

## TADEJ GOLOB – LENIN PARK

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Author: Tadej Golob

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### About the Book

*“Why would someone shoot an elderly homeless woman?”*

*“Some people don’t like tramps.”*

*“Such as?”*

*“Have you not seen the anti-refugee posters, Inspector? And what's the difference between a refugee and a homeless person?”*

The body of a woman is discovered in a small park in the centre of Ljubljana. She has been shot in the head. A day later a man dies in the same way in another part of town. Are the murders linked? Ljubljana is sweltering in a heat wave, a new government is being set up in Slovenia after recent elections, and even without this, police inspector Taras Birsa is having enough troubles of his own.

### About the Author

Tadej Golob (born 1967) is a unique Slovene author with a thematically broad range of works. In 2010 Golob won the Kresnik Award for best novel of the year with his debut novel *Pigs’ Legs* (Svinjske nogice). He is one of the authors of *From Everest* (2000), where he describes Dave Karničar’s skiing from the highest mountain of the world that the writer also ascended. He began his career in sports journalism for the Radio-Television of Slovenia, but later became particularly famous for his interviews with famous Slovenes, that paved a way

to several biographies he has written (among them that of the professional basketball player Goran Dragić). In 2013 his novel *Ali boma ye!* was published, which describes the story of an amateur boxer facing the last fight of his career and an offer he can't refuse.

*The Lake* and *Lenin Park* are both bestselling crime novels.

## **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.

## **SAMPLE TRANSLATION**

### **Tuesday**

#### **Chapter 2**

“How can you be bothered...” Alenka muttered.

His wife fell back to sleep almost as soon as Taras silenced the alarm clock on his mobile phone. It was five in the morning and he hoped that the air outside would not be as stale as inside their bedroom, even though they slept with the window half open.

Fifteen minutes later he was leaving the outskirts of Ljubljana and cycling along the regional road towards Polhov Gradec. He was on the mountain bike that he had fitted with thin, smooth tyres because he mostly cycled on asphalt. The road was almost empty and at the speed of just over twenty kilometres with which he was pushing his way through the heavy, still air, it seemed almost bearable, though he could not, even at this early hour, say it was fresh. The hot night had not cooled him down, and when the sun that was just rising behind his back would reach him, he would boil.

To begin with he did not exert himself excessively, just tried to get into a rhythm at what you might call the upper boundary of comfort. He was saving his strength for the last six kilometres when the road climbed upwards, and would then push harder were he to still feel like it. An hour and a half after leaving home he was at the church on Črni Vrh. Even though

he had been cycling for a number of seasons, he had only discovered the route this year, and after he had been to the church three or four times he even googled it to find out more about it. It was dedicated to Saint Leonard, protector of prisoners and women in labour. This too he had to find on the internet. Of all the years of catechesis, the only one he could remember was fire-fighting Saint Florian.

On the bench in front of the church he changed his sweaty T-shirt for a clean one from his small backpack. He then spent some time looking at the surrounding hills and the valley below from where a hazy mist was rising, and he could not help thinking, as he always did, how beautiful Slovenia is. Not only here, in these low-lying hills in the surroundings of Ljubljana, but everywhere. He checked his phone, switched to silent mode before his ascent. There is nothing more annoying to someone exerting the last of their strength to ride up a hill than persistent, merciless ringing. He did not expect to have any unanswered calls, but there were two. One from Drvarič and one from Brajc, as well as a message from Drvarič.

*Nine o'clock, my office.*

Taras stood up, sat on the bicycle and pushed off towards the short but steep hill that led from the church to the stretched-out settlement and from there into the valley. On the way he greeted an old lady who was clearly on her way to the graveyard next to the church. She did not return his greeting; maybe there was something about him she didn't like.

The slope must have had a gradient of at least fifteen degrees (probably more). By the road at the bottom was a coffee bar with a terrace where Taras would have loved to now stop for a coffee, but it was only open at weekends. He would have to wait until he got to work. If he pushed hard enough, he could be there in time for one even before half past eight, well before Drvarič.

