calmly, as if this was something quite normal. The sharp stench of urine spread through the church and one of the old women looked up. When she realised what was going on, she made her way to the confessional, but the confessional was occupied and she didn't want to disturb. Unsure what to do, she eventually made her way out of the church towards the inn opposite. There were three old men sitting there. 'Come quickly, someone is desecrating God's Temple,' she said. None of those she was addressing understood what she was trying to tell them. Then she cried out, 'Someone in taking a leak in front of the altar!' The three men stirred and made their way across the churchyard. In the meantime the befouler had left the church. All that witnesses heard was the roaring of a car down in the village.

Half an hour later, the same person appeared in a food shop in the next village where he bought two six-litre packs of water and a few tins of fish. The woman at the till who charged the man for the purchased goods described his face

as that of the Devil. The police investigator in charge of the case asked her why. 'Because of the expression on his face,' she said. 'He looked as if he was ill, something wrong with his nerves.' The inspector was confused. 'What do you mean?' he asked the woman. The woman at the till thought a while. 'Because he smiled and cried at the same time. I got the impression that he was drugged up, for his face was simultaneously crying and laughing!' 'A face that cries and laughs at the same time?' the police inspector thought out loud. Yes, the saleswoman confirmed. 'He reminded me of that terrible Joker from films. His face grinned but you knew that in reality he was hiding a great sadness behind his mask.'

The shop assistant was called Anamarija P. and that night she slept badly. She sweated, tossed and turned, restlessly staring at the ceiling with the feeling that something was tickling her arms and legs. With the constant turning, the sheet on the mattress crumpled into a knot. The dried sweat on her body itched and she constantly felt thirsty. At first she attributed her insomnia to the hot atmosphere, unusual for the alpine region, especially during the night when temperatures would fall considerably. Or was it all due to media reports of a heatwave that encompassed all of Europe from Amsterdam to the south of Sicily, she thought to herself, and it is all just a psychological trick. Eventually she got out of bed, switched on the light and dragged herself to the living room, switching on the TV. Usually watching TV for a while made her sleepy, so she sat on the sofa. Zapping through the channels for a few minutes, she found nothing appropriate. Then she came across a reality show. The scene was torturous. A discussion about some woman everyone hated. They wanted to exclude her from the group. The woman cried, wiped away her tears. A younger man with rough features was furious and told the tearful woman that she was incompetent and unintelligent and that he would vote to get rid of her in Saturday's voting. The woman everyone hated was stubbornly silent. But that was not enough for the man. He soon banged his hand on the table and began shouting, 'I don't care – I don't care – I don't care!' he kept repeating robot-like. 'And it is high time we tell you that you don't belong among us!' The woman wiped away the tears and looked away, half ashamed. Twice she blew her nose, swallowed the remaining tears. Most of the others present stared at the ground. Then another woman, a bandana tied around her head, jumped in. She was very agitated and accentuated

her hatred towards the woman by waving her hands about. ‘No,’ she yelled, pointing her accusing finger at the poor woman who remained silent. ‘You aren’t one of us! You never were and never will be!’ Then the weeping woman closed her eyes and raised her left hand as a kind of imaginary shield from the words.

Anamarija P. had had enough. She got up from the sofa, drew back the curtain and looked out of the window into the night. She sensed that someone was moving about outside. Without switching on the light, she slowly opened the balcony door and stepped out onto the still warm tiles. The night breeze seemed to taste salty. ‘Strange,’ she thought to herself, ‘it is as if somewhere far to the south the mass of air had rubbed against the surface of the sea and the strong winds spread it up to the northern parts of the country. Then she stepped bare foot from the terrace and slowly made her way through the sparsely planted orchard, reaching the gate. The road, illuminated at night, was deserted. She looked in the direction of the bus stop. In the distance there was a cat walking along the pavement. Anamarija P. watched it until it turned into the hedge and disappeared.

‘Unusual things are happening,’ she thought to herself. ‘This weather. It has never before been this hot in September.’ She stepped back into the living room where she noticed something odd. The TV screen showed static. She slowly approached to check her internet connection when a face appeared on the screen and a voice telling her that her daughter would soon die. The shock made Anamarija P. jump up and cry out so loudly that the face disappeared. Rigid with fear, she began on all fours to escape towards the stairs leading to the top floor. She slipped twice and hit her ankle, but she didn’t feel the pain. Reaching the top of the stairs, however, she straightened up in a hurry and hit her head on the low beam under the ceiling. Everything turned dark. She smelled the stench of urine. She felt that someone was in her house but at the same time knew she could do nothing about it. Her heart pounding, it felt like a fluttering bird within her chest trying to escape to freedom. The stench of urine persisted and when, after two hours of unconsciousness she finally came to, she was surprised to find herself sitting in the middle of a huge pool of urine.

