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# TADEJ GOLOB



# THE LAKE

Proposal for a Book in Translation

Original Title (Slovene): Jezero

Author: Tadej Golob

Title in Translation: Der See

Translator (English): Gregor Timothy Čeh

Owner of Foreign Rights (World): Goga Publishing House (Založba Goga, Slovenia) Ana Schnabl ana.schnabl@goga.si

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## About the book

*The Lake* is a crime novel which has shifted the boundaries of popular fiction writing within the Slovene literary scene, managed to intrigue a wide reading audience and unify literary critics in the verdict that this is a well thought out and extremely skilfully written story. Further proof of this are the three reprints of the book within a short time after it was first published in November 2016.

The novel is set in recognizable Slovenian surroundings, the tourist surroundings of Lake Bohinj and the daily routine of the capital, Ljubljana. The protagonist is a model family man and detective with quite a reputation in his field. He is also a former mountaineer, a sworn recreational sportsman who is sometimes secretive, sometime impulsive, but always thoughtful and amusing.

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## About the author

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Tadej Golob (born 1967) is a unique Slovene author with a thematically broad range of works. He is one of the authors of the book *From Everest* (Iz Everesta 2000), a mountain he has also climbed himself. He has also written biographies of sportsmen and singers and youth-fiction novels *Golden Tooth* (Zlati zob 2011) and *Where Did Brina Disappear To?* (Kam je izginila Brina? 2013) and adult fiction Pigs' Feet (Svinjske nogice 2009) which won the 2010 Kresnik Award 2010, and *Ali boma ye!* (2013). *The Lake* is his first crime novel.

## About the translator

Gregor Timothy Čeh was born and brought up in a bilingual family in Slovenia. After studying at UCL in London he taught English in Greece and then completed a Masters at Kent. He now lives in Cyprus and regularly translates contemporary Slovene literature for publishing houses and authors in Slovenia, with translations published in both the UK and US.

## Reviews

*"The Lake* by Tadej Golob is the first Slovene crime novel which I devoured from beginning to end."

Miha Kovač in the leading Slovene daily newspaper Delo

"It is not often that a Slovene author writes a crime novel the reader will refuse to put down."

Mojca Pišek in the main Slovene literary journal Literatura

"Cleverly, smoothly and clearly written crime fiction." Matej Bogataj in the leading weekly Slovene magazine *Mladina* 

"Finally! An excellent Slovene crime novel in the manner of Scandinavian thrillers without the excessively painful scenes, blood and various mental deviations."

Katarina Mahnič on RTV Slovenija's portal MMC

## Marketing potential

The book is intended for readers who like to reach for a suspense-filled, clever and amusingly written crime story. It is written in the recently popular style of Scandinavian noir but set in typical Slovene surroundings with all their peculiarities.

The Slovenian Book Agency financially supports translations and the promotion of Slovene literature abroad. With Slovenia's candidacy for Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Slovenian Book Agency has increased its financing for translations of Slovene books into major European languages.

Also available is the Trubar Fund (operating under the auspices of the Slovene Writers' Association) which finances the printing costs for foreign publishers (calls for applications twice yearly).

### Short Summary

Taras Birsa, chief criminal investigator of the Ljubljana Police Administration, is returning from a skiing trip to Mount Vogel on New Year's Eve. As he makes his way home through a snowstorm, he comes across a girl who has found the body of an unrecognizable young woman in the river. Who is the victim? Who is the perpetrator? Was the crime committed by a lone madman or was the unknown woman killed as part of some larger plot?

In his novel, Golob includes the pharmaceutical industry and its profits, milestone inventions, the secrecy over which make killing seem almost a necessity, and involves in this the police inspector and a spirited group of doctors, one of whom is also his wife. Society and work with all their antagonisms mix at all levels, jealousy, adultery, complicated relationships in a team, the anomalies of the police system, changing social statuses...