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"I know," he interrupted her as she was about to tell him about the nine o'clock meeting. "Did he say what it was about?"

"No."

He thought about taking her for a coffee before the meeting and letting Drvarič wait, but he knew that they would not be able to enjoy it this way. Idiot or not, the man was still the boss.

“Never mind, let’s get this over with and we can go for a coffee afterwards. Although by then Brajc and Osterc will also be here...”

“I think they were here before me today. Brajc called me at around half past seven, but he didn’t say why.”

“Yes, he called me too.”

Taras walked behind her down the corridor and could not take his eyes off her tight-fitting jeans. He could not care less about what Drvarič wanted to tell him. Not now, not never.

\*

“Sabina, you go to the park with those already here,” the older teacher told her younger colleague at the France Prešeren Nursery School located close to the American Embassy with the National Museum on the opposite side of one road and the Foreign Ministry on the opposite side of another. Distinguished company that gave the nursery school a distinguished status and clientele. Parents of children at this school did not have to get up as early as those in the suburbs Šiška or Fužine who then had to travel into town, so there were only a few children around at seven o’clock in the morning. It was these whom the older teacher, in charge that morning, was trying to get out into the park, possibly also making her own job a little easier on this stuffy morning. The one thing this nursery school didn’t have was a decent playground. On dry summer days the ground, which seemed unsuitable for growing a lawn of any sorts, produced clouds of fine dust that would eat into all and everything, causing widespread coughing.

“Of course it’s possible,” said the man from the maintenance company that had been called in, after the school had requested help from the town hall with solving the problem. “But it means you should stop operating for a year or so.”

“Stop operating?”

“Yes, because of the kids. No grass in the world can grow if you walk all over it every day... How many do you have here?”

One hundred and forty-two in seven classes. Two meetings later the idea of grass was abandoned and it was decided they would get Tartan playground tiles instead.

“Should I take them to Tivoli?” the younger teacher asked.

The teacher in charge shook her head. The playground equipment there was neatly fenced off but it was a little too far away and she would never take the children there alone. The slides were too big, too dangerous for a single escort, especially because the playground area was split down the middle with a ridge of bushes, which made it impossible for one person to constantly keep an eye on the entire area and all the corners where lively children might wander off or hide.

“Take them to the other park, Park Argentina or whatever it’s called now. You have to be back by breakfast anyway.”

There were five children that the younger teacher made stand in a line, two pairs and one whose hand she held. She was not actually convinced she was allowed to take the children beyond the high fencing of the nursery school compound alone; she never studied the rulebook in detail and Greta, the older teacher who was in charge, had never thought much about sticking to the letter of the law and preferred a more liberal interpretation of the Pre-School Institutions Act that, among its list of rules on the standards for providing pre-school education, also regulated what criteria needed to be met when children were taken beyond the school enclosure. Sabina did wonder whether her colleague was a little too lax about the rules, but she kept quiet about it. Greta was from an era when, with every scratch and graze their children came home with, parents did not first rush off to the family lawyer, only later seeking medical attention. This was also the reason the school’s headmistress was counting down the months until the end of the year when Greta was due to retire.

As long as they reached the park without any problems. Sabina glanced at the group following her. She was holding Jan, the most lively child by the hand. Traipsing behind her were Maja and Tilen, and behind them Jaka and Lina. She had organised them into pairs herself, otherwise they would never have been back before breakfast. If Jan does not cause problems, and there was no indication he would have a bout of his usual stubbornness at this time of day, then this should be a perfectly acceptable outing. And it really would be too hot later on in the day.

She released them among the chestnut trees by a low wall built of large, dressed stone blocks, their tops smoothed with a layer of concrete, and sat on the bench. The park, split diagonally down the middle by an asphalt path, was almost empty. On the other side of the path, on a triangular patch of grass, someone had allowed a dog to run around off its lead; apart from that there was nobody else. Well, there was someone; on a bench at the edge of the section

which included the playground and the trees lay a woman Sabina had seen there on a number of occasions. A homeless woman with lots of plastic bags around her. Clearly she was still asleep.