The mysterious man appeared again in November 2016 in Ljubljana. At ten past five in the morning, Urša M., a gynaecology and obstetrics registrar, was finishing her shift in the maternity ward. Outside there was a strong wind and it was snowing heavily. She had just completed a vaginal examination in delivery room number three, entered the results into the partogram and sent the supervising doctor an SMS about the amount of amniotic fluid drained. She then said goodbye to the birthing woman who was four centimetres dilated and needed an amniotomy.

From the delivery room, she walked down a side corridor. It was very dark in this area but when she approached a window the orange glow from the streetlamps outside illuminated her. She leaned on the windowsill and looked up. Large flakes of snow (the first snow of the year is always soft) fell randomly from the colourless sky, conquering the lawn and parking area behind the hospital like an army of aliens. There was a yellow flash to one side and she attributed the flashing to the municipal lorries that began ploughing the snow as soon as it started falling. She still had to hand over to the next shift. By the time she, exhausted, sat in the car and switched on the engine, the houses and streets seemed entirely different. The sixteen-hour shift had totally destroyed her.

The flat was warm but the floor was so cold that the soles of her feet felt numb after a few steps. The voice on the radio was reporting on Donald Trump's election victory. Gloom was about to engulf the world, she thought to herself. Before going to bed she wrote a few short reports for her mentor from the clinic. They referred to the urgent gynaecological operations she had assisted with the previous afternoon and counted towards her quota of essential operations required for specialisation.

Before falling asleep, she held a mug of hot tea, took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She tried to listen, listen to whatever, but all she could hear was a meaningless silence. All of a sudden, something disturbed her, and she felt as if she was being watched. She checked the lights in the bathroom and all the rooms in the flat, but the unease would not go away. Something was wrong, but what? Then she noticed a man down on the edge of the parking lot. Urinating. He was wearing a long black coat and it took him a long time to finish. As Urša M. watched this man, his image began rotating slowly, spinning. She became scared and began spinning

herself, becoming more and more dizzy and at that moment it seemed as if the man was shuffling about somewhere behind her, in her flat, even though she could see him standing down in the street.

That afternoon in the local shop she once again felt someone was watching her. This was also the first time she could hear quiet whispering. She was at the fruit section where there was a crowd of people. Doctor, ma'am, she comprehended from the whispering. She tried to concentrate but didn't manage to discern whether the whispering was part of other people's conversation or whether the voice was coming from inside her head. Looking around and not noticing anyone speaking to her, she hurriedly filled her bag with grapefruits. As she walked out of the shop and was on her way to the car, someone called her again. She pulled her hood further over her face and walked faster. All of a sudden a silver car turned and blocked her way. The driver's window rolled down and the face of an old lady appeared. It was a neighbour from the block of flats, whose blood sugar she had once measured a long time ago, and ever since the woman kept leaving her various gifts at her door. ‘I just wanted to say hello, Doctor,’ she said. 'I tried in the shop, but you kept eluding me.’

Young doctor Urša M. walked quickly. The air was fresh, the gusts of wind cut at her face. She had almost reached the stairs leading up to the entrance when she smelled the sharp stench of urine. She recalled the nasty man releasing his urinary excretion in the public parking lot. She glanced with disgust towards the place where it had happened, then walked up to the area. The yellow stain in the snow was huge. This man, Urša M. thought to herself, must have a bladder the size of lungs.

The Tower Block of Young Women

1

In December and January nobody reported anything about the notorious stranger. Or February. There were some reports of dirty public areas but nothing that could be linked to the mysterious man, nothing worth mentioning that would raise suspicions or concern.

What did happen was this.

That winter afternoon a stranger entered a block of flats in the centre of Ljubljana and wanted to get to the third floor where he allegedly had a meeting. The woman at reception didn't pay the man particular attention or she simply could not be bothered to interrogate the visitor, even though he came unannounced, so she handed him a card that opened the security door and the stranger quickly disappeared into one of three elevators to go to the upper floors. Up until this point everything went as usual.