### Sample Chapters

#### Introduction

It started snowing at around midday, and when Joey, an impossible mongrel, a mix between a Doberman and a Schnauzer, rushed down the hill, only his black head with his half-droopy Doberman ears stuck out above the snow. Every time his head ploughed into the fresh snow he surprisingly and wistfully looked at his owner at the edge of the road and then continued to search for the yellow tennis ball. He was called Joey after Joey from *Friends*, the favourite character of the young woman standing by the side, laughing at the helpless dog. When the series first started on TV, Alina – that was the girl's name – was still at nursery school. She had only caught up with it in its final seasons and then also watched all the older episodes. Now, ten years later, she still occasionally sits down and watches one. Whenever she is feeling melancholy and nostalgic. At only twenty-five, she thought. What else is to come?

At the same time she couldn't actually explain why this soap was so dear to her. There are things which we like at certain times in our life and, when we come across them later on, we're surprised to discover that we don't really know what it was that made them our favourite books, films and TV series, for example. But with *Friends* it wasn't like that with Alina. Was it corny? Yes, certainly. Was Phoebe not a character that would not last three days in real life? Yes... although, she smiled, she does know a girl like her. And Joey... Joey Tribbiani.

#### "How you doin'?"

Though she would probably not admit it in company, at least if everyone was sober, and in the meantime she has finished a degree in Anthropology, she still finds it sweetly amusing. If she did admit to it, she would add that *Friends* are her *guilty pleasure*. At least she doesn't listen to Bon Jovi.

Joey pushed through the snow. In five hours almost thirty centimetres had fallen. With his Schnauzer feet he trampled the cold white layer and when he reached the ball and grabbed it with his teeth, he didn't turn around and return to his mistress along the path he had made but made a sharp turn and continued to plough afresh.

This was also kind of cutely funny. A short-legged Doberman with a yellow tennis ball in its mouth.

She grabbed the ball and after a brief tugging he let go. She pretended to throw it but didn't let go of the ball, hiding it behind her back. The dog shot out into the snow again, ran a few steps until he was stopped by the snow, and then, confused, first looked ahead and then back at his mistress.

"Oh, silly dog," she said, turned slightly to the left and threw the ball with all her strength down along the river bank as she always did on their regular walk – well, if we can say always on her third visit since they had arrived in Bohinj. The ball flew across the white blanket and disappeared into the bushes. To the dog this seemed even more entertaining though Alina was worried she might have thrown it too far and it could have fallen into the water.

"Joey, Joooeeey..."

The dog didn't listen, it never did. She could shout as much as

she wanted – he was burrowing himself a new channel through the snow and disappeared into the bushes. Surely he won't go into the water if the ball has fallen in?

He barked. She waited for him to return with the ball in his pointy snout, but he didn't come. He barked again and she thought he must be barking at the ball as it flowed down river, but then there should be some movement through the bushes along the bank as he ran through them, but there was none. The bushes were still and the dog was still barking.

"Joeeey!"

She could not be bothered to walk into the fresh snow. She was wearing waterproof Gore-Tex hiking shoes but they were only ankle-high and if snow sticks to your socks and then slowly drips into your shoes no Gore-Tex makes any difference.

"Joeeey!"

The dog appeared at the edge of the bushes, without the ball. She waved at him, calling him to join her, patting her thighs with her woollen gloves.

"Joey, Joey, come along, come to mummy..."

The dog barked sharply and disappeared into the thicket.

She sighed and left the road. The snow was almost knee high. She made herself step along one of the tracks the dog had made, just waiting for the dampness to reach her socks. It's almost half an hour's walk back to the apartments. Silly mutt!

She pushed through the branches, trying not to shake the snow off onto herself. From the edge of the bushes, the river was barely a few feet away. The dog saw her, barked, squealed, and waged his tail, looking alternately at her and the river. The ball was beside him.

"What is it?"

She picked up the ball.

"Let's go, Joey ... "

She looked up and glanced towards the water which was

frozen at the edges. There was something white sticking out of the ice which in the light of dusk appeared artificial, plastic, like the hand of a mannequin.

Who would throw a plastic mannequin into the river? she wondered.

#### Chapter 1.

Ukanc, Sunday, 31 December

"So you're a cop?" asked the woman around sixty clinging onto a glass of wine. In fact it sounded something like, "S... yur..hiccup..." Clearly she had already had a few drinks. "How unusual!"

"Unusual?" he asked. "People usually find my name unusual, not my profession."

"Taras? Well, yes, Taras is a bit strange, but I do know a few, Gogol's Taras Bulba and... probably a few more, but a cop..."