“Miss, can we play Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?”

Standing in front of her was Lina, a sweet, slightly chubby four-year old with long plaits and thick glasses. She was holding a soft toy, a large fluffy grey rat with three baby rats sewn to its belly. The child would not go anywhere without it and often found herself in a tug of war with Jan or any of the other children who tried to separate the baby rats from their mother. Sabina encouraged her and had a soft spot for her, hoping that Lina would grow into a beauty, more beautiful than some of the other perfect but spoilt little princesses her group was full of. She stood up.

“Anyone else for playing?”

Jaka and Maja joined them, Jan and Tilen chose the slides, and before letting them go there – to a distance of about ten metres – Sabina instructed the boys,

“Only on the smaller slides, and you’re not to go beyond the path.”

In the middle of the other equipment was dinosaur-shaped horizontal tree trunk with its branches partly sawn off and stripped of its bark. Intended for climbing, it had become so smooth and slippery through use and re-varnishing, that she would not even try climbing onto it herself, let alone allow a four-year old to do so.

“And you’re not to climb the trunk. Is that clear?”

Tilen nodded.

“Jan?!”

The future ruler of the world gave her a cheeky look, but eventually also nodded. Sabina wanted to add that they would go straight back to the nursery if he disobeyed, but there was not much point. She would have to keep a constant eye on him anyway.

Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf was a simple game, especially the way they played it. She would stand on the path that crossed the park and shuffle her feet on the spot for a while and the children would sneak up behind her and touch her. When she would then turn round and shout “Boooo!” at them, they would then run to a wooden house about fifteen metres away

and hide inside it. She would then roar for a while and hop around the house while the children would scream with excitement. This would be repeated... up to twenty times.

She was not counting, but it must have been after five or six times, when she suggested a short break.

“No, no, no...” the children shouted.

“Just a brief break. The Big Bad Wolf is tired.”

She sat on the bench and checked her phone. Another fifteen minutes and they would have to go back, otherwise the cocoa or tea, or whatever was for breakfast today, would be cold. In this heat, that might not be bad, but still. She glanced at the three that had hidden in the wooden house and had clearly found another game to play. Sabina was twenty-five and could not imagine what it would be like to have someone waiting for her at home after a day spent with children at the nursery school. She would need to consider it at some point, she was thinking, as her gaze moved towards the dinosaur trunk. The boys were not there. They were crouched behind it, picking something up from the ground. Then they stood up and threw that something into the direction beyond the playground... She could not see where, because the boys were obscuring her view. She stood up and shouted,

“Jan, Tilen...”

They did not react. Once again they threw what they had found on the ground. She walked up to them, followed by the other children from the house whose attention had been drawn by her shouting.

“Hey, you two!”

They were throwing whatever they were throwing at the woman on the park bench. She ran up to them and grabbed their hands.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“But she’s not moving,” said Jan, trying to wriggle his way out of her grip. She gave him a furious look and pointed with her finger to show him he should move away. He took a step back and stopped, “But she’s not moving.”

Sabina turned towards the woman, lying on the bench about three metres away, surrounded by plastic bags that must somehow have been attached to her, otherwise they would

long have been blown away. What could she possibly keep in them, Sabina wondered and stepped closer.

“Wait there,” she instructed the children she could sense behind her back.

She was almost right next to the woman, wondering what would happen if she woke up, when a slight breeze moved away one of the plastic bags that had been lying across her face. It revealed something that Sabina could not make out initially. It was as if someone had poured some kind of putrid yoghurt with something else... over the woman's head, over her hair, which looked partly singed. She stepped closer, close enough to pick up the smell of a human body that rarely washed or changed its clothes and notice in the yogurt, which was not yoghurt at all, tiny white worms feasting on human blood and brain tissue.

She screamed and ran towards the children who screamed along with her and ran, laughing and shouting into the small wooden house.

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“How are we all?” Drvarič asked, pretending to be in a good mood.