Then the receptionist stood up from her place and, dirty coffee cup in hand, made her way to the ladies' room in order to rinse out the cup and comb her hair. On the way to the toilets, however, she noticed something strange. The elevator which the stranger had disappeared into was going up to the fourteenth floor instead of the third floor he had mentioned. (This was where the offices of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage were located). The receptionist didn't want to cause any alarm. Perhaps to herself she reckoned that the stranger must have met someone in the coffee shop which was one floor lower, though she knew that it was closing time and it would be less likely, especially as it was Friday, and on Fridays the coffee shop closed even earlier, so it was not used for meetings in the afternoon. But two hours went by and there was no sign of the stranger.

The date was 3 March 2017, low grey clouds dragged themselves across the sky, heavy, waterlogged. The time was half past three.

The receptionist stepped outside the front entrance and lit a cigarette. She observed the parliament building and what was happening above it. The swirls in the sky curled into dark clusters. What strange weather, she thought to herself. A warm southerly wind in March. She extinguished her cigarette and returned to the front desk. She could not get the stranger out of her head. She felt optimistic and, glancing at the eighteen-floor building, she had a sense of security, knowing that a warm bed and the safety of her home awaited her.

At six in the evening she handed over to the night guard. She mentioned the man who went to the wrong floor to the guard and told him to look out for a thin man in a dark suit and a slightly old-fashioned coat. She described the stranger as stooping over, there was something unusual about his posture. 'I didn't see the face

very well,' she said, 'because he was wearing a hat with a long visor. And he had a heavy leather bag across his shoulder.'

The night guard Damjan S. did not give much thought to the night that would follow. After his take over briefing he spent half an hour sorting out the cleaning services keys, checked the ground floor and chatted with one of the cleaners who was a little late that evening and who was supposed to clean the yard. Damjan S. checked all three corridors on both basement levels as well as the first and second floors, including the open corridor towards the bicycle parking area. All indications suggested this would be a peaceful night. At eight o'clock, soon after the first cleaning ladies left the building, he checked the arrival and departure times on the security computer but saw nothing that would indicate that the stranger had left the building. Those leaving were all people he recognised. This was why he opened the third drawer of the reception counter and found the four-digit code to access the recordings on the CCTV cameras, entered it and checked the footage. The cameras covered all four entrances to the building. It was possible that one of the employees might have held the door for the stranger so he was not registered up at the control point. This sometimes happened, especially when employees left the building in groups. That evening he checked all the departures at all exit points, once again checked the exit times and all the control points, looking for a thin man dressed in slightly old-fashioned black clothes, as he had been told at the start of his shift, but there was nobody matching that description.

Night guard Damjan S. had serious doubts. The issue was bugging him, for he believed with deep conviction in logic: if someone enters a building, they are either in the building, or they have left, there is no third option. So he picked up the phone and informed security officer Boštjan K., based in the National Technical Library on the floor above, asking him for his opinion about the matter. As expected, the library security guard believed the matter was quite simple and there was no need to panic because the stranger might indeed have pressed the wrong button in the elevator, but must then have used his phone to ask someone from the lower floors to help him and used the stairs to walk up or down a floor or two, basically to the place where he had arranged to have his meeting. Damjan S. listened to the library security guard for a while, because the man had a lot of experience with the building,

having worked there much longer than he himself, but he eventually still expressed his doubts. ‘This might be possible,’ said Damjan S. ‘It can happen, especially if you are in a hurry to get to a meeting and in your haste you press the wrong button, but I still find it strange that this person was not seen exiting the building.’ Security guard Boštjan K didn’t have anything to say to that, opened the balcony door and took his time lighting his cigarette (giving him time to think about it.) Eventually he suggested that the stranger was not seen exiting because he was held up in one of the offices or he was let out of the building by one of the secretaries or some other employee. Then he reassured the night guard at reception, telling him to calm down, not get unnecessarily worked up over the matter. ‘How can I not get worked up,’ security guard Damjan S. asked, ‘When I don’t know where the unannounced stranger is, nor do I know who he was supposed to be having a meeting with?’ ‘Dunno,’ Boštjan K. replied. ‘Perhaps we are just all very tired and missed something. This should also be considered.’ And that was how the phone call ended, basically without reassuring anyone.

In the night between 3 and 4 March, the night guard carried out all his usual patrol rounds in the building which included checking the engine rooms, both basement levels, the annex and the yard, a check of the National Technical Library on the first floor, and both balconies, but didn’t find anything out of the usual. It seemed as if by the following morning it had all been forgotten and that life in the eighteen-storey building would return to its usual tracks.