She laughed as if she had just said something funny.

"He isn't a cop," said a woman who approached them and placed her hand on Taras' shoulder.

"He's an inspector."

She too was stammering slightly, the r in inspector drooled on for a little too long, meaning she probably had more than one glass of the mulled wine, Taras thought. She never could handle alcohol.

"Hang on, hang on... have you two not met?"

The older woman pouted like a teenager, and looked like... and older woman impersonating a teenager.

"No, my husband only ever introduces me to his... targets, never mine."

Taras smiled, trying not no make it look forced, and gave his

hand to the older lady.

"Taras Birsa. If you ever get a parking ticket, do call me." "Taras..."

"Don't interrupt him, Alenka," said the woman, still pulling faces as she extended her hand to him. "It's not every day a woman like me meets a charming policeman. I'm Karin. Karin Prelc, the wife of the gentleman shining over there..." she waved her hand pointing across towards the far end of the large living room. "He's your wife's colleague. But you probably know that. What kind of a policeman would you be if you didn't?"

And she laughed again as if she had just said something very funny indeed. Taras made the effort to laugh too. Alenka clearly saw no need to.

"And Birsa? I don't know anyone called Birsa."

"Have you not heard of Valter Birsa?"

The woman shook her head.

"The footballer? On the national team?"

"Oh, I don't follow that kind of stuff. Not for me. How come," she turned to Taras' wife, "that you're not called Birsa when you're his wife?"

"Because we're not married, but I can't be bothered to explain to people that we are not. At our age I can hardly call him my boyfriend. But Karin, allow me to take him away for a while."

Karin pouted once again and Taras thought this really was unnecessary.

"Go ahead, Go ahead... so if he's not her husband, she's his... colleague."

And she paused in front of her colleague.

"Pretend you are talking to me," Alenka said as she held Taras by the hand and escorted him to a larger group standing by a small bar on the other side of the room, clearly having fun.

"Why exactly am I doing this?"

"Because the old bat will otherwise devour you. You could

thank me. By the way, why do you keep telling people that you are a cop?"

"Perhaps because I am?" he said, not hiding the irony. "You're not a doctor?"

"I am, but I am also a shareholder in the clinic. And you're a policeman, but most of all, you're an inspector, and that isn't the same. If you were still a policeman at this age, we would probably not be together. Would you hitch up with, I don't know, some nurse?"

"Ugh, aren't we all high and mighty today."

"High and mighty or not, it doesn't change the facts, even if we try to deny them till you drop. People have ambitions in life. Some more, others less. Some stay policemen and some stay family doctors at some surgery in some back of beyond place, but I'm not one of them, and you're not..."

Taras smiled.

"No need to mention a deceased rich father," said Alenka and gave him a stern look.

"Me?"

"Not yet, thank you. But it was my father, thank God, and I am who I am and am not what I'm not. Why should I care what would be, whether it would be or whether it wouldn't be?"

Her slightly slurred words rather sounded more as if she was saying something about a watered, weathered and wooden bee. "I don't give a shit."

"Ouch?"

"Am I drunk?"

"How much have you had?"

"A glass of mulled wine and now this," she raised the stemmed glass she was holding.

"Then you're drunk," said Taras, Taras Birsa, police inspector, Birsa as in the football player, and put his hands around her. "Let's drink to that." He stepped to the drinks table where there was red and white wine and various kinds of spirits, and picked out a conspicuous glass of orange liquid.

"And what are we drinking to here?" A white-haired man with a tousled look and lenseless glasses, slightly unshaven, dressed in a white jumper and white trousers approached them. Dr Prelc always reminded Taras of Richard Branson. Even his teeth were just as white.

"Can I join you?"

He held a glass of wine in his hand. White wine. Had he chosen white to go with his jumper? Taras wondered.

"Well, what is it?"

"She's pregnant," said Taras.

"Taras! Of course I'm not," said Alenka. "He's joking."

"We're toasting our life's luck that we are among the one percent of the world population that is overloaded," Taras said and raised his glass.

"Well, of course. That's something to drink to," Dr Prelc said, joining in on the toast. He was no longer sober either.

"And Taras has a guilty conscience, and is going on and on about it," said Alenka.