Drvarič was one of those people who have a curious, constant, ever-felt absence of genuineness. Such people do not smile when something is funny but only if they have planned to do so in advance. They are utterly skilled in suppressing their primary reactions and Taras could not imagine Drvarič swearing, for example, or at least crying out, were he to hit his finger with a hammer, unless such a reaction was pre-scripted. Drvarič and his kind are not even put off by the fact that this makes them appear to react with a slight delay, almost as if they were actors in an amateur theatre production that have set themselves a goal beyond their capabilities. Do they not notice that everyone else knows that they are pretending to be something they are not, Taras asked himself every time, including this one.

“Alright,” said Tina.

“And we're about to be better,” Drvarič continued, giving Taras a fleeting look of barely noticeable accusation, as an actor on stage might glance at a fellow actor who had forgotten their lines. “I have something for you two.”

“I didn't hear the phone in the morning. I was out on my bike,” Taras said.

Tina glanced at Taras out of the corner of her eye. Why does he insist on working up Drvarič even when it is totally unnecessary? Like now, for example. Of course anyone can be



anywhere they want at half past six in the morning, without explaining to the boss that they could not be bothered to pick up the phone because they were exercising.

“You went cycling in the morning?”

“Yes, so I don’t get put off my day before it even starts.”

There, again.

“Right, right,” Drvarič muttered, either unwilling to argue with Taras or not understanding what Taras was really saying.

“Well, I have a nice little thing for our young lady, if you’ll agree?”

Taras stayed silent.

“I’ve already sent Brajc there, but I thought Tina might take over, with your assistance, of course. You’re going to be busy over the next few days anyway, aren’t you?”

“No,” said Taras. “Not that I know of.”

“I thought you had a meeting with Petan at court the day after tomorrow?”

Taras hissed contemptuously through his teeth,

“That’ll take just a couple of hours plus the journey there and back.”

Drvarič shook his head. “Hopefully. But I’m sure you won’t object to Tina taking on her first, so to say, murder case?”

“I’m excited,” said Taras.

Perhaps it only sounded that way and it was probably just another pick at Drvarič, but Tina felt a little hurt as Taras’ response might also be interpreted differently.

“Is the team complete? I mean, leave and holidays. It is summer. Nothing longer than two days for the next fortnight please.”

“Brajc and Osterc are going on a union trip tomorrow, but it’s only one day.”

Plus two days that Brajc will need to recover.

“Where are they going this year?” Drvarič asked.

“Budapest.”

“Budapest? For a day?”

He then mulled over the Budapest-in-a-day thing for a while, before concluding,

“Well, right, I suppose, one day, then.”

“Excuse me,” said Tina. “What case did you have in mind?”

“Oh, haven’t I mentioned it yet? Well. In that park, the one behind the GPD, I can never remember what it’s called...”

“Lenin Park,” Taras helped him.

“Lenin? And it’s still called that?”

Taras nodded.

“Really? Well, a dead woman has been found in that park. Brajc is there already, and I assume the NFL and the IFM as well. Now they’re waiting for the head of investigation.”

“This dead woman,” Tina asked, “doesn’t happen to be the bag lady who slept on the bench in that park?”

“Yes,” said Drvarič. “Do you know her?”

He smiled and looked at Taras.

“No worries, your colleague here will help you.”

### **Chapter 3**

Brajc’s alarm went off at seven. It was a small red radio clock with angular orange numbers that they had been given as a wedding present. It had somehow escaped the Excel divorce spreadsheet and for this reason Brajc was especially fond of it. He only used it as an alarm clock, even though he could of course use his mobile phone for the purpose and thus avoid waking up to the most inhumanely penetrating, metallic-digital and unpleasant sound there was.

He sighed and turned to the right to reach it and switch it off, dragging his nose across the pillow soaked with the sour stench of the damn summer he hated as much because of the heat as he hated the winter because of the cold and the spring and autumn because of the damp

or the leaves he should, though never did rake up in the garden, or whatever else he hated it for. If he had it his way, people would not settle in places where the temperature falls below eighteen degrees or rises above twenty-five, and also not in places where it rains all the time or where it doesn't rain at all. He had once spent some time looking on the internet to see whether such a place even exists, and just as he discovered almost with relief that it didn't and that there is something wrong with everywhere else in the world and that billions of people are hardly, if at all, better off, the Google search window came up with Las Palmas with the lowest January temperatures at around eighteen degrees, and the highest temperatures in August rarely exceeding twenty-five.

“Just look at them...” he bleated in disappointment and for a while stared at photos of the largest town on Gran Canaria. “Palms and all that,” he added after a while and looked out of the window of his living room, his gaze getting settling on the solitary spruce surrounded by three silver birch trees.

Pillow under his arm, he walked to the balcony on the first floor of the family house that had been designed for two families and in which he was now living alone until he and his former wife decide what would happen to it. He pegged the sweaty pillow to the washing line. “Nothing better against bacteria than UV radiation,” he was once forced to listen to Golob. “If you were to hang a plastic bag of dirty water on your backpack... let's say you're somewhere in the wilderness. If you were to walk around in the sun all day with it, you could easily drink its contents by evening...” Blah, blah, blah. What idiot would walk in the sun around the wilderness all day with a plastic bag full of water? Probably not even Taras would do that.

He threw a knob of butter into the frying pan and waited for it to almost melt before adding a little more, and, fuck it, you only live once, a third blob as well. Then he carefully, without breaking the yolk, added three eggs. Once they began to coagulate he also threw in a couple of slices of bacon. While this combination was pleasantly sizzling away in the pan, he put the coffee pot on the stove. Waiting for everything to cook and boil, he stepped to the window as if to check what the weather might be like today even though he had been outside on the balcony just a moment ago. Creeping up a clear blue sky from round the corner was the glowing sphere, and in his thoughts, because he could not be bothered to say it out loud, Brajc cursed the sphere and the blueness, and then also the missing clouds, despite the fact that both these scourges, the blueness and the lack of clouds, were in effect the same thing.

When his phone rang he was already back in the bedroom where he picked out from the wardrobe what he would wear that day, annoyed by the realisation that he would need to put a few things in the washing machine or he would run out of clean clothes very soon. As it rang, he glanced at the flashing angular numbers on the red radio clock. It was seven thirty-five. Irritated, as he had been since he had woken up, he reluctantly pressed the button.

“Yes?” he asked and then added another ‘yes’ or two, and an ‘ahaa’ and finished with an “I’ll take care of it.” He then searched through his contacts and called Taras. As far as he knew Taras was still his boss and Brajc wasn’t sure why they had not called him.

Taras was not answering.

“Surely he’s not still asleep?” Brajc muttered as he called Osterc’s number.

He let it ring for a long time and just as he thought that Osterc had finally picked up, the line went dead. His way of telling me to sod off, Brajc wondered, or had the phone just ran out of toot-toots, letting him know that there was no point in persisting? He called again and this time Osterc’s number was no longer available. Miffed, he found Tina’s number. Doesn’t anybody work any more in this country?

“Yep,” she said and sounded happy, as if right now she was somewhere else... somewhere like Las Palmas on Gran Canaria and not in the Ljubljana bracing itself for a hellishly hot summer’s day. He moved the pan from the stove at the last second before burning everything that was inside it. Such a possibility merely aggravated him further.

“Are you still at home?” he asked.

“Yep,” she said again. “Just finishing breakfast. Anything urgent?”

“Basically... well, no, I’ll sort it out myself.” He rubbed his stomach. Nothing more urgent than breakfast. And just as he would not allow anyone to cut short his own, he would not cut short anyone else’s either. He shook some salt over the eggs and bacon (more than he had lied to the doctor about, and there were more eggs than he would admit to too) and some pepper (that he had not asked about at all), and cut a thick slice of bread, sighing with content. For a moment, a terrifying moment, he had even thought that the dead bag lady might spoil his breakfast. Well, she wouldn’t. Whatever the case, he liked to eat in peace and quiet. There is a Slovene saying that even a dog likes to be left alone when eating.