"No I don't. It's just so I don't forget."

"Oh, don't be such a drag..."

She turned round to the food table, investigating the tray of canapés.

"Dinner is served in a quarter of an hour!" Dr Prelc - Branson shouted after her. Taras just dismissively waved his hand.

"Let her eat something, otherwise she'll feel sick."

"How much did she drink? How long have you been here? A quarter of an hour."

Taras looked at his watch. A quarter to six.

"An hour, but it's not that. She can't handle it. Anyway, we dropped in unannounced and I don't want someone to go

without dinner because of us."

"Do you think it might actually harm anyone in here if they went without dinner?"

Dr Prelc showed with his hand towards the crowd in the room as he turned around and said again,

"Do you think it will harm anyone here?"

Around twenty people were crowded in the largest room on the ground floor of a weekend house that was big enough for them not to need to stay in a single company but could mingle in smaller groups. Including Alenka and himself, there were twenty-two, if he had not miscounted, and he was usually right in situations like this. By the looks of it, all older couples, and he usually assessed these things correctly as well. Part of his job.

Dr Prelc stared at his glass for a while as if deep in thought. "Let's go for a cigarette?"

"You want me to go for a cigarette with you?"

"Yes, yes... I know you don't smoke. I go out for a cigarette and you go out to get some fresh air, plus my cigarette smoke, we both get something out of it. Come on, let's go..."

They made their way behind the other guests towards the door leading onto a small roofed terrace, big enough for a largish wooden table and a few chairs. Taras closed the door, pulled one of the chairs closer and sat on it. Two metres away the snow was still falling. Evenly and heavily. It wasn't even that cold. Around zero, Taras guessed.

"Nice, isn't it?"

Taras nodded.

"I've had this weekend house for thirty years. I was the first of all these doctors to build one. Well, many others have done so since and now we are a kind of *Hospital at the End of the City*."

He looked at Taras.

"Are you old enough to remember that? The Czech TV series?"

"The likes of Pane Sova?"

"That's the one..."

He seemed delighted, as if Taras had just said something brilliant. Taking a sip, he choked on it in his enthusiasm, almost landing on the table in front of them.

"Shit, do you know when you are old? When you start telling jokes in a company and nobody else knows what you're talking about. You start telling a Mujo and Haso joke\*, and everyone just stares at you. Which Mujo? Who's Haso?"

He took another sip, carefully this time.

"And what's the snow like up on Vogel?"

"It only started snowing as we were leaving and there must be plenty now. But there was barely any before. You needed to watch out for rocks."

"Now there'll be enough for skiing down Žagarjev Graben," Dr Prelc said. "I love that. The last cable car up to Vogel, a quick shot of schnapps, and ski back home... for another shot of schnapps."

He laughed.

"Listen Taras, why don't you two stay the night here? You don't want to drive back home in this? Stay and we can get drunk like real people... animals always know when they've had enough..." and he laughed loudly again. "Well, at least the rest of us, you can sip on your apple juice."

Taras shook his head.

"Come on, we can go and have some fun in the snow tomorrow. I have an extra pair of cross-country skis and boots in the shed over there..."

He pointed to a shed about twenty metres away, barely visible in the dark.

"As far as that goes, it isn't a problem. In winter I always keep

<sup>\*</sup> Translator's note: Mujo and Haso were Bosnian joke characters used in (sometimes racist) jokes throughout the former Yugoslavia.

my cross-country skis and all the gear in car."

From spring to autumn Taras kept everything he needed for running in the back of his Citröen, running shoes, socks, shorts, T-shirts, a towel. In the winter he changed it to cross country skiing gear.

"Our daughters said they will come to our place after midnight and we'll all go for a walk around the old town. And if two twenty-year-olds that you otherwise never see promise that to their parents, then..."

"Then you have little choice," Dr Prelc said. "Are they both studying? Where are they?"

"Both in Vienna, both Microbiology."

"Well, then we really need to drink to high-flyers."

He raised his glass, they clinked and took a sip. Then Dr Prelc produced from his trouser pocket a cigarette packet that looked empty, and pulled out a ready joint.

"A gift from some students..."

He lit it and took a deep draw, leaning back into the wooden chair. Taras could smell the smoke which in the damp air rose up under the roof of the terrace in the shape of a small cloud.

"Oh, I hope you're fine with this. I keep forgetting that you're a..."

"Cop?"

"Well, yes, a detective. I mean the joint. Everyone uses it now anyway."

"I'm fine with it," said Taras. "I'm not at work anyway."

"Want some?"

Taras shook his head.

"And what do you think about this? Legalization and all that?"

"I don't care."

"You must have some opinion on it. It's your work."

He could not have cared less. If there was something that

Taras had learnt over the almost quarter of a century on the job, it was that with things he had no influence over – and there were certainly a huge number of such things – he couldn't care less. Crime is a constant. A certain percentage of people will always hop onto the dark side. If you take away their dope, they will start trading in amphetamines, coke, heroin... amanita mushrooms. If everything is legalized, they will divert their attention to stealing from shops. There will always be something.

"I don't know," he said. "I really don't care. Besides, I deal with murders, Homicide and Sexual Offences Section, drugs come under another department. Organized crime, Illicit Drug Section," he reeled off. "You're an abdominal expert, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Yes, intestines and stuff like that."

Dr Prelc laughed. Clearly the dope was having an effect.

"What do you know about lungs? Could you operate on lungs?"

"I don't know. I could cut a few bits off if needed. I do know that people shouldn't smoke."

He choked and he coughed for a while and then started laughing. He laughed so much that tears began rolling down his cheeks. He took off his glasses and wiped them away with the sleeve of his jumper. In fact, if it was up to him, thought Taras, he would keep marihuana illegal. With alcohol at least people become sociable. With two puffs of dope, they enter a world of their own. They laugh at their own jokes, for example.

"Your wife," Dr Prelc said, "Alenka, she's OK. I think she has always been OK, even as a student, and she still is. She's still great."

For which she can thank her genes, Taras thought. If he was as inactive as she is, he'd age in an instant, but she certainly looks much younger than she is.

Alenka was a beautiful woman, and still is at forty-five.

When she steps into a room you can see all the men turning to her, and women also, out of envy. Her friends, her generation, are either domesticated housewives with quite a few extra kilos or ardent sportswomen, fanatic followers of this or that way of life, vegetarianism, veganism, fanatical yoga... and too thin, all veiny, skin and bones, as Dr Prelc would say, nothing to hold on to. Alenka had a good figure, a nice face with the right features and a slightly pointed nose in the middle which should distract from this balanced beauty but in fact served to make it more attractive, cuter. And medium-long, fair hair, which turned almost blonde in the summer and now had the hues of a brunette. When Taras had first met her she wore her hair short, a bit like Pink in the days of her shortest hair. And for a long time he thought she dyed it blonde. For quite a while now, she had kept it much longer.

"Short haircuts are for twenty-year-olds," she said. "At forty it makes you look like an ageing lesbian."

Prelc took another deep draw and threw the rest into the darkness, into the snow.

"We did fuck a lot then, god, we fucked. You won't believe how quickly they offer themselves to a professor surgeon. There is something about the white robe."

"Butchers also wear one," Taras said.

"Butchers? Butchers?"

He laughed and when it seemed as if he had stopped he began again, and again. He could not stop. Butchers, and ha, ha, ha and again, butchers, and ha ha ha...

"We annoy you, don't we, Taras?"

"Doctors?"

"Not just doctors," Prelc said laughing. "All of us high-flyers, the nouveau riche, the bourgeoisie. We do, don't we? But there's no point, Taras. We're here forever. This is because we aren't picky. We can make do with anything. We reproduce sexually, vegetatively, whatever works. That's why we need to recruit someone new every so often, new blood. You!"

He pointed at Taras with his finger and started laughing again. Clearly the joint was a good one, very strong.

"Perhaps there will be a time," Dr Prelc said when he finally managed to calm down and Taras thought he was about to change the subject again, "when girls won't just offer themselves for a fuck to Rajko Prelc, perhaps, but it is not now," he said and dramatically pointed his finger towards the sky, well, to the wooden roof above the terrace. "The hour of the wolves of impotence and a leaky prostate... but it is not now."

He gulped a new portion of smoke.

"Do you know it?"

"Lord of the Rings?"

"Lord of fucking zilch," Dr Prelc said. "Hey, Taras?"

"Yes?"

"Why don't you stay tonight and we really do have something to drink? There are a bunch of doctors of whatever in there, but I have nothing in common with them. They are all stuck behind the blinkers of their work, hidebound half-finished idiots. I am fed up of them, they get on my nerves." He leaned towards Taras and whispered into his ear, "Do you know that I have fucked all their wives? Absolutely every one in there?"

He then slumped into his chair and continued mumbling, talking to himself or thinking aloud,

"Although, if I can be honest, and I suppose I can be because it's just me and you here; Fuck it, I'm sixty and the day is fast approaching. Some of these dumb students and nurses and all this clientele see me as some old lecher. I don't mind the second part because I always have been lecherous and always will be, but old... When I mount some of them, I feel like some pervert, seducing a child with some sweets... perhaps I will somehow have to settle down..." He picked up his glass and drank what wine was left in it.

"Settle down, Taras, eh?"

"Are you not yet settled?"

Dr Prelc snorted, as if he had gulped on spoilt wine.

"We're friends, aren't we Taras?"

Are we? Prelc was more than ten years his senior. Taras had met him when Alenka became co-owner of the clinic, so only a few years ago, four perhaps. He would see him regularly and they occasionally went on a bike ride around Ljubljana together, three or four times on longer trips... which is something you probably do with friends. Today he had even met his wife.

"Yes, of course."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

"Could you do me a favour? A kind of professional favour, as a friend, if I asked you for it?"

"What kind of a favour?"

Prelc stopped, looked at his empty glass and waved his hand dismissively.

"You've met my wife?"

"I have."

"Did you know she was at the Olympics. In Montreal 1976. The ones where Nadia Comăneci was awarded a perfect ten. The first ever. And Karin almost performed, had it not been for all the machinations in the Yugoslav national team. Like Jacky Stewart... Do you know who Jacky Stewart is?"

"I do. A seventies Formula One driver."

The door opened and Alenka stuck her head round the frame. "Hey, you two, dinner is on the table."

Then she stepped out onto the terrace and looked out into the darkness. The snow was getting heavier.

"Quite deep, isn't it," she said and shivered in the cold. She turned to Taras, "Taras, if we want to get home tonight we'll have to hurry." She seemed to have recovered. She opened the door back into the house and waited for Taras to join her. Dr Prelc followed close behind them.

"If I remember rightly, Balažič's wife is the only one I haven't fucked," he whispered and gestured with his hands towards a rather bulky woman across the room, "never had the stomach for that. Poor woman."

> Tadej Golob (The Lake, 2016) translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh





# Co-financing Publications of Slovenian Authors in Foreign Languages

#### I. THE SLOVENIAN BOOK AGENCY (JAK)

The Slovenian Book Agency (JAK) is a government institution founded in 2009 that deals with all actors in the book publishing chain, from authors to publishers and readers. The main form of international promotion is the co-financing of translations from Slovenian into other languages. JAK annually publishes call for applications for co-financing translations of Slovenian authors' books into other languages, including adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, and essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, theatrical plays and comics. Applicants can be publishing houses, theatres, and individual translators. In each case, a contract is concluded with the translator, and therefore all funding goes directly to him or her.

More information on the website: http://jakrs.si/eng/

#### II. THE TRUBAR FOUNDATION

The Trubar Foundation is a joint venture of the Slovene Writers' Association, Slovenian PEN and the Center for Slovenian Literature. Foreign publishers can apply for subsidies to publish Slovene works in their native languages. The Trubar Foundation contributes up to 70% of printing costs. The Board will consider all applications for works of fiction, poetry, drama or literary essays, providing the originals are written in Slovene. They convene at least twice a year, usually in April and October and applications can be sent at anytime.

The Board advises applicants to submit their applications in Slovene or English, in written form, by post.

Address for applications: Slovene Writers' Association for the Trubar Foundation Tomšičeva 12, SI – 1000 Ljubljana Email: dsp@drustvo-dsp.si Further information: http://www.drustvo-dsp.si/si/drustvo\_slovenskih\_pisateljev/ dejavnosti/567/detail.html/

#### TADEJ GOLOB The lake

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