While Brajc was emptying his frying pan, Osterc was sticking his two kids into the car to drop them off at school and before that drive his wife to her work, if that would even be possible considering the late hour at which they were setting off from home and for which his wife, this time, as always, was blaming him. Not entirely justified, although it was true that Osterc sometimes just did not know how to do things quickly, especially because he was not selective. For example, if his phone rang just as he was putting shoes on the younger one, who should of course be putting his shoes on himself as one would expect from a child in third grade, but who as a clever child discovered that in a time constraint he could successfully pretend to be a helpless toddler, Osterc, without any qualms, dropped the child's heel and shoe, found his phone in his pocket and started looking at the screen ...

“Are you nuts?” his wife shouted at him, pulled his phone from his hand and switched it off. Not only cut the line, she switched it off entirely.

With an upset face Osterc completed the task with his second son's shoes and clenched his teeth all the way to Ljubljana. When they reached the petrol station at Barje he finally spoke,

“It was Brajc. There might be something wrong at work.”

“I'll wait,” said his wife, figuring out in her mind whether it was easier for her as a part-time librarian, to be late for work, or whether the kids could, once again, be late for school.

“Where are we going?” Osterc asked as they reached Tržaška and they had to make their mind up. To go to their kids' school at Bičevje he would need to turn right in a hundred metres, to take his wife to work in Šiška, he would make a left turn and take the road under Rožnik... He did not get an answer and, as the turning was inevitably approaching, he tried again,

“Where...”

“School,” she responded sternly.

She'd rather have to listen to her boss reprimand her than deal with the class teacher of her younger son – she could be hellishly vicious.

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“Why don't we walk?” Tina suggested.

“I can't be bothered.”

Can a person who gets up at five in the morning to cycle for two hours before coming to work really not be bothered to walk the less than five hundred metres distance from the police station to the park?

“No, don’t feel like it, I’ve done my stuff for today.”

Driving twenty or thirty metres from the parking lots at the station, they stopped at the first set of traffic lights.

“I took her some food yesterday,” she said quietly. “A sandwich and some milk.”

“Who?”

“This woman.”

Taras looked at her with surprise,

“When yesterday?”

“After you left. Now I’m wondering whether she might already have been dead even then.”

“You didn’t speak to her?”

“No, she was asleep. At least I thought she was asleep.”

The traffic lights switched to yellow and Taras drove on.

“Were you being serious when you said that shooting her in the head might be the best way of helping her?”

“I said that I was afraid that there was no way of helping her, and that the SS shot people in the head when they were burning because of phosphorus.”

“As an example of what to do with people who cannot be helped.”

He looked at her.

“It doesn’t matter what I or anyone else said. The fact that you were concerned about her and I wasn’t neither helped nor hurt her.”

Taras swore when someone pushed in in front of him from a one-way side street and for a moment Tina worried that he might, agitated as he was, overtake them and stop in front of them. Clenching his teeth Taras drove behind the car until it disappeared into a side street.

When they reached the park of a thousand names he drove up onto the pavement and stopped the engine. Behind the trunks of the trees that surrounded the park and beyond the playground area he could see a group of people, standing out from which was a figure in white.

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Brajc did not stop at the police station. He drove directly to the General Police Directorate and parked in a space reserved for staff. He began swearing as he tried to find his permit in the glove compartment. Where had he put it? He tapped his fingers on the dashboard, trying to remember why the hell he would have moved to somewhere else something that is only ever useful in the car. He could not think of a reason and dismissively waved his hand.

“Whatever...” he said to himself and stepped out of the car, locked it and made his way towards the entrance of the GPD. It was only twenty metres away, enough for the first droplets of sweat to appear on his forehead.

“Hi Brajc,” said the man in the glass booth.

Brajc did not bother with morning courtesies. He had never understood this good morning-good morning stuff. Why would anyone want to wish anyone else a good morning? Does it make it any better? He found a packet of paper handkerchiefs in his pocket and mopped his forehead.

“Hot, isn’t it?” the man behind the glass tried.

“That’s a fucking understatement,” said Brajc. “Babnik, apparently you’ve got a carcass down in the park? Is anyone with her?”

Babnik nodded,

“Two brats are keeping watch over it for you.”

Brajc half turned to Babnik as he was leaving,

“The grey Omega out in your parking lot is mine. I hope it’s not towed away by the time I come back and I have to rush around to retrieve it.”

He stepped outside and found himself in the sun. Tiredly he glanced at the sky between the building of the General Police Directorate and the Nebotičnik, looked in the direction of the park that, despite living in Ljubljana and its outskirts all his life, he could not remember the

name of, and set off in the opposite direction, towards the coffee bar in the deep shade of the passage between Štefanova and Cankarjeva. The body could wait.

This was where Osterc found him, at the table next to the outside wall of the bar. He was leaning against the large glass wall that was cracked with large pieces of tape stuck over the damage.

“What happened to this?” Osterc asked.

“I don’t know and I really don’t care,” said Brajc and pointed to the empty chair.

“Wouldn’t it be better if...” Osterc tried but still sat down.

He then ordered a juice because his usual green tea would take ages to cool in this heat that was creeping even into this tunnel. He drank it instantly, throwing a contemptuous look at Brajc who was only slowly sipping on his cappuccino, wiped his brow with a handkerchief and beckoned to the waitress.

“Your turn,” Brajc said to Osterc who was still fiddling around with his wallet before finding the coins he dropped into the palm of the student waitress who waited patiently with a bored expression on her face. He then hurried after Brajc who was already swaying down the passage towards the blinding sunlight.

Standing by the body lying on the park bench, behind the police cordon that separated the bench and its immediate surroundings from the outside world, stood two young police officers in uniform. At the other end a figure clad in white plastic was bending over, scratching the ground under the bench. Brajc lifted the cord and made his way straight to the man in a white Tyvek protective suit, while Osterc, showing his police ID, calmed down the two policemen who had jumped towards him.

“So what do we have, Golob?”

Golob nodded and continued collecting whatever it was he was collecting from under the bench. Brajc leaned over the body and grabbed his nose.

“Urgh, Jesus Christ, how long has she been here?”

“Not very long,” said the voice under the bench. “Judging by the *muscidae* larvae, specifically those of *musca domestica*, ten or twelve hours at the most. The stench is... partly due to the heat, partly antecedent.”



“Yuck,” said Brajc, “Yucky yuck.”

With disgust on his face he leaned over the old woman’s dead body from which Golob had already removed all the plastic bags, carefully placing them into his own bag. In the middle of the head, among the matted and filthy hair that was almost the same ash grey colour as the woman’s skin, gaped a small, almost perfectly round hole, through which wriggling tiny white larvae were visible. Golob had transferred some of them into his test tube in order to later, in the peace and quiet of his own lab, weigh and measure them and, taking into consideration the day and night temperatures of the specific micro-location, estimate the time when the bullet shot through the barrel of the pistol – for he was almost convinced that it *was* a pistol – penetrated the skull, flew through the gap in between the planks of wood on the bench under the victim’s head and hit the metal bracket with which the bench was fixed to the ground, flattening and shattering as it did so. He picked up the fragments of lead, tin, and, as he assumed rather than established at first sight, also copper, which would lead to a definite conclusion that this was a case of a *full metal jacket bullet* or FMJ as forensics might say in some American film, in which Golob would be played by...

“Don’t you have the cartridge?”

“Let me do my job, please,” Golob barked at Brajc.

No, he didn’t have it. If he had had the cartridge he could, with some luck, not only determine the type of weapon, but even find its owner if the firearm was in the databases of any country with membership of Interpol. These fragments he was picking up from the ground with tweezers wouldn’t be of much use to him.

“I just wanted to help,” said Brajc, moving backwards out of the way and then turning round towards someone he noticed on the horizon.

“There! Here comes Taras,” he said over his shoulder. “Golob, you’d better make up what you don’t yet know.”

translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh