

The Laurentis Case

András László



BERSERKER

BOOKS



FIRST NIGHT

First chapter

Józsa was just about to leave. He pushed the two folders into the table box, turned the key twice, removed it and pocketed it.

He sighed. Home at last! He glanced at the clock on the wall. Five minutes to eleven. He would be home by half past eleven. Mórika had probably prepared a warm dinner. He smiled. Broad beans with smoked meat. He had a great fondness for broad beans with smoked meat.

He went to the door.

At that moment, the phone on his desk rang.

Józsa stood still. His eyes burned with fatigue, it was like lead in his limbs.

He turned round and up the phone.

"Józsa. Please."

"Commissariat of the XIV District. Lieutenant Karpai, guard commander. I have a murder to report, Comrade Major."

Józsa tightened up. He was back to his old self. Thirsty for action and self-confident. He hadn't closed an eye in six and thirty hours.

Here Ferenc J. Szücs paused for a moment. He thought about it.

The question is: Is it right for a Hungarian police officer to work overtime? Does the overtime regulation also apply to the police? On top of that, anyone who is so exhausted cannot work properly. Even though the tension of brain work comes about through self-induction, as he read somewhere recently. But still ... No. The problem is far-fetched. Doctors, police officers and literary critics are not allowed to have fixed working hours. They have to be available day and night, at all hours, to serve the common good.

He carefully stretches out his left hand and feels the bedside table. He doesn't want to knock anything over. This is the bell button, this is the wristwatch. What time might it be? He couldn't check anyway. He feels further. There it is, the glass. He grasps it carefully, lifts it, places it on the bedspread above his chest, slides his hand up to the edge of the glass, feels all around it like a blind man and finally finds the plastic drinking tube. He flicks the tube until it points in the direction of his mouth. Slowly he tilts the glass, just a little, the tube bumps first against the bandage around his chin, then against the one over his nose. Finally it finds his mouth. It was left free when he was bandaged.

It sucks extensively from the lemon juice.

It's a pity he can't move his right hand, it's in a plaster cast. Otherwise he would put his index finger in the glass now to check whether there is still enough juice in it or whether he has to ring for the nurse to bring more. Well, later. When he's finished.

He cheats the glass back onto the bedside table. Now he just lies there. It is quiet. He hears the silence. There is a little rustling in his ears under the thick bandage.

He is warm. He bends his left leg at the knee, so now there's a bit of air under the blanket. He moves his toes so that they don't fall asleep while lying motionless.

Where were we? Etuka. No. Not Etuka. The murder. And that Józsa hasn't closed his eyes for thirty-six hours. He likes this Józsa, this clever, decent, pithy man with the clean family life, with Mórika, his charming little wife. An immovable, great character. Józsa does not age. He invented him twenty-three or twenty-four years ago, and since then he has been writing - writing? thinking and playing - novels with him, crime stories. With his eyes closed, disciplined, because that's how he relaxes and disperses, that's how he captivates his thoughts. He likes Józsa very much. Józsa is his favourite Poirot and his Maigret. In the beginning, Józsa was still a chief inspector, once even (and Ferenc J. Szücs is ashamed of himself, he doesn't like to think about it) he was Jauser, a tall, blond, lanky Gestapo officer who fell in love with Mórika, this wonderful brown-haired Hungarian teacher, he would certainly have forgotten this Jauser by now, but Jauser married Mórika, thus symbolising the German-Hungarian friendship of the stormy war years, thus Jauser unfortunately became a decisive person in Józsa's life, J. Szücs could not rely on Mórika. Szücs could not do without Mórika, J. Szücs was sixteen years old at the time, fortunately Jauser disappeared, Józsa remained, Józsa is alive, he is a major in the Democratic Police and very tired, at home the thick beans with the smoked meat are slowly cooling in the roasting tin, he has not closed an eye for six and thirty hours, and now this murder ...

"Who is the victim?" asks Józsa into the receiver.

"Doctor Ernő Laurentis, corresponding member

of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences," reports Lieutenant Karpai.

"Don't touch anything. I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

Major Józsa goes to the standby desk and orders a He calls his wife to come home late because he still has work to do, his heart is breaking for the broad beans with the smoked meat; when he steps out of the house, the Volga is already waiting and he gets in, sighing. He is very tired.

"We can, Comrade Kucsora. To the commissariat of the XIV district," he says to the driver, then lowers his head to the headrest and closes his eyes.

Napoleon slept like this too, he thinks before falling asleep. Like this. Five or ten minutes at a time.

In the sultry summer night, the Volga rushes along Rákóczi Street.

"It's going to storm," grumbles Kucsora, without taking his eyes off the carriageway.

But Major Józsa no longer hears this. He is asleep. Kucsora smiles broadly. Poor guy, he thinks sympathetically.

He must dog-tired.

At the start of the empty Thökölystraße, he steps on the accelerator.

He would kick if Ferenc J. Szücs would let him. He doesn't let him. He sits next to comrade Kucsora in the car and slams on the brakes.

"Stop!"

The wheels are almost smoking from the sudden braking. The car pulls over to the side.

Józsa is . "What is it? Are we there?"

"No, comrade Józsa. I don't understand it, it was as if someone had slammed on the brakes. I can't grasp that."

"Understand, understand," says J. Szücs angrily. "Of course you don't understand. It was me. That's stupid.

We lose valuable minutes if we are not at the scene of the crime immediately."

Józsa turns her head to the side thoughtfully. "Hm, that's true. But what should I do now? The guard didn't say where the murder took place."

"That's not his fault," says J. Szücs magnanimously. He is self-critical, you have to hand it to him. "I didn't think he would have to tell you. At least you could have asked him, Comrade Józsa. You are no longer a beginner."

"You're right, but this tiredness, Comrade Szücs. I haven't slept a wink in thirty-six hours."

"Fine, I understand. Never mind. I know where we have to go. Turn round, Comrade Kucsora. The murder took place near the Népstadion, diagonally opposite the point where Jobbágy Street joins."

Kucsora pulls up and turns round, then they drive back along Thökölystrasse.

"Am I God or am I not?! There you go!" J. Szücs grumbles half aloud through the mouth opening of the bandage covering his entire head, lying in bed in his single room in the hospital. He is fully aware that this a somewhat outdated, old-fashioned romantic theory, when the author, who, like God, sees everything and knows everything, interferes in the fate of his heroes, into their souls and into their pots, gives orders, instructions, enacts laws, but Ferenc J. Szücs takes pleasure in being God, at least when he writes these novels in his head that never make it to paper and are never printed, a sovereign ruler, benevolent and just, but also strict and frowning. *For behold, there is not a word on my tongue that you, Lord, do not know all about.* Enlightened abolitionism. Patriarchal views. Do I have a father complex? Father did not have a father complex.

He raises both arms, his hands at the back of his neck, the freshly put on shirt is already a little sweaty under the armpits, a gesture as if he were dancing, that's how the peasant boys dance at Whitsun, but he doesn't dance, he just opens the metal hook of the moustache tie at the back of his neck, with two short steps he is in front of the mirror, in the room the smell of soap, the sour-sweet nightly sleeping smell of the still warm beds and the paraffin smell of the shoe wax mingle, the shiny black boots, "they must be shiny, my boy, so that the sunlight slips on them and shoots pixies", he leans forward, close to the mirror, takes off the moustache tie, places it carefully and lost in thought next to the wash basin, looks in the mirror at the sticky, compressed hairs of the still barely greying, thick black moustache with the curly, upwardly twirled tips, they must be the same, without looking, he reaches for the small brush with his right hand, with swift, short movements he brushes the beard until it looks alive, then he turns the tips from top to bottom and inside, for a moment he stands there rigidly, his right hand with the brush in the air, now it strokes the eyebrows on the right and left, the thick, long eyebrows, he looks in the mirror, puts the brush away, checks the smoothness of the face with the back of his index finger, he frowns again in the mirror, then turns around and spreads his arms, mother stands behind him, she holds the uniform coat like a holy virgin, but he doesn't look behind him, he puts both arms into the uniform coat, it doesn't need to move, it all happens wordlessly, with one hand he closes the buttons, like the officers do in the cinema, the rubber collar, the belt, the raised index finger, plus the daily joke, "that you won't be stubborn with me at school!", he knows exactly that I

he bends down to Mother, kisses her on the forehead, I flinch as he strokes my head with his hand, now he leaves, as he walks he takes the jack with the cock's feathers from the hook, the feathers sway and shimmer, he opens the door, goes out and into the next room, through the next door into the guardroom, he could also go straight across, But in front of the door between the two rooms is the brown wardrobe, Mother steps to the window and opens it, she always opens it only when he leaves, she pushes the shutters open and hooks them tight, the sun is shining outside, Easter is coming soon, the bells are ringing in St. Anton, the Easter holidays start tomorrow, the voice of Corporal Balog can be heard from the next room as he reports in a tight posture, "Mr Chief Constable, please report obediently ..."

But the way Karpai reports when Józsa arrives is different, completely different. Chattering and endeavouring not to let his excitement show, he reports. A couple had the victim, they thought he had taken ill, the young man lifted him by the shoulder, he fell back, they ran to the café on the corner and made a phone call. Rigor mortis has not yet set in, Lieutenant Karpai lifts the wrapping paper covering the body with two fingers and shows it to Józsa.

"Was he robbed?" asks Józsa.

"No. We found three hundred and twenty forints in his wallet. And small change. He was shot. From behind. Here's the bullet hole." Karpai shows the spot.

"Is that his briefcase?"

"Yes. Manuscripts and a wrapped book. A consignment from abroad. He's probably just picked it up from the post office in Versenystrasse."

"Where did he live?"

"Not far from here. In Columbus Street."

"Married?"

"Divorced, according to the information on the identity card." Józsa looks around, slowly letting his gaze wander. He takes a few steps in the direction from which the victim must have come, looks back at the victim, looks at the ground, estimates with his eyes the direction from which the shot was probably fired, then goes back to Karpai.

"Make sure that everything is thoroughly examined, then take the body away. I want a report tonight on the medical examination, the circumstances, further details. Appoint a liaison officer, take the keys from the victim's pocket, carefully. You come with me to Kolumbusstrasse. I'll be at the car in five minutes. That's it."

Józsa turns away and lights a cigarette. He walks slowly and thoughtfully to the car. He holds the packet out to Kucsora.

He fends him off with a smile. "Still a non-smoker, Comrade Major."

"Oh yes. I forgot."

Second chapter

J. Szücs has the feeling that he is gradually coming in. It's getting there, the story is getting there. For the time being he still has no idea who Ernő Laurentis, nor what the motive for the deed might be, right, that's it, the old golden rule set in hexameter: *quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando*, so, not in hexameter: *who, what, where, by what, why*,

how, when, but if he all that, the inventions would no longer be interesting to him. He likes this pleasant, exciting, intellectual tension; crossword puzzles, bridge, rummy and canasta are nonsense, J. Szücs despises all those who write crime novels backwards, who first look for the solution and then construct the plot from behind. *This is not maths, comrades*, he likes to tell Józsa, *but real life*. Afterwards, Józsa usually takes a short break from art - why should he lack natural human vanity? - He enjoys the fact that his younger, less experienced colleagues devour his words, he looks around the room, then adds: *"However, mathematics is also part of life, so it should not be despised either."*

So J. Szücs in his hospital bed is excited, excited even in Józsa's place, because Józsa can't get excited, he's an old fox, an experienced criminalist, he's worked in all areas, from traffic and accident prevention to administration and vice to offences against the people, he knows the trade inside out with all its tricks, he's familiar with all the technical possibilities, Józsa doesn't get upset.

He stands in front of the garden door of the house in Kolumbusstrasse and waits for the caretaker to come out and unlock it.

"Police," he says to the caretaker and shows his badge. "We're looking for Doctor Laurentis' flat."

"From the professor? Great Creator, what's happened? I don't even know if he's at home. I haven't seen him leave." The caretaker is restless, agitated, but Józsa knows that's normal, he's not suspicious of the caretaker's behaviour.

"Which is the professor's flat?" he asks.

"Second floor, number three. Come on, I'll show you. The lift is there."

"Thank you, we'll find our own way up."

A lift is just a lift. A stairwell is terrain.

The first key Józsa tries doesn't fit, but the second one opens Laurentis' flat.

Karpai's little torch lights up, they find the switch and flick the light on.

The flat is empty. Two rooms and the hallway. Books, books everywhere. A small modern wardrobe, radio with record player, a large desk full of paper, meticulous order everywhere. Even on the desk.

Józsa walks around the flat, opens the wardrobe, closes it again, looks at the two glasses on the table and the half-filled bottle of gin, lifts one of the glasses, sniffs it, inspects the couch, lifts the blanket lying on it, puts it back, goes into the bathroom, looks in the toilet cupboard, feels the towel, goes back into the study, sits down at the desk, lifts a bundle of manuscripts wrapped in string, pulls open the drawer, takes out a sheet of paper, reads.

"Dearest, I was here, nice as I am, but I'm in a hurry, tomorrow morning I'm going to Lake Balaton with Dóra for a few days, sorry I didn't get here until after seven, Aurél telegraphed from Berlin to call me at eight, that's why I didn't call you. I'll send you a card to let you know when I'll be back.

A little kiss. Zsu."

Józsa carefully reads the message that Laurentis no longer received twice. Then he continues to check the desk. A kind of school magazine. Ferenc Kölcsey Grammar School, 1932. He leafs through it and puts it aside. The calendar. 17 July. Poor professor, Józsa thinks. He has torn off 17 July in advance, he won't live to see it.

He turns to Karpai, with whom he has only exchanged half-words so far. "Well?"

"I think the matter is clear. He waits for a woman, she doesn't come, he goes to the post office, in the meantime she comes and leaves the note here. The glasses are unused, the professor hasn't had anything to drink either."

"Yes," says Józsa wanly. "And you didn't notice that this woman has a key to his flat? So she's his permanent girlfriend. Small and brown-haired and, as the note also shows, married of course, her husband is in Berlin. Call directory enquiries and ask who was called from Berlin around eight o'clock."

"But how do you know that the woman is short and brown-haired, Comrade Major?"

"Are you married, Comrade Karpai?"

"Single. Still."

"Well. You've seen the negligee in his wardrobe, haven't you? And the slippers. Size five and thirty. A tall, sturdy woman doesn't size thirty-five shoes. And brown? What kind of hair does Laurentis have?"

"Light blonde, as far as I."

"Please. Didn't you notice that there were several long brown hairs stuck between the teeth of the comb in the bathroom?"

"I still have a lot to learn, Comrade Major."

"That's all right. Don't worry about it. Those who are married always know more about such things."

Karpai gets on the phone and speaks to the information centre. Józsa inspects the flat again. He takes a book from the bookshelf and leafs through it, goes to the desk and looks at the school magazine, then at the sheet of paper again, he studies the woman's handwriting. He finds the tear-off pad from which the note came, lifts it up, takes the first blank sheet and holds it up to the light at an angle, looks at it and sighs.

Karpai is on the phone, waiting for the answer. He closes the mouthpiece and says to Józsa: "Between seven and nine, a single call came in from Berlin. It was for the Turkish export salesman Mutalaki Eftin Bei at the Hotel Duna. The colleague is now looking to see if there is one of the day's calls for a line whose owner's first name is Aurél. I'm waiting for that." And immediately afterwards into the speakerphone: "Yes, I'm still here. I'm writing in. Yes. At fifteen thirty. Thank you very much. Goodbye." And to Józsa: "Doctor Aurél Tamacskó. Here's the address. And the telephone number."

"It will him," sighs Józsa. His eyes almost close. "Zsu swore at the professor on the note."

"We could call the number," says Karpai, "and interrogate the lady."

"Unnecessary, I think. But try it, for my sake."

Karpai chooses. He waits. With a glance he tells Józsa that the call sign is there. He waits. And still waits. Nobody picks up. He takes the receiver a little away from his ear, now Józsa hears the call sign too.

"Hang up," says Józsa. "Nobody will answer anyway."

But Karpai remains confident. He dialled the number three more times, to no avail, then hung up, discouraged.

"You see," says Józsa.

"But how could that have been foreseen?"

"Without witchcraft. Zsu deceived the professor in that her husband called from Berlin at a different time. She probably had something else to do when she was supposed to be here with the professor. And this other occupation must have prevented her from calling him and cancelling the rendezvous. Does that make sense, Comrade Karpai?"

"Yes."

"All right then. Zsu suddenly decided to go to Lake Balaton with Dóra. We don't know who Dóra is, but from the foregoing we can deduce without particular boldness that Dóra is the cover name of the same man, admittedly only for Laurentis, which is why she could neither come here nor call on Laurentis. In short, an adventure. An important one. She probably phoned later, Laurentis was no longer at home, she came here quickly, possibly in a taxi, wrote the note and hurried off, presumably with this third man to Lake Balaton or somewhere else. We can assume she really did go to Lake Balaton when she announced that she was going to write him a card."

Karpai is full of enthusiasm and eagerness to serve.

"I call the taxi company and try to find out if any small, brown-haired woman has been driven to this neighbourhood between nine and eleven."

"Superfluous. Superfluous for two reasons. Firstly, because we already know that Zsu was here at the time of the murder. And secondly, Comrade Karpai, in case you've forgotten, because the film studios are here in Columbusstrasse. So it's obvious that a lot of women come to this neighbourhood by taxi,

including small, brown-haired ones, frequently and at different times. So we can actually leave, Comrade Karpai."

But Karpai remains depressed the chair.

"What is it now?" asks Józsa, looking back from the door.

"Sometimes I think I'll never become a real criminalist."

Józsa smiles. "Don't worry about it, I've already told you. I didn't spring from the forehead of Zeus in full armour either. You need practice and experience, Comrade Karpai. There's an old Spanish saying: the devil knows more because he's old, not because he's the devil. Stay calm. Always take it easy. But let's go now, otherwise I'll fall asleep standing up. Oh, it's a good thing we're still here, otherwise I would have forgotten!"

He takes Zsu's note from his desk, hesitates for a moment, then slips it into the school magazine and takes it with him.

"Please, here are the keys, lock the flat, a seal won't be necessary, we'll tell the caretaker not let anyone in. Zsu won't be thawing out for a few days anyway. Tomorrow the flat is to be systematically searched. Quietly and inconspicuously. Complete discretion with regard to Zsu! I think we can cross Tamacskó off the list of suspects, maybe Zsu too, at least that seems obvious, maybe even addiction as a motive for the murder. Although that's not yet certain."

Third chapter

J. Szücs is satisfied with the results so far. He pauses for a moment, makes his assumptions and summarises. This is absolutely necessary for three reasons. Firstly, to memorise everything firmly so that nothing is forgotten or disregarded later; secondly, in order to further complicate the matter, it is also important to eliminate any contradictions that may have arisen so far, and it is also important to link up the arbitrary threads; thirdly, the critic must also be given something to do. The events to date must be subjected to rigorous criticism. He is not even thinking of trying to find out who the murderer is. That would be a hasty step and quite unnecessary for the time being. But he is already thinking about why Ernő Laurentis was murdered. And the characters are already beginning to . For example this Zsu. She promises to be very interesting. Like Józsa, he knows the tricks of the trade of writing novels like the back of his hand. Above all, he is aware of his own writing methods, the ones he uses in his head, in his imagination. This Zsu is clearly modelled on two people. In appearance she is Etuka, as evidenced by her height, her thirty-five shoe size and her brown hair, and her light-bloodedness comes from Babsi, Etuka's best friend, i.e. Mrs Ottilia Göndös, née Préth, a nymphomaniac bimbo with a Madonna's head exuding virginal innocence, blonde hair reaching down over her shoulders and pure, sky-blue eyes, a nymphomaniac bimbo, there's no better term, a slut, a bitch, a ... And this woman is Etuka's best friend, not even the best, she's her only one, and Babsi's sordid affairs are something Ferenc has to put up with.

J. Szücs, down to the last detail, because Babsi tells Etuka everything, because she knows that Etuka is silent as the grave and won't tell anyone else, Etuka is not a gossip, but she is also just a woman, she has to tell someone, J. Szücs fully understands that, and who else should she tell but him, her husband.

"Stop it already, Etuka. I'm sick and tired of Babsi's dirty affairs."

"So, so, out the neck, Ferenc. All right. I'll go on then. Shall I go on, Ferenc?"

"Go on, Etuka."

And so it has been for fourteen years. J. Szücs is aware of everything, or at least he thought for a long time that he was aware of everything, because he is an expert on human nature and knows what psychological damage the brutality of German soldiers can inflict on an adolescent girl. Etuka was no longer a girl in the physical sense of the word when, in 1950, at the age of nineteen, she married Ferenc J. Szücs, tears stood in her beautiful brown eyes when she told him how three of the fleeing German soldiers had attacked her in Szombathely when Etuka was only fourteen, luckily she didn't get pregnant, but since then she has never become pregnant again, Unfortunately, in the first few months after the wedding, they still had a proper married life, but one evening Etuka confessed to him, again with tears in her eyes, that she was disgusted by being together physically and that she hadn't said anything yet because she didn't want to offend him. "Maybe I should to the doctor? I feel so unhappy," said Etuka, tears rolling down her cheeks, then she went to a doctor for months, how she praised him, "he's so gentle, he's so clever", once she took Babsi with her, Babsi then had a relationship with the doctor, Babsi learned to be a doctor.

told Etuka in minute detail, as only intimate friends talk to each other, about the course of this relationship, and Etuka went on to tell him, it was clear that Etuka was young, healthy to the core apart from the emotional injury, full of life, desirable, she was living it up in Babsi's dirty affairs. J. Szücs had studied psychology for four semesters, he of all people should not understand her? Transposition of personality, that's what they call it. But even the doctor couldn't cure Etuka's ailments. At first, J. Szücs was still amused by Babsi's adventures and how, with Etuka's help, she always managed to pull the wool over the eyes of her husband Bálint, who adored this nymphomaniac, perverted tramp unreservedly and with almost religious fervour, but should he forbid Etuka to have anything to do with her best friend? He might have done so if Etuka hadn't had this psychological injury, this terrible memory that made her shudder at every physical touch, because she transposes her unfulfilled desires onto Babsi and lives them out in Babsi's adventures, so much so that sometimes, when she tells J. Szücs about it, she forgets that it all happened to Babsi, which is why she then tells the story in the first person singular, as if it had all happened to her, but J. Szücs knows how it is, even before the marriage he confessed to Etuka that he writes crime novels in his head, shouldn't he of all people know how much one can identify with his characters? Of course he does, he knows world literature inside out, a thousand and one thousand novel heroes and heroines, not to mention the supporting characters, there are no new situations, no new stories, everything has been written before, even this, one moment, he's got it, the budding, then blossoming friendship of two girls in the strict walls of a convent school, later their

Marriages, the continuation of friendship with the alternation of hatred and love, the intimate confessions, this ambiguous, only suspected, open and at the same time secret relationship between them, a moment, J. Szücs concentrates, and if his eyes were not closed under the headband, he would close them now, another second, yes, he has it, Courtelier, ambiguous friendships, *Les amitiés ambiguës*, because he has read it in French.

Yes, but what is Józsa doing now? Józsa is sleeping now. J. Szücs does not sleep. He doesn't know what time it might be, he assumes he woke up between eight and nine in the evening, maybe it's half past two in the morning, but it could also be that it's just as late as Józsa's time now, half past six in the morning, in which case the fictitious time in the novel would coincide exactly with the real time, because today is 17 July. Not so, because novels can only be written about things that have already happened, even if they are set in the future, the events have taken place in the past, measured at the time of writing, and writing in the present tense is certainly an invigorating stylistic method. And if, think

J. Szücs in consistent logic, today is 17 July and in the novel it is also 17 July, for Józsa, who is still sleeping at home next to Mórika in his bed, then everything happened at least a year ago, in 1964. So: What did I do a year ago? asks J. Szücs. I took my last exams at university on 2 July, the critics' conference in Prague began on the 13th, I gave my paper there on the third day, *Some Problems of the Modern Socialist Novel*, that was on the 15th, the day before, that was on the 14th, I called Etuka from Prague for the first time, that's right, for the second time on the 16th, when she said she would come with Babsi and Bálint the next morning for

go to Lake Balaton for a few days. That's right. According to this, I am also Doctor Aurél Tamacskó, because of course I am also Józsa, in fact you can't write a novel without such a double or multiple transposition of personality, without such a deliberate splitting of consciousness. But time is running out, the murderer is still large, he may commit another outrage, I'm sorry he can't sleep in again, I have to wake Józsa up. Should Mórika wake up too?

Different: Mórika wakes up. Józsa is generally a light sleeper, he opens his eyes at the slightest noise, but now he is so dead tired that he only wakes up twice when the phone rings, he turns on his side and pulls the duvet over his head, because Józsa sleeps under a duvet in summer and winter. Mórika always says: "I don't understand you, Gábor, aren't you going to die under this thick down?"

Mórika jumps out of bed, she is still beautiful, plump and mature, a pretty Hungarian face with a small dimple on her chin,

J. Szücs would only have married such a woman if he had been as strong, tall and robust as Józsa, but someone like Etuka suits him, she is no less well-built, plump and yet slim, like Mórika, only smaller.

Mórika picks up the receiver, the phone is next to Józsa's bed, she sits down on the edge of the bed and pushes the thick feather pillow aside a little, so she sits there in her nightgown, J. Szücs immerses himself in this sight for a while, but then he calls himself to order, just speak, Mórika, speak.

"Hello," says Mórika.

"Captain Ringler, from the Presidium. I would like to speak to Comrade Józsa."

"I am his wife. My husband is asleep."

"I'm very sorry, but you'll probably have to wake him up. It's very important."

"Just a moment, Comrade Ringler, I'll try." Mórika shakes Józsa gently on the shoulder. La-
She looks at this huge teddy bear man, who is sleeping like a log. "Gábor ..."

Józsa flinches, opens her eyes and sits up. "Give me the receiver." Then into the receiver: "This is Józsa. Is it you, Ringler? Yes. I see." Silence.

"Leave the dissection report, I'll read it later. When exactly did the death occur? That's important. Between a quarter to ten and a quarter to eleven? Have you looked at his watch? It happens that when it falls it branches off and stops."

"A Doxa wristwatch, waterproof and impact-resistant. She's still walking as if nothing had happened."

"Bad luck," says Józsa curtly. He looks at Mórika's back as she bends over in her light nightgown to plug the coffee machine into the socket. "Call Laurentis' divorced wife, go to her, talk to her. I'll be there in an hour ..." he looks at Mórika, who is just standing up and turns to him with a smile, "no, in about an hour and a half. I still have to eat last night's supper. I can't work on an empty stomach. Good day."

He hangs up, grabs Mórika around the waist and pulls her onto his knees. Mórika embraces him with her white, naked arms.

"You see," sighs Józsa, "you have an impossible husband."

"I know, I know!" Mórika laughs, leans forward and kisses him. "I know, you big donkey ..."

J. Szücs pauses here. He considers whether he should go into further details of this intimate family scene or conclude this part. Why conclude,

he counters. Am I writing the novel for readers under eighteen? Not much longer and I'll be forty. I'm an adult, I'm married. There's no point in finishing it here, nobody reads it but me anyway, besides I'm ill, I have to lie there with shattered limbs, you need a bit of entertainment. It's not a novel for young people. I did criticise Kertes' *Inert Cat* harshly because of the use of erotic elements as an end in themselves, but that was something else. There are at least three, and to be precise, four extramarital relationships in the novel, not to the fact that the main hero is married for the third time, that in the well-constructed work of the otherwise talented Kertes these scenes, which almost border on pornography, have a functional meaning, these love affairs and, let's call them that, love surrogates have an important function in the consciousness, in the activities of Dukász, the young main hero of Kertes, a building engineer, and thus in the plot of the novel. But Kertes doesn't think about the public, which firmly rejects such an attitude in pure morality. When I discussed Kertes' novel and the criticism I had written about it with Szalai in the coffee house, he accused me of being conservative and of wanting to impose the outdated norms of Christian morality on socialist society, which, with the sum of its external and internal changes, aims to create a free world of free people and one of whose tasks is precisely to eradicate what is wrong and immoral from people's consciousness. And he still had the audacity, this scoundrel, to rely on the dialectic of nature.

to invoke! In Kertes' novel, he claimed, this very transitional state is well reflected, the revolutionary change in consciousness, the attempt to escape the old morality, even if Dukász has to overcome numerous cliffs in order to finally find the inner balance of his consciousness in a free, pure love and to draw strength from it for his further path in life. And I, I should look around the world more thoroughly and realise that Kertes represents the changing, bubbling reality! Does the idiot think I don't know that? But he shouldn't do it with such crude means! When it comes to Marxism, Szalai really won't back me into a corner. I've given him a thorough talking-to. Our view rejects the old morality, but adopts and realises in a purified form everything that is progressive, useful and forward-looking in this era. The demand for cleanliness in the most elementary human relationships. The public does not tolerate someone digging around in sexuality with naturalistic means, with sultry, almost obscene bed scenes, under the pretext of depicting reality. Really good literature has never had to do that before. To which the stupid bloke objected that Kertes' novel was already completely out of print on the second day after my review appeared. You criticised the bed scenes so well, he said, that the readers were fighting over the book. Never mind, he continued, the novel is good. As if I had written that the novel was bad! I said clearly in my review that Kertes is not without talent and that we can still expect a lot from him if he can free himself from depicting the erotic with naturalistic means. Szalai asked scornfully: "And that's not naturalism for you, when Dukász sits at his drawing board in the novel and draws six prints?"

I asked him if he would spend a whole night designing a new building complex because he has to deliver at nine o'clock in the morning? No, I explained to him, that's not naturalism, that's the apotheosis of labour! Of course, he didn't know what to say to that, he just waved it off. Oh, he said, I can't argue with you.

The memory of this unnerving conversation has Unfortunately, J. Szücs is distracted by Józsa and Móríka, and when he thinks of them again, Józsa is already sitting at the kitchen table, spooning up last night's broad beans with smoked meat. Móríka sits opposite him, satisfied, her face smiling, her chin resting on her hands, watching him eat with appetite, gorging because he's hungry and also because he's in a hurry. Móríka's hair, that splendid mop of golden yellow hair, is now much more dishevelled than when J. Szücs left her after the telephone conversation with Ringler, she has only quickly pinned it back with a mother-of-pearl clip, she is so beautiful that J. Szücs feels the greatest desire to send the two of them back to bed, but then he doesn't because his shoulder hurts a little, apparently the effect of the painkillers is wearing off, it doesn't matter, there are no limits to human thought, later he will perhaps recount the events between the conversation with Ringler and the kitchen scene for his own amusement.

J. Szücs gently stretches out his unharmed left hand, feels the bell button and rings the bell, then waits.

He hears the door open. And how the friendly, youthful voice asks: "Please? Do you have a wish?"

"My shoulder ." He pauses for a moment, not sure how to say it. "And I have to go for a pee."

Chapter Four

Józsa sits at his desk and looks at his watch. Half past ten. Less than twelve hours have passed since he received the first report on Laurentis's murder, and in the meantime a lot of paper has piled up, statements, reports, minutes, recordings, all revealing further details of the case, the deputy minister has called Józsa, Laurentis was an important man, president of several scientific societies, Laurentis was an important man, president of several scientific societies, university professor and corresponding member of the Academy, once also minister, but only ambassador and minister plenipotentiary for two years, but nevertheless, the importance of his person does not exclude the possibility that the case had a political background, the deputy minister said on the phone. Józsa doesn't believe that, it doesn't look like that, he could have smelled it, but he is nervous that he still has no theory as to who the perpetrator might be, no suspects far and wide, and therefore the motive for the crime is also unknown. He has already come up with four or five theories, but when he starts to piece together the details, each theory turns out to be a dead end. He even suspected that a student was the perpetrator whom Laurentis had failed the exam, now it was summer, now the exams were over, he called the university, even though he himself didn't seriously in the possibility, and it turned out that Laurentis hadn't failed anyone that year.

Józsa orders a strong, flavoured wine from his secretary. Mocha and says that he doesn't want to be disturbed, only the most urgent phone calls, he's working now. He places a blank sheet of paper in front of him and divides it into eight columns. Let's start from the beginning, he says to himself. Using the old, primitive, Latin method.

What happened? Sure. The murder of fifty-one-year-old university professor Ernő Laurentis.

Who committed the murder? If only we knew!

How was the murder committed? From diagonally behind, probably from a distance of ten metres, probably from the road.

With what? This question logically belongs here. Yes, with a simple Belgian Browning, as there are countless of them all over the country. If the weapon were found, the weapons expert would be able to determine whether the murder shot was fired from it. But where is the weapon? The weapon is not there.

Where? Diagonally opposite the junction of Jobbágy Street, on the side of the Népstadion.

When? On 16 July between twenty-one forty-five and twenty-two fifteen.

Why? The motive for the offence is unknown. There is no motive.

Eighth column. *List of suspects.* It remains empty. Józsa stares into the air and chews on his bullet. writer. *Empty head, empty paper, I wish for an idea.* Of course that's not true, Józsa's head is full of ideas, they just don't lead to success.

Józsa thinks about Zsu. About Zsu, who has cheated him. Zsu's name is Dalma and she is only called Bizsu or Zsu by her friends, which is how she signed the note. I fell for it, thinks Józsa. Dalma Ta- macskó born Andai, also called Zsu or Bizsu, whereabouts unknown. Her best friend, Dóra Straub, deputy head of the commercial department at the stocking plant, hasn't seen Bizsu for three or four days, but Józsa had guessed that, so it's clear that she's travelling with a man. Yesterday evening. Searching for her through the police is hopeless, it's high season at Lake Balaton, there's a lot of hun-

thousands everywhere, someone should find Zsu. Or Bizsu. Bijou. The jewel, the gem. But it would be important. The dactyloscopes found fingerprints on the torn-off calendar page from 16 July that was in the wastepaper basket. The caretaker cleans Laurentis' house and her fingerprints were also found in the flat, but the same prints were on the calendar page as on the size thirty-five slippers in the wardrobe. Zsu's.

Is it relevant to Laurentis' murder that Zsu tore off this calendar page? Hardly likely. But the question still occupies Józsa. Unfortunately, he can't dwell on it. Let's take look at Laurentis' statements.

Born in Veszprém in 1914, his father was a grammar school teacher who was dismissed from teaching in 1920 due to his political activities during the Soviet Republic, moved to Budapest in the same year and worked as a journalist there. Ernő Laurentis attended the Kölcsey Grammar School and passed his doctoral examinations at the University of Szeged in 1938. Repeatedly harassed by the Horthy police because of his left-wing views, called up for military service in 1942, but discharged due to recurrent neuralgia, worked as a civil servant, married the teacher Krisztina Braun in 1943 ...

Józsa searches among the papers and pulls out a sheet. This is it. Statement by Mrs Krisztina Csépán, née Braun, divorced Laurentis.

"We married in nineteen forty-three. We didn't have any children. We separated on good terms ten years ago, after eleven years of marriage. I didn't see Ernő again after that, as I remarried in nineteen fifty-five. When we met by chance, we always had a friendly chat. He quiet and thoughtful, but nevertheless

His specialism was Bronze Age archaeology, to which he devoted all his free time when he was forced to be an official. When he was appointed to the university in nineteen forty-six, many predicted a stellar career in his field, but unfortunately this never materialised. Now he became more of a public man than ever, I would have preferred him to stay in archaeology. I don't know anything about his relationships with women, he hasn't remarried, but a year or six months ago I heard from someone that he had started an affair with a married woman. I don't know who this woman is. The last time I saw Ernő was perhaps in March. Lately he started to put on a lot of weight, I was worried and told him he should go on a weight loss programme, but he just laughed. It was terrible that he was killed."

It's all very nice, Józsa thinks, but it doesn't get us anywhere. The caretaker and his wife, who cleaned his house, didn't know anything; he hardly ever had any visitors, just a few students, boys and girls from the university from time to time. "The professor only rarely had guests, and I was happy about that, because I don't like washing up," says the caretaker. "This lady didn't come often either, of course we don't know exactly, but she might have visited him once or twice a week. I that's because of the glasses, otherwise the professor never drank alcohol and only ever ate cold food in the evening, mainly yoghurt. He always had lunch in the city."

That's right. Józsa remembers seeing an empty yoghurt bottle in the kitchen, and the section report confirms the caretaker's statement. Apparently he wanted to pick up again. The postman had left a note with the caretaker the previous day.

He had tried in vain for the second time to deliver a consignment of books and now it had to be collected from the Versenystasse post office by twenty o'clock. Laurentis had phoned the post office to say he couldn't collect the consignment until after eight. That was at nine-ten-thirty. Shortly before eight, another call asking if he could come after nine. Yes, he was told, it was against the rules, but he could pick the consignment at the night inspector's office until twenty-three, and he should bring his identity card.

So Laurentis was determined to wait for Zsu until one and twenty o'clock. Maybe they only missed each other by minutes, Józsa muses. Or maybe they missed each other by a quarter or half an hour. Laurentis accepted the book consignment two minutes after half past nine, the porter at the post office was the last person to see him alive, Laurentis greeted him with "Good evening" as he left the building. It is quite rare for someone to greet you as you leave, the porter, Ferenc Babali, recognised the professor in the photo, yes, he said hello. He didn't know what time it was. About half past nine, he said.

The residents in the neighbourhood didn't hear a shot, or they didn't hear it. In a flat at the mouth of Jobbágy Street, loud dance music was playing on the radio, lorries often drive past there, including postal vehicles, one child saw a foreign car, but that was further up, "dark grey, a sleigh, I can tell you, class, which brand, I don't know, I've never seen it before," said the child, who was called in for dinner by his father from the window on the ground floor. The child couldn't say which country the car came from, he only knew that it wasn't Hungarian.

The shoemaker's assistant István P. Rottner and the

Júlia Z., the underage female apprentice who discovered Laurentis' body, also know nothing that could help the investigation. The dead man was lying completely in the shadows, "we didn't even look round much because we had other things to do, one more step and I would have stepped on his hand. Then Júlia said: "Watch out! What's that? I bent down and thought I was going to be sick, I asked: What's wrong, old man, aren't you feeling well? But by then I was already feeling queasy because he wasn't moving at all. I lifted him by the shoulder, he was too heavy and fell back. Júlia said: Good heavens, he's dead, he's dead. I replied: Yes, dead as a doornail. You stay here, I said to her, but she was scared and came with me. We went over to the café and told the boss, he wanted to call, but I said I'd found the body, I'd call. And that's what I did. You know the rest."

According to the post-mortem report, the bullet had entered under the left shoulder blade and lodged in the right ventricle. Death thus ensued. According to the fully concurring opinion of the doctor and the weapons expert, the shot was from the carriageway, the murderer was either considerably smaller than the tall Laurentis, or he did not shoot from shoulder height, as is usual with a pistol, but from the hip, from bottom to top, which seemed unlikely, however, as even the most experienced shooters cannot aim accurately. The accuracy of the aim also seemed to rule out the assumption that the shot had come from a moving car, and the residents would probably have to remember a car that had been parked at the side of the road for some time.

Józsa racks his brains over this. As if automatically, he picks up the phone and calls Ringler.

"What does it look like? Have you tried to reconstruct?"

"I came back at that moment and was just about to call you, but you beat me to it."

"Tell , what is it!" Józsa's voice sounds irritated.

"Dude, it's fantastic. Do you want me to round?"

"Later. Tell me now what out."

"Well, the shooter was either a midget or a child, but even then they shot from below, so not from the shoulder, but from the hip or slightly above, or Laurentis was shot from a car."

"What's so fantastic about that? We already know that!"

"But excuse me, mate! A midget? Or a child?"

"Oh, you're talking nonsense! What if it was a small woman? just shot him like that and happened to hit him right in the heart? You didn't think of that?"

"Well well, I hadn't thought of that."

"From what height did the shot come?"

"Between seventy-five and ninety centimetres. The distance was at most three to four and at least two to three metres. If he had shot from ten metres, as we originally assumed, then he would have had to lie on his stomach on the opposite pavement, which we can probably rule out."

"I think so too. All right, thank you. I'll hear more details later."

"Any time it you, Gábor."

"Servus."

"Servus."

How big might Zsu, the bijou, be? Small. And women with a height of one hundred and forty-five centimetres are not rare.

Józsa leans over, pulls open the bottom drawer of his desk and starts rummaging through it. This is his junk shop. There's everything there. He rummages around in the mess until he finds an ordinary, coiled centimetre ruler. I knew I had one, he thinks.

He begins to measure himself. He soon realises that he is dealing with different proportions, he can't calculate like that. He calls his secretary in.

"Yes, Comrade Józsa?"

"How tall are you, Elzike?"

Józsa is a rather comical sight as he stands there, a centimetre ruler in his hand.

"One metre fifty-two, but only in shoes with a flat heel."

"And barefoot?"

"One metre fifty."

"Please take off your shoes."

Elzike is not surprised, with Józsa you have to be prepared for anything. She slips off her shoes and stands on the carpet in stockings.

Józsa feels under her tousled hair and measures the distance from the top of her head to her shoulder. Twenty-six centimetres. Then her upper arm to her elbow.

Elzike shakes herself and has to laugh. "Well... That's a bit of a kitsch, Comrade Józsa."

"Excuse me ... That's twenty-nine centimetres."

So fifty-five centimetres. If a woman who is one metre and forty-five centimetres tall has the same proportions as Elzike, then she could have shot Laurentis. With a slightly raised forearm, from about three metres away.

But it still couldn't have been Zsu, he thinks. She was in Laurentis' flat at almost the same time.

He turns round to the desk, takes two steps towards it, stops and continues to think. He has completely forgotten about Elzike.

"Can I put my shoes back on?"

"Oh yes ... thank you. You can put them back on, El- zike, we're done. Thank you."

Elzike goes out and closes the door behind her.

"Where can I get another little woman now?" says Józsa to his desk. "And if I get one ... why would another little woman have murdered Lau- rentis?"

That leaves the car. Also a very shaky opportunity. But at least there is a track. Probably also a dead end, but it has to be followed, however hopeless it may seem. He picks the report with the child's statement.

"Dark grey, a sledge, I can tell you, class, I don't know what make, I've never it before." He didn't know which country it was from either, only that it wasn't Hungarian. The father, who called the child out of the window, didn't see any car at all.

"I'd rather believe the child. You don't make that up," Józsa muses half aloud. "Children memorise cars."

He reaches for the phone.

"Vicenik, please. Is that you, Comrade Vicenik? Tell me, how many foreigners are there in Hungary at the moment?"

"According to last night's figures, there are four thousand six hundred and seventy. I've just received the number."

"Do you have any information on how many people travelled by car?"

"Just a moment. I'll have a look."

Józsa waits. He clamps the receiver between his shoulder and ear and lights a cigarette.

"Here I am again. One thousand eighty-nine. The figure is also from last night."

"Thank you very much, Comrade Vicenik."

He hangs up. The second needle in the haystack. The first is Zsu at Lake Balaton. This is the second. The dark grey sled with a foreign number plate. Only a miracle can help here. A miracle, or Csudik. It's about women, so Csudik has to be here. I'm surprised I didn't think of it sooner.

The phone again.

"Hello, Péter, is that you?"

"Who else, you steed."

"Speak properly to a major who calls you on duty."

"All right, enough blathering, what do you need?"

"The csudik. Only for two or three days."

"Is it about women?"

"Yes, but on business."

"That's what I meant. You don't get the Csudik for your private womanising. If it's official and important, then maybe."

"Are you sending him over?"

"Will it suit you? He's here right now."

"Tell him to hurry up."

Of course, the Csudik must be brought in. Csudik from the morality police, the eloquent Csudik, the handsome Csudik in front of whom the women melt away. Csudik, the handsome one. Dear Karcsi.

He tells Elzike that when Csudik arrives, she should send him in immediately.

"The Karcsi is coming here?" Elzike shines.

"Elzike, you're married, don't be so keen on the Csudik."

"But what do you think of me, Comrade Józsa!" Elzike pretends to be offended. But she grabs the side of her hair with her hands and adjusts it.

The gesture is so mechanical that she is not even aware of it.

Józsa smiles at this, but says nothing. Csudik. He's needed now. He goes back to his room and sits down. There is a knock.

"Come in, Karcsi."

"Here I am, comrade Józsa. Have me at your disposal."

"Sit down, Karcsi, and to me carefully."

"I'm all ears, Uncle Gábor."

"The devil is your uncle. The fact that you have grown up under my hands does not entitle you to be insolent."

"Don't hold it against me, Uncle Gábor, I'm just a bit cheeky, you know me."

"So watch out. We're up to our ears in a mess. There's not a breath of wind, all the sails are hanging limp. We can't move an inch forward."

"Who is the lady, Uncle Gábor, and what is to be done with her?"

"Mrs Dalma Tamacskó, nicknamed Zsu or Bizsu."

"I've never had anything to do with a Dalma anyway."

"One does not flaunt one's conquests, comrade Csudik. So this Bizsu is probably staying with a man at Lake Balaton. She must be found."

"North bank? South bank? Siófok? Tihany? Füred? Széplak?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't have let you come here."

"You're daring me to do all sorts of things."

"Wait. There's also a certain Dóra Straub."

"Who's that?"

"Deputy head of the commercial department in the stockholding department, our best friend

rer Zsu. We questioned her and she said she 't seen Zsu for two or three days. She doesn't know where she is. But maybe 's just being discreet and covering up for her friend so that her husband, who is currently abroad in Berlin, doesn't find out about her. So the first step is Dóra Straub. She would have to find out where Zsu probably is now. But that's just an assumption, she may not really know anything. But if she does, that would make our work much easier. I wouldn't want to be in your place if you were travelling all over Lake Balaton with a photo of Zsu and a car, which I'll get for you, to find the lady for us."

"So there is a photo of her."

"Of course. Definitely. In her flat. Doctor Aurél Tamacskó. I'll give you the address, you get the photo."

"I see."

"You don't understand anything yet. This Zsu or Dalma is not only Mrs Tamacskó, but also the girlfriend of Professor Laurentis, who was murdered last night."

"And now she's at Lake Balaton with a third person?"

"Exactly. We absolutely need them, but without any fuss. Absolute discretion. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Uncle Gábor. Report on the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of each subtask by telephone to you, if you're not here, to Elzike, at night to the guard or to your home."

"Yes, Karcsi. Are you going straight away or on the spot?"

"Both as well as. Thank ."

"Don't thank me in advance. Do you have any money with you?"

"I did."

"I'll call the car service, when you're downstairs the car will be ready."

Csudik walks out. Józsa reaches for the tea again.

lephone, but comes to his senses, jumps up and runs after Csudik.

Csudik sits on the edge of Elzike's desk, one leg over the other, and flirts with her thoroughly.

"Come back and read this," says Józsa.

He picks out the Kölcsey Grammar School newspaper from the pile of papers on his desk, takes Zsu's note and hands it to Csudik. He reads it.

"Did she write this down for the professor?"

"Yes, last night. About the time of the murder."

Csudik puts the note away, says goodbye and leaves. He walks with a gait as if he were Clark Gable, Alain Delon and a professional heavyweight boxer all rolled into one. Yet he resembles none of them. He is the Csudik. And an intelligent chap, too. What's he doing in the police force, Józsa wonders, then, while his thoughts still on Csudik, he absentmindedly leafs through the school magazine.

Something catches his attention, he reads with concentration, quickly reaches for the phone, but changes his mind, gets up and rushes out of the room. He doesn't even close the door behind him. He doesn't even see Elzike. Csudik has gone in the meantime.

Fifth chapter

Józsa is a brilliant detective. He finds a clue, the clue means a hypothesis, the hypothesis means a suspect and the suspect means the chance to shed light on the murder case. The hypothesis seems unbelievable, almost fantastical, but it is concrete, comprehensible, completely tangible, you can

You can build a theory on it, you can find a motif and everything you need to work with it. Józsa doesn't know anything for sure yet, but he has a hypothesis.

J. Szücs, on the other hand, already knows who the murderer is. A miracle? No. It's clear that J. Szücs is even more ingenious than Józsa, because he invented this ingenious Józsa. It doesn't even occur to him to give Józsa a tip, go there, go there, do this and that. Not a clue. Józsa is an experienced criminalist with razor-sharp logic, so let him do his job. Investigate the cases, look for evidence, check whether his hypothesis is tenable. J. Szücs can't even think of telling Józsa who the murderer is. Besides, it wouldn't do him any good, evidence is needed in the investigation stage of the criminal proceedings. Without evidence

J. Szücs' tip as to who the murderer is is worth a damn.

J. Szücs is not really interested in the murderer himself, although he is interested in the structure of the novel, he is interested in how and by what means Józsa will obtain the evidence. He is interested in the person of the murderer

J. Szücs not as a novelist, but as a private person.

He is also interested in Csudik as a private person. But only secondarily. As the novel currently stands, Csudik is a character in a novel, and it is none of the reader's business who J. Szücs models his characters on. It doesn't matter that nobody will read the novel. How could anyone read a novel that hasn't even been written? Yet he has tried so often to put these invented novels, which are only thought through in his head, on paper. He simply can't come to terms with the fact that everything that is so good, exciting, plot-rich and artfully intricate in his head deadlly dull, shallow, silly and uninteresting when written down. Because writing

He can, that's his profession, he's an aesthete, a critic, his reviews appear weekly, he can write anything, essays, articles, monographs, he doesn't want to claim that he has punch and a personal style, he doesn't, but he doesn't need that. It's the thought, the structure, the logical chain that counts. And he has that. That suits him. A longer essay by J. Szücs - and he is strictly objective even to himself, that's not showing off - is always an event in Hungarian literary life. Principled rigour, rigour, clarity, that is what his work. The richness of colour, the complications and multi-layered intricacies of life, warm humanity, yes, the humane, that is what his novels, written in his head, are imbued with. What a beautiful and expressive word: the humane. Human, humanity - that has something to do with humus, with the topsoil, the soil, with its origin, with the perfect, creative and all-embracing womanhood, with Móríka. Yes, Móríka is a symbol. Or, among other things, a symbol.

J. Szücs works with signs. In the centre, directly opposite him, hangs this sign: *J. Szücs does not create paper figures*. He doesn't do that either.

He knows that he is modelling Csudik on the private detective, or rather on the private detective's son, whose advertisement found in pre-war times. Then he looked him in the telephone directory and first called him under a false name, asking whether he was the same person as the former well-known private detective. When he replied in the affirmative and asked the private detective what he could do for him, he replied that he had no special request, he was just an old admirer of the master and was enquiring out of pure curiosity because he had read the name in the phone book by chance. He then waited ten days and visited him.

"Please understand, sir, I can't take it on. I don't have a licence," said the once famous private detective. "And besides, look at me, I'm sixty-seven years old. rigours involved are beyond my strength. Former clients still come to me, but they're always forgiven, sir. Do you know what risks people take these days? And it really is like that, why bother, the strain would be too much for me."

J. Szücs sat in the worn Empire armchair and didn't know what else to say. He had already thought everything through so well.

He lasted the once famous private detective.

"That me," he said in a whisper, even though they were alone in the room, "we could try that. I won't do it, but I want to ask my son. He's on holiday at the moment, he retired from the police force a few months ago, where he had been taken on in consideration of my previous merits. Well, my name is still known in the profession today ... Karcsi! Karcsi!"

The young man answered the call. The man after whom J. Szücs is now modelling Csudik. Not a paper figure.

J. Szücs would have liked to back down, but somehow it was no longer possible, the old man put his straight English pipe in his mouth (and J. Szücs sensed that it a requisite of the job) and explained with the pipe between his teeth what J. Szücs wanted.

"If you can handle it, my boy ... It's your business, I won't talk you into it. Not as a private detective, of course, but as a friendly service for this gentleman ..."

"Of course, Father," said the young .

J. Szücs wasn't even sure that he was really the old man's son. They didn't look alike.

"Of course I can't accept it for free," he said nonetheless.

"But, sir, that's out of the question," said the young man. "I don't get involved in illegal things. I only do it as a favour. They only cover my costs, I don't claim anything else. I'm drawn to the trade, and besides, as you can well understand, it's a bit of a family tradition with us."

"But yes, but yes ..."

"As this is a favour, we'd better do without anything in writing. No contract, no order or anything like that. I won't provide you with an invoice either. If you allow me, I will tell you the amount verbally. However, a certain advance payment would be required. Which I will of course charge afterwards."

"Yes, er.." said J. Szücs, not knowing how to behave in such cases, "how much do you think it will cost?"

"Just a little thing, my lord. Not worth mentioning." The father said.

"We won't argue about that," said the young man and smiled. "You're giving me five hundred forints as an advance now. You understand that, don't you? After all, I have to go to Lake Balaton, hotel and catering, if the lady goes out, I have to go out too. But I will only spend the bare necessities. I don't use work for binge drinking. I won't throw your money down the drain. Not me, sir, you can count on it!"

J. Szücs paid the five hundred forints. He had set aside a total of two thousand forints for shadowing Etuka anyway. Not as if he didn't have complete trust in her, but still, Babsi's company, you never know if ... if Babsi won't get her into some kind of trouble.

a carelessness. And for once, he finally wanted certainty. Tabula rasa. For six months he had been secretly putting money aside, writing reviews and glosses for provincial newspapers, from which he had to hand in his salary and the fee for the works published in Budapest newspapers at home, which Etuka kept a close eye on, a conscientious housewife, no one will deny it, she divided the money, J. Szücs receives a decent amount of pocket money from her every week, Etuka is not stingy.

Etuka is a saint.

Round at the front and round at the back, pretty and appetising, outgoing and lively, but a saint. In Etuka's apron, the bread for the poor would turn to roses, as happened to St Elizabeth, or so the legend goes. No matter. Not important.

The private investigation was a complete success. The private detective's report on the ten days at Lake Balaton - verbal only, of course, nothing in writing, bill for two thousand three hundred and twenty-four forints and thirty fillers, advance deducted, also verbal only, of course - corresponded exactly with everything Etuka later said, who of course, as always, had to watch Babsi's light-hearted debauchery this time as well.

The private detective arrived in Füred on the ten-twenty train, and at eleven thirty-two he was already lying on a mat on the beach in the immediate neighbourhood of Etuka and Babsi. Babsi was accompanied by a grey-haired gentleman with a trimmed English moustache and sunglasses, a rich South American manufacturer of Hungarian descent, as it later turned out, who had met Babsi at the sailing club. The private detective had heard about

J. Szücs received two photos of Etuka, one showing her dressed, the other in swimwear. Now

he picked up the latter. Once he had made sure that Etuka was the person to be observed, he just waited for the right moment, which soon arrived. Etuka and the South American Hungarian went to the buffet to eat ice cream, they also brought Babsi an ice cream, the private detective was able to an eye on them all while they waited in line at the buffet, but he didn't waste this time in vain either, because when he saw that Babsi wanted to light a cigarette, he quickly gave her a light and made her acquaintance. He pretended to be an electrical engineer on holiday in Füred and introduced himself to all three of them under the false name of Károly Csudik. He spent the next ten days partly with them and partly in their immediate vicinity.

The private investigator only reported one thing J. Szücs, but that was none of his business, it was his private matter and he only found out from Etuka. When the South American Hungarian travelled to Budapest by car to take care of some business matters, the private detective had an affair with Babsi. Babsi raved to Etuka about how nice the private detective was, absolutely ravishing, "a great pike, this Karcsi," she said to Etuka, "what a man!" This was followed by the intimate details, which were J. Szücs had to listen to in Etuka's blunt manner. But these were only a few fleeting hours in the ten days. Even a private detective is allowed to have a private life, he too is entitled to a little free time, a little relaxation. Etuka suspected that Babsi was also meeting him in Budapest. But that didn't interest J. Szücs.

The important thing was that there was nothing wrong with Etuka's behaviour during the ten days.

"A real lady," said the private detective to J. Szücs.
"You can be proud of your wife, sir."

They were standing at the coffee table in the Savoy, J. Szücs was holding the coffee glass in his hand, but he felt as if there was Tokay in it, his left hand was resting on his chest, completely relaxed, behind his glasses he squinted his right eye a little, as if he were completely absorbed in the sight of the left corner of the coffee machine. But he didn't see it. In his mind's eye, he saw Etuka's tanned, chubby little face floating in front of him.

Etuka is a saint, he thought. And a real lady. But he only admitted that to himself, he would never have called his wife a lady out loud, you don't boast about being married to a lady these days, but how would this private detective know that, a simple man who blurts out what's on his mind without any political consideration.

J. Szücs, the experienced self-observer, suddenly realised how he was standing. Like an operetta lover, yes, an operetta lover, who learns at this moment that his beloved loves him after all, and who will sing away the next moment. But Etuka is still a saint.

"Careful, sir! Your wife!" the private detective suddenly whispered. "Careful! We don't know each other!"

Slowly and calmly, he turned his back on J. Szücs.

J. Szücs winced and turned round to the door. Etuka entered on high, pointed heels, wearing black nylon stockings despite the summer heat, she was freshly coiffed, as J. Szücs realised immediately, she was wearing the tight, rather short red skirt, no one would claim that she was already thirty-two, and she was smiling. She didn't even notice J. Szücs' embarrassment.

"Well, Ferenc! What are you doing here at this time of night! I thought you'd be in the office by now." Then to the private detective: "Jee, Karcsi, you're already here? But

You don't even know each other yet. My husband. Ferenc, this is the friendly gentleman from Lake Balaton, I've told you so much about him, Károly Csudik."

"Csudik," said the private detective, nodding militarily. "How do you do?"

"Ferenc J. Szücs."

"Karcsi, order me a massive Budapest double mocha, as you used to say so beautifully in Füred."

"Gladly, Etuka," said the private detective and went to the till.

Etuka turned so that her back was to the till and began to whisper briskly: "I came a bit early, Babsi me for a favour, I know you don't like that sort of thing, but you have obligations to your best friend too. I lent them the flat." She pointed her head the private detective at the cash desk. "Babsi wants to do some overtime this morning. You understand, don't you, Ferenc? Babsi asked me to pick up Karcsi and bring her to our flat. She doesn't want to be seen with this Csudik. That's understandable. You understand, Ferenc?"

"I understand, Etuka."

With a beaming smile showed off his white teeth, the private detective handed the coffee chef the receipt. "An extra solid Budapest double mocha," he said. "It's awful when you have to drink Pro-Vinz coffee for days on end."

"So you won't be home before three, half past three, Ferenc? Isn't that what you said? Three-thirty-four. Well, what can you do? I'll dash to school and ask when it's my turn for the summer inspection, then I'll probably go to the swimming pool. But that's not certain yet. I'll be home around three or half past three. Do you understand, Ferenc?"

"I understand, Etuka."

"Well, go on now, Ferenc. Good day. I'm going to have this massive double mocha with Karcsi."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye to you. Nice to have met you," said the private detective.

At the editorial meeting, he felt tired and exhausted, and his head ached, so they soon called it a day. It was probably the heat, he said to Kittner, but maybe the weather had changed. I should eat something, he suggested, something light. You don't really have an appetite in such heat. While he went downstairs, he drank a bottle of beer at the buffet on the way. His throat was parched. Babsi, you'd have to see Babsi coming out of our house. She's probably already there now, with that Csudik. He tried to think of something else, but the intimate details that Etuka had told him in such detail about the relationship between Babsi and the private detective kept running through his mind. Am I suffering from erotomania? Yes, you'd have to see her, Babsi, coming out of the house, if only because then I could go into the flat and lie down for a while, this heat is unbearable. Today of all days Etuka had to kick her out of the flat, he had never liked it, but Etuka had said that Babsi never lay down in bed, "That's just what was missing!" Etuka used to add, she always used the couch, but still, there's something unappetising about it, especially as Etuka can talk about everything in such a way that he sees Babsi in his flat like on a film screen.

J. Szücs stands on the corner and watches the door from which Babsi will come out, if only she would finally come.

This heat, even here in the shade. He's thirsty again. There's a pub nearby, but he can't go in, Babsi might be stepping out of the front door at that very moment. He walks up and down, looks at his watch, he's been standing here for over three quarters of an hour now, he walks a little way again, turns round abruptly so that Babsi can't get away unnoticed, then he'd be standing around uselessly, sometimes hiding in a doorway, because he doesn't want Babsi to see him standing here, how should he explain it, not to Babsi but to his wife. What time is it? Still only eight minutes past two. And he has to be careful not to behave conspicuously. He mustn't stand there stiffly, he has to change his observation points, very casually and naturally, that would be something if acquaintances came by and saw him standing here. Are you waiting for someone, Mr Szücs? No easy matter, Józsa would certainly be more skilful than him, who has no practice in this, Józsa has practice. Good God! What if Etuka comes out of the swimming pool and sees him standing here? That's what's missing! He quickly steps into a hallway and peers out between the rusty, jammed, squiggly wrought-iron bars, while he has to keep turning round to make sure no one is coming, plus this heat, his shirt is sticking to him, his whole body is swimming in sweat, he doesn't really understand what he's doing all this for, is there any point? We should go away, right now, have a pint of beer somewhere. He's getting thirstier and thirstier.

But he stays where he is and continues to lurk. Without ever the sense. But he stays. The house he lives in is a corner house, he should actually be watching the corner, maybe he just turned away when Babsi came out and turned into the other street, she's gone and he didn't even notice. And now he's here uselessly. Five minutes to a quarter three.

At least another twenty minutes. But it's about time Babsi came out. And the private detective. Or for Etuka to come home from the swimming pool. He hears footsteps behind him and quickly steps out of the hallway and into the neighbouring hallway. In this heat, hardly anyone goes out into the street, understandably. Will they come out together, Csudik and Babsi? Or separately? And if separately who will step out of the door first? What if he rang home? As if he knew nothing. If Babsi picks up, he demands Etuka, he has to tell her something urgently. No, that's not possible. J. Szücs knows, from Etuka, that Babsi always pulls out the phone plug. Ten minutes to three, and still no one.

Three minutes to three, Csudik steps out of the front door, looks around, but only fleetingly, and then really turns into the other street, two or three steps, and he's gone.

No. Now he won't wait another minute.

But then he waits another ten minutes. Babsi doesn't come out. And Etuka doesn't return from the pool.

Then I'll have a little chat with Babsi. I don't know anything, my name is Hase, I don't get involved in these stories. I'm not going to be Babsi's sidekick in these dirty affairs. What a rotten piece of work!

He walks up the stairs, takes the key out of his pocket and opens the door. It's nice and cool in the flat, he unbuttons two buttons on his shirt, the door to the dining room is open, a gentle draught. Approved.

"Is it you, Ferenc?" Etuka asks from the inner room. "It's me, yes," replies J. Szücs from the outer room. It's funny that I'm not even surprised, he thinks. Why am I not surprised?

"Imagine that, Ferenc!" Etuka appears in the doorway between the dining room and the inner room, in a negligee and slippers, but this is a different negligee, red with little yellow flowers, and these are different slippers, not the ones that were in Laurentis' wardrobe. "That stupid Babsi didn't turn up, she didn't even call. Maybe something's come up, maybe it didn't work out with the cancellation."

"I'm sure it was like that, Etuka."

"And I had Csudik on my back, I had to look after him, after all, he was visiting. I even played rummy with him. Imagine, Ferenc, I lost three forints forty. But he's an excellent player. But I was also lucky. Because I'm not the worst rummy player either."

"You're an excellent rummy player, Etuka." J. Szücs has taken off his shirt and is standing in the hallway in his trousers and vest.

"Barely fifteen minutes since he left. Un- secretly, like he a crush on Babsi. What you looking at, Ferenc?"

J. Szücs does not look into the room. He doesn't need to look there. As soon as he enters, he notices that everything is in tip-top condition, no creases on the couch, the small Meissen sugar bowl and the two cups on the table, one with a spoon, Etuka drinks her coffee without sugar, the rummy cards, simply thrown down after the last game, the slip of paper with the numbers, he only needs to take a quick look, he doesn't even need to do the maths, they've played a round, up to five hundred, the two letters *E* and *K* at the top of the slip of paper.

J. Szücs looks at Etuka, her face is not as fresh as it was in the espresso that morning, her hair also different, dark blue circles under her eyes, at least a little bit of a sour look.

At least one, he can't see it that clearly from where he's standing. And that kind of round, kind of lazy pose in which she stands there.

"Nothing," he says. "I'm just tired. I'm going to lie down for a while."

"It's the heat," says Etuka, raising her left hand and tucking her hair back with two quick gestures. "The heat can sometimes get to me, Ferenc."

The phone rings ten minutes after half past three. Etuka picks up and tells Babsi off for not turning up. "You could at least have called," she says reproachfully.

Then she remains silent for a long time.

"I see. You, the poor boy was so desperate, I could hardly calm him down, he's really angry with you. Then he thought you were mad at him again. All right. I'll see you tomorrow, then you can tell me why the boss had to send you of all people. Good day." And to J. Szücs: "Just think, Ferenc, Babsi was just about to leave when her boss called her, she had to go with him to Megyer to take some kind of protocol. But I guess she made up with her boss what she missed here, with Csudik. Nah, that Babsi! But you know her."

"I've told you a thousand times that I'm not interested in your friend Babsi's affairs. So please! I haven't even lunch! Because of her!" J. Szücs is lying on the couch, facing the wall.

"Wouldn't you like something to eat, Ferenc?"

"I'm not hungry," grumbles J. Szücs. "I want to sleep."

So the private investigation was a complete success. But I don't have certainty, full, absolute certainty. No. This is not a tabula rasa.

"Etuka!"

He sits up abruptly, turns round on the couch. Through the door to the other room he can only half see her, a bit of her hair, a shoulder, a round hip.

"Yes, Ferenc?"

But she doesn't turn round, she's just throwing off her negligee, it seems she wants to take a siesta too.

"Tell , Etuka, didn't that scoundrel get too close to you?"

"What kind of fool?" Etuka turns a little,
J. Szücs can now see more of her. Etuka is naked.

"This one, what's his name, Csudik."

"But, Ferenc, please! The Karcsi? But not at all! Because he's so good-looking? Karcsi is very good, very pleasant, he's a tremendously likeable chap. And so eloquent."

Slowly, almost at length, she praises Csudik. J. Szücs is sitting on the couch, he looks over into the other room and would like to know how he should interpret Etuka's movements, she is lolling around like this.

"And what's more," says Etuka, "Karcsi is not a Tunichtgut, but an electrical engineer."

J. Szücs hears the familiar little sounds of Etuka lying down in bed and covering herself up.

No. Unfortunately, he can't contradict her that this Karcsi is not an electrical engineer, but an ordinary scoundrel, a so-called private detective who doesn't even have a licence. He sighs and lies down again.

No, I don't have complete certainty yet.

Sixth chapter

Camus died in a road accident, Hemingway was hit by a fatal bullet while cleaning his hunting rifle. Pushkin fell in a duel, Ady died of syphilis, Attila József threw himself in front of a goods train, Radnóti was killed by the Germans, and I fell off the ladder while repairing the toilet cistern and broke my bones. Typical. In any normal flat the toilet is so small that it's almost impossible to fall off the ladder, but here it's as big as a knight's hall. And on your face. My glasses are shattered, the shards hurt my eyelid, my nose is completely smashed, two fractures to my right arm and shoulder. That's me. If I could at least concentrate properly on Józsa, but no, my mind wanders, all kinds of embarrassing and unpleasant things come to mind. Who killed Laurentis? Yes, that has to be solved, I already know who did it. Józsa only has a suspicion, now the investigation really starts, he has to get the evidence, a suspicion alone is not enough, a suspicion is nothing. All well and good, but this is where the most difficult problems arise for the novelist.

J. Szücs lies in bed and ponders whether he should cheat or abandon his previous writing methods. The structure of the material. What is more interesting, what is more exciting? If he follows Józsa step by step through the various phases of the investigation, or if he cheats and only reveals the wicked murderer at the very end of the novel? Any normal crime writer would do this, the reader must turn green and yellow with curiosity as to who the culprit is.

J. Szücs sighs. I'm the reader, he thinks, nobody will read this novel but me. But the rules of the trade tie my hands too. Rules of the fa-

What? J. Szücs knows them inside out, he has also written about them, namely in the essay *Auch der Mörder ist ein Mensch* (Zu einigen neueren Fragen des literarischen Kriminalromans). A little gem of essay writing. Every novel is actually an attempt to solve a problem. The writer investigates and uncovers a secret (or several secrets). The only question is, and this is what determines the literary value of the novel, from which side and according to which aspects he approaches the problem to be solved. What interests him more, the external, technical solution to the problem or the uncovering of the human secrets of the novel's characters, including those of the murderer. The truly great novels always questions of fate, questions of life, death and love, and in doing so they always turn to new points of view. Every child knows that *Crime and Punishment* and *Klim Samgin* are regular crime novels. But so are *Don Quixote*, *Madame Bovary*, *Red and Black* and *The Silent Don*. Only in these the writer himself is the detective, he does not take part in the plot, he uncovers the secrets while writing. The writer begins by investigating his characters in a more or less convoluted situation: what is happening to them and why? The novel itself is the investigation. We only speak of a crime novel in the narrower sense when the investigation does not take place outside the novel, but within it. In a regular crime novel, a crime takes place, usually a murder. This has to be solved. The crime novel only has literary value if not only the detective in the novel investigates, but also the writer of the novel, who wants to reveal both the mystery of the crime and the human secrets of the novel's characters to the reader. The relationship between these two secrets

The literary value of the detective novel is determined by the way they relate to each other. The more human secrets we learn, the greater the literary value of a crime novel.

The short essay, peppered with exciting examples, stirred a lot of dust, and J. Szücs was congratulated by several important people, including Márton Lóránt himself, who is J. Szücs' role model. A role model not in human or moral terms, but rather in terms of how and by what means one can make a career as a scientist and writer at a relatively young age. J. Szücs models his Professor Laurentis after him. Of course, Laurentis has as little to do with Lóránt as the private detective Csudik has to do with Józsa's colleague Csudik. This is a writer's work. You only have to look at what a character J. Szücs has moulded out of this good-for-nothing private detective. Is it the same character? Not even the same! J. Szücs is not a naturalist, he does not live, is creative. Never paper figures!

It was five minutes past quarter past three when the nurse the room. How embarrassing to ask a young woman to help you pee. But after all, he can't wet the bed! J. Szücs doesn't have a particularly good sense of time, but he thinks that he must have woken up around seven in the evening, the accident had happened the previous evening, at half past ten, the cistern in the toilet kept running full, and when it was full, the water rushed down, the noise could be heard exactly every three minutes.

"It's getting on my nerves," Etuka said. "I won't sleep a wink all night! Why don't you take something! But you're so clumsy, Ferenc, so clumsy!"

It still won't later than quarter past eleven, half past eleven. It's been twenty-four hours now,

They took him to hospital, stitched him up, clamped him, splinted him, plastered him, injected him, bandaged him and fed him medication, he fell asleep at half past five in the morning, then he slept all day, so he woke up at seven in the evening, his head is clear, he's not tired. Time is off the rails. Never mind. I was born to put it back on the rails.

"Major Józsa!"

"Yes, Mr Szücs?"

"Where to in such a hurry?"

"Why are you keeping me? You know I want to go to the registry."

"It's all right, I just wanted to ask if you're going straight to the registry or if you're doing this and that on the way. It might be a good idea to give a few instructions. I don't want to have said anything, you know everything anyway. Well?"

"Thanks for the tip, Mr Szücs, but I came up with it on my own. But, and hold on tight, I'm not letting the list of names out of my hands. At first I thought Lakatos would start the investigation, but then I decided otherwise. I'll do it myself. Excuse me, I really must go now. The matter can't be delayed. Goodbye, Mr Szücs."

"Goodbye, Major Józsa."

J. Szücs stands in the corridor of the presidium, a warm, fatherly smile playing around his mouth, he shakes his head gently as he looks after Józsa, who disappears into a room.

Józsa goes to the lab. He has a class photo enlarged that he found in the school magazine. The photo of a senior class.

"I want a sharp and clear enlargement of this," he says to little Ringler, who is his daughter

Captain Ringler's, a pretty thing, not so long ago they were playing cops and robbers on an outing, the way she made out! Józsa's gaze wanders furtively to her round knees, which peek out from under the hem of her skirt as she sits there.

"All right, Uncle Gábor."

"That's not all. I need a separate enlargement of each person in the group picture, including the teacher here, you see, in the centre of the first row, all in the same size. But be careful, Magdika, that all the pictures are absolutely sharp and clear. It's very urgent."

"It takes at least an hour and a half. If we work very hard, an hour. The enlargements in your room then?"

"No. I'll be in the registry. I'll put the photos in an envelope, sorted according to the order on the group photo. Together with the newspaper, of course. Thank you, Magdika."

He stops in the corridor. Should he go for lunch now? He's not hungry. He still has yesterday's dinner in his stomach, his breakfast. And what a delicious breakfast! He can still feel the flavour of smoked meat on his tongue. So let's get back to work. I can eat something later.

In the registry he pulls out the Haag-Horváth card index. Haas, Halmos, Hammer, Harkányi, Hartog, Hartvolk, Hauchling ... That's one. Alfréd Hauchling. It's lucky he has such a rare name, if his name was Szabó or Kovács, I certainly wouldn't remember him. Hauchling. SgV 683/45, 726/45 and 007/1946. He makes a note of the numbers and gives the slip of paper to the archivist.

While the files are being retrieved, he calls Elzike on the house phone.

"Elzike, call Sándor Meszlényi for me. Yes, the actor. Try his flat. If he's not there, then at the theatre. Yes, at the National Theatre. If he's not there either, try to find out where he is, if they don't know, look for him on the radio and on television, but look for him and find him when he's in Budapest. Only then, of course. If he's in the province or abroad, it's no use to me. As soon as you've found him, put me in touch with him, I'm in the registry of offences against the people. Otherwise I am not available to anyone. Except Csudik, but he's still on his way. Thank you."

He sits down at a table and takes a look at the three files. Two of them contain several hundred pages, the third is relatively small. He makes notes in a notepad. After about twenty minutes, the archivist calls him on the phone.

"At the Palatinusbad? Then call them and they'll put Mr Meszlényi on the loudspeaker. Some people have it good. I'm brooding here in the heat, and this count is basking in the cool water. Good, Elzike. Call them and keep them connected."

Five minutes later he speaks to Meszlényi.

"Mr Meszlényi? This is Major Józsa from the Budapest police headquarters."

Józsa has a special voice for such telephone conversations. It is deep, slow, calm, sympathetic, intellectual. You can't alienate these civilians. Their hearts will drop anyway when the police contact them. Józsa knows that you have to reassure the civilian population.

"Meszlényi. What is about, please?"

There you go. Józsa knew it after all. He got a fright and wants to hide it. The nervous voice. They're all like that. Calm down.

"I must apologise for interrupting your sunbathing. We need your help. You can rest assured that if it 't something out of the ordinary, I wouldn't have bothered you."

"But, . What it about?"

"You're the same person as Sándor Meitner, aren't you, who graduated from Kölcsey High School in nineteen hundred and thirty-two?"

"Yes. But why?"

Now a confidential little laugh in her voice.

"I'd rather tell you that in person. I'd like to ask you to get dressed. I'll send you a trolley."

"Not necessary. I'm here with my car."

"Can you with me in half an hour?"

"I need at least that. It's three-quarters to one now. I have a TV recording at half past two."

"We'll organise it so that you're there on time. The sooner you arrive, the sooner we'll be ready. I'll let you know at the entrance so that you can be admitted. My name is Józsa. Major Józsa."

"Good, I'll be on my in a minute."

Józsa informs the admissions desk, then the lab, saying he needs the pictures in half an hour.

He looks at the files again. Alfréd Hauchling. Nobody saw him again after the summer of 1944. His name does not appear anywhere. Only up to that point, and even then only rarely. What is the name of the journalist who analysed this whole period? Lan- tos, Lakatos, Lan-, Lan-... Lugosi. That's right. Henrik Lu- gosi. Maybe he knows something about Hauchling.

Józsa calls the newspaper and asks for Lugosi. He doesn't arrive at the editorial office until after two o'clock.

All right. Then after two, when he's finished with Meszlényi.

The little Ringler brings the enlargements. Józsa pulls them out of the envelope, they are still a little damp.

"Won't they stick together?"

"No, Uncle Gábor. They'll be completely dry in five minutes."

"Thank you, Magdika."

The telephone. Everything works. Elzike says Meszlényi is there.

Józsa is in a hurry. Time is pressing. It's very urgent. But when he enters his room, he is very calm.

Meszlényi only betrays his nervousness by acting outrageously calm. What an actor! Józsa, however, looks into his innermost being. He gets straight to the point.

"Mr Meszlényi, Professor Ernő Laurentis has been murdered."

"Laurentis? The Lauri? Murdered? By whom?"

"That's what we want to find out right now. With your help."

"Poisoned? Stabbed? Shot?"

"Shot to death. With a Browning. Look." Józsa shows Meszlényi the enlarged class photo.

"Poor Lauri. Comrade Major, I want to help as much as I can."

Meszlényi is now a great actor who has just learnt about the murder of his classmate. Józsa sincerely admires his art.

"What do you know about Laurentis?"

"Very little. We almost only saw each other at A-level meetings. He was the best student in our class. I only remember one case in the eight years that Lauri didn't know. The good boy Csulafy called him out in Latin class. 'Imagine, Laurentis, that you are a participium praesens in the genitive. Yes? How do you read in the nominative in this case, Laurentis?'"

rens, teacher,' says Lauri. 'Ladendus, my dear Laurentis. And now declare yourself. And Lauri declines. Laurens, laurentum, laurentis, laurenti, laurente. Laurentes, laurentes, laurentium, laurentibus, laurenti- bus. 'Which declension is that, Laurentis?' 'The third declension, teacher, the one for the ending -ens. 'Ex- zellent, Laurentis, you can sit down. And I'll put the secunda for you. Not because you didn't know it, but because, Laurentis, you were expecting me to ask you about it for the tenth time and therefore didn't do your homework. Is that so, Laurentis?' 'That's right, teacher,' said Lauri and sat down."

"Is that Csulafy?" Józsa asked, trying to avoid an endless chain of interwoven school stories, and pulled the teacher's photo out of the envelope. He had the impression that Meszlényi's tension and nervousness had evaporated.

"No. That's Doctor Koppai. He was our head of class in the sixth form. Hungarian and history. Ramaczay once drew him on the blackboard as the Turkish Khan ..."

"Show me which one of them is Ramaczay," Józsa interrupted him and pulled out the other photos. He wanted to check Meszlényi's memory for faces.

After a brief search, Meszlényi lifted up a photo.
"Here."

"Please tell me the names one by one so that I can write them on the back of the photos."

"But they are not in alphabetical order."

"Never mind. So much the better."

"All right. Karlman, Anasztáz, Ruzicska, I don't know the name of this one ... (Józsa put the photo aside.) Rottenstein, Szőnyi, Balla, Sitik, Donner, Felcser, Tinkai-Török ... I don't know his name either, he was only with us in the upper primary ... (Józsa also put the photo aside).

this photo aside). That's Braun, the Haszlacher, Papp, poor Laurentis ..."

Meszlényi could not remember a total of four names.

"If I help, can you tell me who was called what?"

"Probably."

"Which of the four is Alfréd Hauchling?"

"The knight? None."

"What do you mean, the knight?"

"We called Hauchling the knight. He came to us in secondary school from another school, and when Csulafy wanted to sign him in the class register, he asked him his father's name. As if shot from a pistol, he said: 'Albert Hauchling, Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of Malta'. That's how he became a knight for us."

"I see, but how come he's not in the class photo? Please take a look at the group photo."

Meszlényi scrutinised the faces in the group photo, which had been taken in the schoolyard.

"He's not on it. Apparently he was absent that day. But you don't suspect Hauchling of Laurentis' murder, do you? He's not Ungar at all. He might not even be alive. And besides, he was good friends with Laurentis."

"If I knew who to suspect, Mr Meszlényi, everything would be much easier," Józsa replied evasively. "Would you recognise Hauchling on the street?"

"Probably. Although ... Who knows. I haven't seen him for twenty years. Just a moment ..."

Meszlényi pondered. Józsa observed with pleasure how unobtrusively, how naturally such a great artist

can think about it. He glanced briefly at his watch. Ten minutes past two.

"I've got it. The last time I saw him was in nineteen hundred and forty-four, at the Hangli. He was wearing a dark grey suit with a white cravat in the breast pocket, a plain dark tie and, of course, a white shirt. Hauchling was never dressed differently. Two German officers were with him."

"Excuse me if I ask you something else. Do you happen to remember whether Hauchling had any particular external characteristics? Did he have a moustache, for example? Glasses? A monocle? Did he have a birthmark? You knew him for years."

"He was of medium height, about a metre seventy, maybe taller. Blond, brown eyes, oval face, rather lean and slim, straight nose. No particular distinguishing features. But that was twenty years ago."

Amazingly, while Meszlényi was telling all this, it seemed as if he was transforming into Hauchling, but still remaining himself.

"Wait a minute, Major. His gait. I'll show you how he walked. I have to go anyway. I've got a recording in ten minutes."

He stood up, pulled his shoulders back slightly, lowered his chin and stepped towards Józsa with a very straight back, almost stiff neck, but still with a light, relaxed, springy step and shook hands with him. "See you again, Comrade Major."

"Goodbye, Mr Meszlényi. We are very grateful to you."

Józsa looked after the actor as if bewitched.

Chapter seven

Location: A mass of white, expertly wrapped gauze and gauze bandages, including the skull bone of Ferenc J. Szücs, the brain inside, in this an editing room where Józsa and Henrik Lugosi are sitting.

Time: The moment when Józsa remembers that he has forgotten to ask Meszlényi about a very important matter. He remembers this while writing down what Lugosi knows to tell him.

In J. Szücs' head, however, there are no moving images, no film, but a simple photograph, 18 by 24 centimetres. Józsa's hand with the ballpoint pen over the notes is still, Lugosi turns his head a little to the side, his mouth is open, he is speaking, but J. Szücs cannot hear what he is saying. J. Szücs now hears his own conscience speaking to him. It was not Józsa who forgot to ask Meszlényi where he could be reached in the next forty-eight hours, because further information might be needed, or Hauchling could be identified if he were found. No. J. Szücs had forgotten this fact.

Actually, he should now return to the Presidium, replay the end of the conversation between Józsa and Meszlényi and insert a question, and that would be the end of it. That really isn't a problem. A novelist can do it at any time. He takes the scissors out of the drawer, cuts the manuscript page at the relevant point, types the text to be inserted onto another sheet of paper, sticks it between the two interfaces, smooths out the glued page a little by hand and corrects the words and sentences here and there with a pencil so that the dialogue sounds loose and natural, and that's it.

A novelist can that at any time. Not

but Ferenc J. Szücs. Firstly, there is no manuscript of this novel that he could cut up. Secondly, J. Szücs does not tolerate any sloppiness, not even when he commits it himself. Rigour, kindness, consistency.

What would happen, for example, if Józsa were not sitting in the editorial office imagined by J. Szücs, but in a real editorial office at a quarter to five in the afternoon? The rigid image is set in motion, Józsa lifts the biro from the notepad and says to Lugosi: "Excuse me. May I make a phone call?"

Lugosi points to the machine. "Please."

Józsa dials. He calls the television, knowing the number off the top of his head from a previous case.

There is too much telephoning in this novel of mine, thinks J. Szücs thinks, while Józsa waits for the switchboard to answer. Or rather, let us assume that this is not the novel, but reality.

"I would like to speak to Mr Meszlényi. As far as I know, he's with you on assignment."

"I connect with the studio."

"Hello, I need to speak to Mr Meszlényi."

"Mr Meszlényi has already left. We finished the recording twenty minutes ago."

"Do you know where he went? It would be very important."

"I don't know, I'm a stagehand here. But maybe the director knows, Mr Kalotai. I'm trying to reconnect. Please wait."

Józsa waits. Then he is connected to Kalotai.

"Meszlényi? Yes, he left, about half an hour ago. But of course I know where he was going. Home with a hundred and twenty things, to his wife, and then straight on to Italy for a fortnight."

Józsa calls Meszlényi's flat. He lets it ring for a long time, but nobody answers. Apparently they are already on their way.

You can see that Lugosi is getting restless. Surely he has other things to do than decorate Józsa's telephone conversations. After all, he's supposed to be doing Józsa a favour, not the other way round. Isn't Józsa exaggerating a little?

Józsa is getting more and more nervous. But he doesn't want to let it show. It's a stupid predicament he's in now because of this little forgetfulness. Now that every minute counts. It's after half past four. He could order all border crossings to send Meszlényi back from the border to Major Józsa. But on what factual grounds? And who will identify Hauchling if he doesn't? Because if Hauchling is in Hungary, he is certainly not using his real name. If. He was last seen in the summer of 1944. Hauchling is just a fiction. A hypothesis. Even if this hypothesis is confirmed, Hauchling must first be found. And when he is found, if he is here, where is there the slightest evidence that Hauchling can be suspected of Laurentis' murder at all? There is absolutely no evidence. Perhaps Hauchling has not been alive for many years. The fact that a school newspaper was found on Laurentis' desk is no proof at all.

What if the hypothesis is correct? if Hauchling is the culprit? He is in Hungary and murdered Laurentis. Even then, he is only staying in Hungary under a foreign name, only as a foreign citizen with a proper passport and visa. And just as he travelled in, he can also leave. He can cross the border at any moment. And then he is gone, never to be seen again.

And the deputy minister! What will the deputy say? Józsa won't frame what the deputy minister will say in gold and hang it on the wall under glass. Laurentis was a telling man. Tomorrow morning the newspapers will say he died a tragic death. Where the hell is Józsa supposed to find a murderer for the minister's deputy all of a sudden?

In any case, he hurriedly says goodbye to Lugosi and apologises profusely for having delayed him.

"But please, please. Never mind," says Lugosi and can hardly wait for Józsa to disappear.

There is a taxi rank opposite the editorial building and Józsa is lucky enough to get into a car.

"To the police headquarters," he says to the driver.

J. Szücs would like to rub his hands together that he has come up with such excellent complications. Unfortunately he can't, his right hand is in plaster. Rubbing hands is impossible.

"I am the good Lord", he says aloud in the single room where he lies alone and lonely. He can move his left hand, he places it on his chest, because such a sentence requires an appropriately effective gesture. I tell it like it is. For it is not only in God's power to make things better, he can also make them worse. A nice thriller where everything runs like clockwork! If I was so foolish as to forget this highly important question, or so wise, then let things their course. Mesz- lényi should go on holiday to Italy with his wife. He has earned this holiday. He has performed almost every night this season. And then there are the film roles, television, radio and all sorts of other hustle and bustle.

Józsa leans back in the taxi, closes his eyes and thinks about the fact that this J. Szücs will be with him that night.

will not let us sleep again. That's inhumane. Never mind.

He wouldn't meet anyone at Kölcsey Grammar School. It's the height of summer and almost five o'clock in the afternoon. And how would anyone there know the current addresses or telephone numbers of pupils who graduated in 1932? At most by chance, if anyone was at the school at all. So that's a bad starting point. Never mind. I'll still use Lakatos for the list of student names, let him try the phone book or come up with something else, but I definitely want him to track down two people from that class of 1932 who can be matched to Hauchling for identification. If Hauchling even exists and is in Hungary. For the time being, this assumption is the only lead I can follow up. Unless something new comes up in the investigation reports so far. Oh yes, and the car with the foreign licence plate. That also has to be brought in. I'm not in such a good position as far as leads are concerned that I can neglect them. Wait a minute. That's not a bad idea. about I put the two lanes together and look for Hauchling in the dark grey car? Of course! What did Meszlényi say? With two German officers in the Hangli, spring 1944, in a *dark grey* suit! Maybe that's his favourite colour.

What hair-raising nonsense. There are no such coincidences. We need facts and evidence instead of such silly fantasies. Thorough, hard, detailed police work. Fiddling around. But is it a miracle if I fantasise? I've hardly slept and eaten nothing but a pair of sausages, standing up. And Mórika. At my age, you shouldn't be so full of beans. Yes, rested, well-rested and

with a proper meal in your belly, the world would look very different. Don't moan, Józsa, don't moan.

He pays for the taxi journey and chases off to his room.

"Has Karcsi called?" he asks Elzike, who is already powdering herself in front of her little hand mirror, she wants to go home, her working hours are over, she was just waiting for him.

"Not yet," says Elzike quietly. She can see that the boss is in the mood.

"Five hours since he set off. He goes after the women, and I have to labour. That's no good. Uncle Gábor here, Uncle Gábor there, but I can't rely on him. The great Csudik. But I'll turn him into a very small Csudik if I get my hands on him! That's right!"

"Can I go, Comrade Józsa?" Elzike asks shyly, because she knows that when Józsa is on the rampage, it's better to stay out of his way.

"Go away!" hisses Józsa. "Go away! I don't want to see you anymore! I'm staying!"

"Should I stay too, comrade Józsa?" Elzike's style is a thin white thread.

"!"

Elzike vanishes into thin air. Where she was standing a moment ago is now just a bit of white dust. A little powder from the tin.

What number did Vicenik say? One thousand nine-eighty.

"Comrade Vicenik? I would like to entrust you with a rather nasty job. You told me this morning that there were one thousand and eighty-nine foreigners with cars in the country last night. I need one of them. He drives a dark grey car, is about fifty years old, no, exactly fifty, although according to the year of birth

Not exactly fifty, and about one metre seventy tall. Other than that, I have no clues. Brown eyes, maybe. Twenty years ago his face was oval, rather narrow, and his nose straight. In the meantime, he could easily have put on twenty or twenty-five kilos. Or maybe not. Try to conjure up this man for me. But you won't find a single one who fits all that anyway, let's say there are fifty like him. I'd be happy with that. I can't do anything with a thousand and eighty-nine. I need precise details and photos of those that come into consideration. Thank you, Mr Vicenik. Oh, one more thing: it's very urgent. Goodbye."

And now Lakatos.

Should Lakatos be summoned, or should Lakatos come to Józsa under some pretence? As unimportant as the question may seem for the novel, it prepares

J. Szücs a serious headache. J. Szücs has a great fondness for Lakatos. Lakatos was the one who carved him an elder pipe, who fed him bacon stuck on the tip of his penknife against his mother's strictest prohibition, who brought him stag beetles and snail shells when he was in bed with scarlet fever. Lakatos wasn't called Laka- tos, but János Szabó, and J. Szücs wasn't even afraid of him (actually, he wasn't afraid of anyone but him) when one morning around ten o'clock his father came back from the guardroom after being on duty all night and had his mother make him fried eggs with five eggs and bacon, because he hadn't eaten anything since the evening, so J. Szücs wasn't afraid either. Szücs was not afraid of him either when he overheard something strange that morning.

"Is there trouble, Ferenc?"

"Trouble not exactly, not that."

Everything made mum nervous, she was constantly frightened, no matter how often father told her that the wife of a gene- mery sergeant need not be afraid, she just nodded and continued to be frightened.

"Szabó, that fool ..."

"What did he do?"

"Not now, a month ago, when we searched the house of the merchant Goldner ..."

"Who owns the shop in Ziegeleistraße?"

"Yes. Apparently his two sons couldn't keep quiet when they came back from Budapest, so we were told to check whether they had any leaflets or seditious books in the house, as ordered by the county authorities. And during the search, how can I put it, Szabó, that fool, waved his rubber truncheon around until he had knocked out the eye of the older Goldner son. Unfortunately we didn't find anything, Goldner's wife is a Christian, she has some relative who's a big shot, but that wouldn't be too bad, I've always pulled my people out of every mess when they were in trouble, I'm like their own father to them. Now Szabó, that fool who never drinks a sip, got himself fifteen litres of confiscated home-distilled schnapps in the same night, together with Mitenik, and yesterday morning, it was already broad daylight, he strolled through the town singing loud patriotic songs. In his nightgown, imagine that! If he had at least sung spring songs, but no, patriotic ones! What a bovine animal. He has fifteen years of service and four children. The smallest is six months old. My best man. That the ..."

"Don't swear in front of the child, Ferenc!"

"Run to the shop, son, get a parcel

Fine-cut tobacco and cigarette paper, Modiano, chop, chop!"

Now J. Szücs has found the solution. Józsa looks for Lakatos so that he can go to him, but Lakatos is away, he won't be back for half an hour. Józsa leaves the school newspaper and a handwritten instruction for Lakatos with the man on duty. Bring in two men, the cost, who can recognise Hauchling. Underneath: *Urgent! Józsa.*

If Hauchling is found, of course.

Back in his room, he is annoyed that Csudik has not let him hear from him, but the telephone rings. Hopefully, he picks up the receiver.

But no. It's Vicenik. He needs more information about the car. The make. Or what country it's from.

"I don't know, Comrade Vicenik. I don't know."

"Not even whether it's a Western type or a people's democracy type?"

"Not even that, Comrade Vicenik. Probably a western one."

"Thank you, Comrade Józsa."

"But for !"

He hasn't hung up yet when the switchboard answers. A long-distance call from Balatonalmádi.

Finally. Ten minutes to seven.

"What is it, you tramp! Talk!"

"I've got it, Uncle Gábor."

"Mrs Tamacskó?"

"Yes, the Zsu. She told me to call her Zsu."

"I'm not interested in your women's stories.

Take them to Budapest right away!"

"Don't shout with me, Uncle Gábor. She's already packing. I'll get her in a minute and we'll leave. She's with a South American in Dóra Straub's weekly

He left in the morning in his car to do something, he came back at half past one, he left again at half past three, he wants to come back around seven, he's not here yet, but Zsu has promised that she will accompany me to Budapest."

"I don't want to your praises, you disgraceful knave, but I think you deserve it."

"Just tune in, Uncle Gábor, just tune in."

"So bring her here, you snotty nose. Did you ask her about Laurentis?"

"That wasn't my job. Shall I ask her?"

"No. Not a word to her about that. Does she know you're a policeman?"

"No. I said I was an electrical engineer."

"Tell her what you really are during the journey home. And bring her straight here. As soon as you reach the city, tell her that Laurentis has been murdered. See exactly how she reacts."

"I see."

"When can you be here?"

"If I make a big effort, in about an hour and a half."

"Then go to great lengths. How many kilometres?"

A hundred?"

"One hundred and seventeen, Uncle Gábor. What should I do with the South American?"

"What should you do with him? Let him go. I'm not interested in Lady Tamacskó's flirtations, but in the Laurentis case. And now hurry. Seven o'clock. You'll be at my place with her by half past eight at the latest. That's it."

Józsa then calls the guard on duty. Everything is in order. Lakatos has received the order and is on his way. Vicenik is working, Karcsi Csudik arrives with Mrs Tamacskó from Almádi. At last something seems to be happening in the case.

He calls Mórika to say that he's coming home for dinner now but has to be back at the presidium in an hour.

"Gábor, Gábor, this is not to end well. You're working yourself into the ground," sighs Mórika into the phone.

"What am I supposed to do, that's life. Make something nice for dinner, I'll be right there."

He orders a car and leaves word that if anything important comes up, he should be notified at home. Then he goes downstairs and gets in.

"Good evening, comrade Kucsora. Chance has brought us together again."

"Good evening, Comrade Józsa. Not by chance. I was sitting in the driver's cab when a car was requested for you. I just jumped the queue."

"Have you eaten, Comrade Kucsora?"

"I am, yes. But your stomach is growling, it seems to me."

"It doesn't just seem that way, he's really growling at me. I'm going out for dinner now. You wait for me and bring me back. In the meantime, have a nice coffee at the espresso bar on the corner at my expense."

"Thank you very much."

"You're welcome, Comrade Kucsora."

Chapter Eight

He didn't imagine the sky to be quite like this. Warmer and more populated. *Fasten your belts. Atta- chez vos ceintures.* The stewardess carries sweets and chewing gum around on a tray and offers them with a smile. The elegant firmness of whipped cream, fresh from the fridge. A pink dab here and there.

fer, where the sun shines on this motionless, brittle, sublime skyscape. Antarctica. He doesn't want to be God in this heaven. God in heaven! Poor you. The plane starts to land. He can see out to the left engine, the bleak white skyscape turns, becomes grey, dripping and dirty grey, as the plane drills into a towering cloud dripstone, the engine roar sounds more strained, the pilot stirs laboriously in the dense, grey mass, grains of ice settle grittily on the metal housing of the engine. His stomach starts to move, pushes up towards his throat, nausea. Leaning back, leaning back, circling down, deeper and deeper, now it's getting better, the other engine is humming in his ears, it's about to get better. Indeed. He can already see the airport building, there is the runway, he knows from film memories that the landing gear has been extended, the white concrete strip is getting closer and closer, small, soft bumps, one more and one more, now the machine is rolling, braking, turning, then later, in the open door, the stewardess's hand, red-painted nails, delicate fingers that gently grip his joint and help him onto the first step, Then, a little later, he sees Babsi at the top of the banister, Etuka next to her, Babsi is easier to spot with her bright blonde hair, in flat shoes she is half a head taller than Etuka, Etuka in a white, low-cut dress, tanned by the Balaton sun, how pretty, how appetising, how desirable she is. Babsi too, they are both standing in the waiting hall, waiting for him, two such beautiful women!

"Hello, Ferenc! How was the flight?"

"Hello, Fefe!"

Etuka kisses him on the forehead, Babsi takes him in her arms and gives him a smacking kiss on the right and left cheek, then they hang on to him

He stretches a little between the two beauties and off they go.

Well. This is how Doctor Aurél Tamacskó's homecoming from Berlin will play out. But not for another three days, J. Szücs already knows that he won't include the arrival in the novel, he just reeled it off for himself, just to pass the time. He didn't accompany Józsa to the flat, to be honest, the carefree, happy family life of the Józsas is starting to get on his nerves, as is the fact that they are constantly eating their meals in the kitchen and always gorging on these heavy, greasy dishes, even at the height of summer, especially now, when his stomach is still quivering a little from the flight. This is where we cut now. Cut.

Twenty-five o'clock, Józsa looks over at the clock on the wall. Csudik should be arriving with Zsu by now. In the meantime, he looks through the notes he made at Lugosi's, where he had only written mechanically, especially towards the end, because he was thinking about how find Meszlényi. So, let's see. So Hauchling studied law in Vienna, then worked for a year at the Vienna Bank-Verein, then half a year in Switzerland. Józsa writes figures, harmonises the years, thirty-eight, let's say thirty-nine. He was already forty and working for his father's small bank, Kredit- und Transferbank A. G., which was steadily gaining in importance, mainly due to its links with German companies. The family belonged to the financial aristocracy, a small peculiarity being that the men's first names all began with A. Alfréd Hauchling's older brother Alfonz is a well-known polo player, but in 1941 he falls off his horse on the polo field on Margaret Island, breaks his back and dies. Albert Hauchling, the Knight of Malta, died at the beginning of 1943 and Alfréd Hauchling took over the bank alone. He travelled a lot to the

abroad, especially to Germany, where he maintains excellent relations with the highest financial circles. He is not married. After the German invasion, he is often seen with high-ranking officers; his role is unclear. He is an excellent sportsman, played polo himself, but gave it up after the death of his brother. He was probably one of the most important economic advisors to the Germans in Hungary; a witness statement suggests that one of Hauchling's tasks in the second half of the 1930s and early 1940s was to investigate and locate Hungarian private assets smuggled abroad. The witness, Miksa Traubmann, is a former factory owner and industrialist. Yes, Józsa found this testimony in file number 726/45 of the People's Court Council. According to Traubmann, Hauchling was in charge of the interrogation when the Germans wanted to squeeze out of him where he had hidden assets abroad. Hauchling was also present when Traubmann was tortured and beaten. He himself behaved impeccably, "like a gentleman". He had not ordered the torture, but the German in civilian clothes who was with him. Traubmann was also beaten and tortured by Germans. Traubmann admitted to having a secret account in Switzerland and hoped that he would be released, especially as Hauchling had given him his word of honour. But he was not released; Hauchling probably suspected that Traubmann had concealed his other foreign assets, or the reason was that only Traubmann himself could withdraw his Swiss deposits, as he had instructed the Swiss bank to do. Traubmann was interrogated and tortured at the end of May 1944. He was held prisoner in a cellar in Budapest. Soviet troops found him there on 15 January 1945, he was unconscious and had not eaten for nine days.

After this statement in court, he could not be questioned again as he lost his mind. He died in February 1946 in a Budapest mental hospital. Józsa learnt this from Lugosi. Likewise that Hauchling was not seen again in Hungary after June 1944. This agrees with Meszlényi's statement, Józsa thinks. There is no photo of him. Well, Lakatos will get the two classmates to recognise him.

He sighs deeply. Of course, only if the person he secretly suspects of Laurentis' murder - without even knowing why - is really Hauchling. And if he is found.

Twenty forty-three, Karcsi could really come.

A rare moment in life. Józsa's wish comes true. The door opens, Csudik enters, smiles.

"Here we are, comrade Józsa."

Józsa doesn't let on how happy he is, the snotty boy doesn't need to see it, he's already arrogant enough.

"I said half past eight. Thirteen minutes late."

"Uncle Gábor, you have no idea what a record it is anyway. And what traffic there is on Lake Balaton! We only made it because Zsu's South American brought us here in his Jaguar. What a car! Because the cylinder head gaskets in my car are blown."

"We're not chatting, Comrade Csudik. Difficulties are there to be overcome. I expect your report, quickly, in telegram style. Think you'll have to pay for every word."

"Please: We are here. Shall I call Mrs Tamacskó in?"
Csudik is a little miffed.

"Wait. Does she know you're a police officer?"

"Yes. I her halfway through."

"Before the South American?"

"He only speaks English and Spanish."

"Does Mrs Tamacskó speak English?"

"She has passed an intermediate language exam."

"What did she say?"

"She turned round because she was sitting next to the South American at the front, laughed and said: 'Well, Karcsi, you're a rascal!'

"And how did she take the news of Laurentis' murder?"

"I only told her that earlier when we were driving over the Liberty Bridge."

"In front of the South American again? Where is the vigilance, Comrade Csudik?"

"I told you, Uncle Gábor, he doesn't speak Hungarian."

"Don't talk back! How did she react?"

"'Good God,' she said, 'Ernő? But who did it? Why did it? When? Well, there'll be a scandal! The note I wrote to him! If Aurél finds out about it!' That was her reaction. Then she said something to Miguel in English. He was also very upset."

"The South American? How does he know Laurentis?"

"I asked Zsu that we got out and Miguel drove on. She said she had told him about Laurentis."

"Oh, you donkey! You call that discretion? In an hour, half the town will know that Laurentis has been killed. Where does this Miguel live?"

"He told Zsu to call him at the Royal at half past four."

"Karcsi, Karcsi! You can't be trusted with anything. Get Mrs Tamacskó in here now."

Csudik goes out. The next moment he is

Back again. Excited. "She's run away! She's not here anymore!"

"Oh, you bovine!" Józsa reaches for the phone call the admissions desk when the door opens and a woman's head peers into the room.

"Zsu! Where have you been? I thought you'd absconded," Csudik hisses at her.

"May I come in? I was in the toilet."

"Come closer, Mrs Tamacskó," says Józsa.

I need something here now, thinks J. Szücs and keeps up his fabulation. Something like the entrance song of the prima donna or a bravura aria. His keen, sensitive ear, however, prevents him from livening up the taut, closed composition of the crime novel with any artificial literary phrases. He contents himself with a small lyrical gesture, in the French manner, yes, that's it, *Le jardin des soupirs*, garden of sighs, exactly, Józsa's room now becomes a garden of sighs.

Csudik's sigh is a sigh of relief, Józsa's sigh expresses contentment. Zsu enters the room, her sigh coming from deep within, at once worried, deeply sad and yet hopeful. She Csudik a brief, searching look, but he is now as rigid as a statue, cast in plaster and already dried.

"Take a seat, Mrs Tamacskó," says Józsa as he sighs.

How she resembles Etuka! In her figure, in her face and in the way she now sits in the armchair and leans back, crossing her legs; the warm tan of her skin suddenly makes it hot in the puristically simple office. J. Szücs recently read about a very interesting new theory, according to which there is a very close connection between increased hormone secretion and the growth of the

bioelectric voltage that can be measured in the organism. Experiments with rats and guinea pigs have shown that if the internal secretion glands are stimulated with appropriate pharmaceuticals or by stimulating the skin surface surrounding the genitals to produce more hormones, the bioelectric current produced by the animals can be used to make the filaments of miniaturised radiant heaters glow. Experiments with human bioelectricity in this regard are underway, it was reported.

"So you're Mrs Tamacskó, if I'm not mistaken," says Józsa.

"Yes." The answer is a barely audible whisper. Józsa looks at the wall clock automatically, as he does at the beginning of every interrogation. Twenty fifty-seven minutes.

"Please tell us when and under what circumstances you saw Professor Laurentis for the last time. You already know that he was murdered."

"But how? And why? Why was he murdered?" asks Zsu and begins to sob.

"Please, I'll ask the questions. You answer me. We'll sort everything out."

Zsu stops crying and wipes her eyes dry. Another little snuffle, then she reports:

"We had an appointment yesterday afternoon at half past one in the Terraces café at the Gellérthotel. That was last time I saw him."

"Did you anything about his behaviour?"

"No. He was the same as always. He courted me, said nice things to me, I don't like it when people flirt with me the old-fashioned way he always does, but I was used to it and I liked it with him. He said I should visit him in the evening."

"What was the relationship between Laurentis and you?"

"How do you express something like that ... In short, we had a relationship. Ernő was my husband's boss at the university. Please, you won't tell my husband about this, will you? I implore you not to tell him!"

"Your marriage is none of our business, Mrs Tamacskó. We have no intention of investigating your intimate relationships and letting your husband in on it, we want to find Laurentis' murderer. And now tell us in detail what you did between half past one in the afternoon and half past ten at night."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"Do I have to?"

"You have to."

Zsu leans forward, pulls a packet of Kent out of her bag and painstakingly lights a cigarette.

"So I had arranged with Ernő to come to his flat at seven o'clock. He said he was going to the academy now, and I said I wanted to go for a swim in the Gellértbad."

"So Laurentis left you. At what time?"

"Around two. I'm walking towards the entrance to the swimming pool, and just before the corner, a beautiful, dark grey car suddenly stops next to me."

"With a foreign licence plate?" asks Józsa, barely able to hide his excitement.

"Yes, with a foreign licence plate. A good-looking man gets out of the car, wearing black sunglasses like the ones I've seen in Italian films, and asks me in English how to get to Avenue Bartók. I say: *follow right your way*, i.e. always straight ahead, because I have an intermediate level in English, and he asks me very kindly and politely to him the way.

The cheap way you are sometimes addressed. As a woman, you feel it immediately. I tell myself that it doesn't matter if I go swimming a quarter of an hour later because of my figure, you know, I want to lose a bit of weight."

"And you got into the dark grey car with the foreign number plate."

"Yes. Why, is it forbidden?"

"No, no. What next?"

"He introduced himself to me. Miguel Navarro Sánchez, a businessman from Nicaragua, I told him: *follow right the way, this is the Avenue Bartók where we are*, and he drove off very slowly in the direction of Móriczplatz. Meanwhile we chatted. It never hurts to brush up on your language skills a little, I have the next higher exam in September, and I also really liked him."

"Of course you didn't go swimming anymore."

"How do you know that? Oh, I see. You deduce. No. At Móriczplatz, Miguel confessed to me that he was a *shy man*, a shy person, that he hadn't dared to tell me that he had liked me in the terrace café, but I hadn't been alone there, so he only spoke to me when this *gentleman*, this likeable gentleman, had left. He offered me one of his Kent, which is my favourite cigarette, and invited me for a glass of bourbon, which is my favourite drink, but everything within reason, as it should be, after all I am married to Doctor Tamacskó. Do you understand?"

"Of course," replies Józsa. Csudik sits there silently. He already knows the story. "Did he enquire about Laurentis?"

"Why should he have enquired about Ernő? He wasn't interested in him, only me. He knows about Ernő

Only what I told him. That he was a professor and my husband's boss, that I had something to discuss with him at seven and so on, but for him the main thing was, *it means, that you are free until seven*, that I am free until seven. *Not at all*, I said, not at all, I'm going swimming, because men like it when you let yourself be coerced a bit, but he didn't care about my protest, he just asked: *where could we drink that bottle of whisky*, whereupon I, as a modern woman, generously invited him in for a coffee, after all, you don't want to expose yourself to the embarrassment of not being let into your room in a hotel, so I invited him in, *because my husband is actually taking part in a congress in East Berlin*, I said, because my husband is therefore currently in Berlin for a congress."

"So you took him to your flat?" asks Józsa, who occasionally takes notes.

"Yes. Details about that too?"

"Thank you, I'd rather not," Józsa fights, startled.

"Just tell me when this ... yes, Miguel Navarro Sánchez left you."

"We left together. Just after half past eight."

"But you had a date with Laurentis at seven, didn't you?"

"Oh God, the little delay. It always happens. Ernő knows me, he knows how moody I am. He even particularly likes that about me. Oh, the poor thing. He liked it so much about me. How awful everything is."

"Keep reporting. So they went together."

"Outside. We got into Miguel's car there ..."

"In the dark grey one with the foreign licence plate?"

"Yes. Why do you keep harping on about it? He only has the one. We agreed that I would spend an hour

Laurentis, he would pick me up nearby and we would go to Lake Balaton together. I rang Dóra at home to see if her weekend cottage by the lake was available. She said: 'You know where the key is. '

"So Sánchez drove you to Laurentis' flat;"

"Not quite to the house. I got off in Kolumbusstrasse, on the corner of Gyarmatstrasse. I didn't want Ernő to see me if he happened to be at the window."

"I understand. When was that? Tell me the exact time."

"At Ostbahnhof, the clock showed ten minutes past nine as we drove past. And how much further might it be from there to Kolumbusstraße? I don't think it was even five minutes. And we were travelling pretty fast. He wanted to pick me up at a quarter to eleven. I wanted to wait for him on the street."

"What did Sánchez want to do in the meantime?"

"He wanted to go back to the hotel, pack up and pay the bill. And do some shopping in case he got anything."

"Yes. Which hotel is he staying at?"

"At the Royal. Now again. I'm supposed to call him tomorrow."

Józsa tells Csudik to phone the hotel. Csudik looks up the telephone number in the book, dials and waits.

Meanwhile, Józsa asks: "You didn't Laurentis, you went into the bathroom and combed your hair. There was a fake gin on the table. You didn't drink any of that?"

"I'd had a bit too much whisky in the afternoon. And Ernő only ever had Hungarian gin."

"Why did you tear off the calendar page?"

"What kind of calendar page? Oh yes! Poor thing, im-

He always said: 'Every day without you is an empty day in my life. We had a habit of me tearing off the calendar pages when I was with him. And yet I felt guilty because I so late and because he wasn't at home. I wanted to make him happy.'

"Yes," says Csudik into the phone. "I see. So only the night porter can tell me. When is he coming? In an hour. Thank you. Isn't that right, Mr Miguel Navarro Sánchez is staying with you again now? No? He hasn't announced his arrival either? I see. Finally moved out. Thank you very much." He hangs up. "Did you hear that?" he says to Józsa.

"Yes, I've heard. When did you leave the Lauren-Tis flat, Mrs Tamacskó?"

"I don't know exactly. I didn't have a watch with me. Miguel just came in the car, he said: *jump in, darling*, and then we drove straight on."

"What does that mean, *jump in* ?"

Jump in."

At that moment there is a knock. Józsa turns his head towards the door. "*Jump in*," he says.

Vicenik enters.

Józsa involuntarily glances at the clock. Twenty-one fifty-eight minutes. "Well, Comrade Vicenik?" he asks.

"With a lot of luck, we were able to reduce the number to twelve." He pulls a dossier out of his briefcase and places it on Józsa's desk.

Józsa opens the dossier, leafs through it and lifts out a visa application with a photo on it.

"Miguel Navarro Sánchez, Nicaraguan citizen, passport number, Número de Pasaporte: 8896, born in Paris, 1915, single; vehicle registration number: GB.JOX 3426, type: Jaguar, colour: dark grey. Yes. Is that him, Mrs Tamacskó?" He shows Zsu the photo.

"Yes, that's him. You don't think Miguel ...?
Impossible!"

"I don't think anything, Mrs Tamacskó. I'll do what I have to do. You can go now, but stay at home, you must be available to the police at all times. Thank you very much. Comrade Csudik, escort the lady out."

Csudik jumps up. Zsu stands there dejected and with her head bowed. She sobs loudly as she walks to the door.

It serves her right. This nymphomaniac tart. Now she's got it. She deserves no less. Maybe she'll learn from it.

J. Szücs waves his mobile right hand in annoyance.

But it's a matter of seconds here, he doesn't have time to fully savour the fact that he was able to punish Babsi so harshly and severely. Or rather, who, Babsi or Etuka? Just a moment ... Zsu is Babsi, the way she speaks and acts, and Zsu is Etuka, the way she looks. Quality writing. But really, which one? No. Let's leave that now. We'll sort that out later. Now back to Józsa. He mustn't be left alone for a moment, that would be irresponsible, that would be dishonest. Miguel Navarro Sánchez alias, as Józsa assumes, Alfréd Hauchling is on the run in his dark grey Jaguar. Although Józsa does not yet know *why* Hauchling alias Navarro Sánchez committed the murder of Laurentis, he is convinced that no one can be more thoroughly suspected of this murder. His weapon was seen near the scene of the crime. While Mrs Tamacskó was in Laurentis' flat, he would have had plenty of time to commit the murder. According to the experts, the professor was killed during this period. But all this makes Miguel Navarro Sánchez a suspect. Is the South American

Is the businessman really identical to Alfréd Hauchling? Józsa is not particularly interested in this question at the moment. It is only a theoretical question. Navarro Sánchez must be arrested as soon as possible. If he is a fugitive, he can flee across the border. In the meantime, Józsa has spoken to the lieutenant-colonel, who has promised to take care of an arrest warrant despite the late hour of the evening. After all, Józsa is conscientious in complying with all orders and regulations, even in such a difficult situation as he is now, he does not commit any offences. Of course, it would also be embarrassing, the wanted man is a foreign citizen. What if Józsa is wrong? But no. In this case, a mistake is out of the question. There is a strong suspicion that Ernő Laurentis was murdered by Miguel Navarro Sánchez. The suspect must be taken into custody.

And Józsa gets to work.

Chapter nine

Józsa shouldn't get down to work. Relationship-wise, let him! As far as I'm concerned! What's to me!

"I've blown my cover," says J. Szücs loudly into the air. "Busted because I'm greedy and lustful. Like a blackmailer."

He is thoroughly fed up with him, this Józsa, the whole Laurentis case, the South American, the murder. He's got the murderer. So what do I get out of it? It's two or half past two at the most. I still have half the night ahead of me, I'm not a bit tired, the brilliant Józsa lowers his left eyebrow a little, he's , he's forgetting.

Miguel Navarro Sánchez has dropped Csudik and Mrs Tamacskó off at twenty thirty-seven and is now racing through the night, for example towards the Hegyeshalom border crossing, because it's the closest, from Budapest to Győr it's 126 kilometres, from there to Hegyeshalom another 60, so 186. No problem. Racing through the night? He can't drive at more than ninety kilometres per hour on average. Even if it manages one hundred and twenty on some stretches. The traffic won't be heavy, but it's night, the headlights of oncoming cars are distracting, the Jaguar could easily do more, but not under these circumstances. It needs at least two hours to reach the border. Let's assume it was nine minutes past ten when Józsa set to work, sixteen minutes past ten the wanted report went out to the border crossing points, at the same time the order to check whether the wanted man already left the country, what tension, at the last moment, every second counts, whether Laurentis' murderer will be caught, of course he will be caught, in a thriller the murderer can't not be caught. And anyway, justice must triumph, both justice, the one in the novel and Ferenc J. Szücs' own, the horny South American must atone.

Justice and Ferenc J. Szücs' chastising hand are on every wrongdoer. Even poor Józsa. And he really didn't have an affair with Babsi. A rare, strange case. Even J. Szücs only had an affair with Babsi once. The second time was not to be considered as such.

J. Szücs is fed up with the Laurentis case, but he is conscientious. If he has made poor Józsa toil like this, then at least he deserves a well-rounded, beautiful ending to the novel. So off we go. But only briefly.

Józsa is sitting at his desk. His expression is , serious in a cheerful way, only the immense tiredness makes an unruly nerve twitch in the left side of his face. Deep circles around his eyes. Inwardly, however, he has to make an effort not to laugh out loud. The deputy minister! He wanted a quick result. Please, there it is. Maybe I'll even get an award, Józsa thinks. I might even be promoted to lieutenant-colonel. I would be due. We interrogate the South American, draw up a nice little protocol, and that's it. Haha! Did you need that, Miguel Navarro Sánchez? Is he really the same as Hauchling? It will show.

Vicenik is now sitting on the chair where Zsu was crossing her shapely legs earlier. He is restless, he wants to leave, he still has so much to do, but Major Józsa won't let him. Vicenik is only the captain.

"You have played a major part in this work, comrade Vicenik. So you have a right to be there when the harvest takes place. The South American has not yet crossed the border. But if he is still in the country, then he is trapped. Then we'll catch him in any case. The border could come at any moment ..."

And she in touch.

Csudik jumps from his chair.

"Yes," says Józsa into the phone.

If I had a bit of a writer's imagination, J. Szücs muses here for a moment, I could think of a huge surprise. For , that during the body search of the South American it turns out that he is a woman. J. Szücs has to laugh at the impossible idea, then he hands the floor back to Józsa on the phone.

"I see," says Józsa. "Was he armed? We're looking for a Belgian Browning. So no weapon ... What?! A second passport. In the name of Hauchling? So not. Wait, I'll make a note. Nicolas Papp, valid French passport with Hungarian visa in it, only the entry stamp is missing ... Accompany the arrested Miguel Navarro Sánchez to Budapest tomorrow morning. Use a company car. Bring me the dark grey Jaguar separately and in the same condition it was in when Sánchez was arrested. Check the petrol and oil levels, note the odometer reading. I expect the readings and the car with the arrested man at the police station tomorrow at nine o'clock. Thank you."

Józsa sighs. "So that's it," he says modestly to Vicenik and Csudik. "Nice, clean collective work. Thank you, comrades."

"Can I go, Comrade Major?" asks Vicenik.

"Yes, Comrade Vicenik. Thank you again for your quick and precise help."

"I want to go too, Uncle Gábor," says Csudik, yawning. "It's been a tiring day."

"Go on, my boy. You're all right, if only you weren't such a greyhound and a womaniser."

Csudik also leaves. Józsa is alone.

With a practised gesture, he pushes the two files into the drawer, turns the key twice and inserts it.

He breathes a sigh of relief. Home at last! Three minutes until the eleven. He smiles. Twenty-four hours and two minutes have passed since Karpai phoned him to report Laurentis' murder.

Now I'm going home to Mórika, he thinks. I'll be there by half past eleven. And then I'll sleep. Sleep.

There are. I guess if I put it on

I don't write more than two typewritten pages. But of course I don't write it down. That's all there was in the material. Not another sentence. The justification is still pending, the motive for the offence. If the *acte gratuite*, the unfounded plot, wasn't an overused literary schema, I could use it now, it could even be justified with the appropriate psychological underpinning, but then it would be a mixture of genres, it would be another novel, in a proper crime novel either the detective himself explains at the end of the novel how he unmasked the murderer and determined the motive, or the broken perpetrator reveals: that's why I did it! What time might it be? If I didn't have this damn bandage on my head, at least I could see if it was getting light. I've done myself a favour by tracking down Laurentis' murderer so quickly! Should I start another novel? But this one isn't actually over yet, there are still a lot of questions to be answered. Firstly, why the South American murdered Laurentis. Secondly, why he is not Alfréd Hauchling, and what does Nicolas Papp mean, why does he carry his French passport in that name? But these are all externalities. Can I, Ferenc J. Szücs, be content with writing a literarily undemanding crime novel for a reader as literarily demanding as I, Ferenc J. Szücs, am? And where is the catharsis in this novel? That I as a reader must feel, that purifies me, in whose rich spring water I bathe myself, that elevates me? Where is the universalisation that relates to me? The social statement? Am I supposed to write a novel, even if it is only a detective story that is nothing more than cheap reading, anaesthetising opium, a naïve product of the light muse? Do I just want to be entertained, to

entertaining and killing time? No, that would not be worthy of J. Szücs. Or should I mercilessly tear up what I've written down so far, only in my mind of course, because I don't have any paper to tear it up, or should I call the nurse in and talk to her, which of course would require an excuse, I don't really need to pee, I don't have to pee, I still have lemon juice, but I'm not thirsty either, or should I, or should I ... Or should I - that would be the more difficult task, that would be a goal with high literary aspirations! - summarise the social background, shed light on the deeper historical and human circumstances, clarify the connections, unmistakably typify the characters - as I have done so far - and create that truly great work that is worthy of me alone? Or both. I'll call the sister in, and later I'll write the great work. Maybe I'll write it later, when my recovery is progressing, really write it down, on real paper, that will be the last attempt to really write a novel, maybe this time it will work. I mustn't resign myself to the fact that I only ever write in my head, in my imagination, and that humanity can't derive any benefit from such great works. Great concepts, straightforwardness, credibility and that certain something that is unique to J. Szücs and distinguishes my work from all the work of others and makes it recognisable at first glance. Of course, the latter only in the raw. Not in my critical and literary-historical works. Stylistically speaking. However, the rigour and clarity of the concatenation of ideas contains that certain something. And merciless straightforwardness and openness. Yes, indeed. Towards me and my figures. Etuka is no exception to this rule.

form. Nobody. I'll show you! And now let the nurse come. I'll finish the juice first, then I'll ring the bell. And chat to her a bit, it's a pity I can't see if she's pretty, her style is nice and young, I'll ask her what she looks like. A nurse's job is to be merciful to the sick.

He carefully feels his way to the bedside table. The drinking ritual. The empty glass back. The bell button. Ringing, waiting. He has to wait quite a long time. Then the door opens. The nice voice. It sounds tired, but nice.

"Are you in pain?"

"No, sis. Thank you. I'm just thirsty."

"Why aren't you asleep at this time of night? Would you like a sleeping pill?"

"What time is it, sis? You feel completely sold without a watch."

"It's only three quarters of five."

"Already? That's great. Is it light outside already?"

"The sun is shining."

"Because I can't see it."

"That the sun is shining?"

"And neither you, sis. Are you blonde?"

"Brown. I'll bring you a glass of juice in a minute."

Well, that wasn't exactly an uplifting conversation. That's my cross. I'm incapable of making natural, direct, natural contact with people. I'm always under some kind of pressure, it's apparently innate, an inherited trait, the genes, the chromosomes, the protein, they're to blame. And the ribonucleic acids. Of course, acquired characteristics also play a role in this stiffness, this rigidity. And also the balance between the outer and inner world. Will it be possible to change this by changing certain proteins?

artificially? Certainly. And in the not too distant future. Maybe it can already be done now and I just don't know about it. Or things like the sense of time. I was wrong by two hours. My sense of time is slipping. A few more years and I'll buy an organic chronometer built into a protein tablet at the pharmacy and my brain cells will show the passage of time down to the second. It wouldn't be that new. The sunflowers can actually already do that. I just don't know whether the sunflowers also turn towards the sun when the sky is overcast. They certainly do. Then they have inbuilt clocks. In short, we will be perfect and omniscient. Man will not only think he is a god, he will be one. Or the difference between the two concepts will simply disappear, as this process is already underway. Two or three generations will be enough to create a perfect humanity. The only question is how to measure this perfection. What a dramatic conflict! One scholar, guided by nefarious intentions and lust for power, wants to let the greater part of humanity wither away, while the other strives for a free world of omniscient, good, beautiful, balanced people. The future of humanity is at stake! An enormous topic. My next work will be a scientific-fantastic novel, a real novel about the future! Józsa will be the scientist guided by noble ideas, and I won't portray Etuka as a saint, but as a splendid chemical computer, rich in white, an ideal object of experimentation on which both scientists, the bad one and the good one, want to experiment. Where's my lemon juice? That's right, I'm not thirsty at all. But still. And I'm going to transfigure Babsi in this novel. Artfully dismembered and into pieces.

She will become the benchmark of the perfect female body, the individual parts of which will be used by scholars of the to study ideal human proportions. She will also exist as a whole, but only as an exhibit in a museum. A new Venus de Milo. And Doctor Aurél Tamacskó will stand in front of her and laugh to himself that she is just a statue and can't move. Like an inverted Pygmalion. The juice is there.

"Thank you, sis."

"But with pleasure. Would you like me to help you drink?"

"That would be nice of you. I can't see anything, I can't smell anything, I can hardly taste anything, at least I can feel the touch of a warm human hand."

"But, but! You mustn't let yourself go! You'd better get some sleep. I'll give you something to sleep in. Yes?"

"How long will it be before I'm asleep?"

"Twenty, twenty-five minutes. You'll see."

"Then you'd better give me two tablets. Sleeping pills only work very slowly on me."

"Now take one, and if it doesn't work, take the other one later, I'll put it here on the edge of the bedside table. Stick your tongue out and I'll put it on it."

J. Szücs sticks out his tongue. And pulls it right back.

"What is ?"

"If I stick my tongue out far, my lower jaw hurts. It's so tight."

"Then don't stick them out so far, just a little."

J. Szücs sticks out his tongue a little. The nurse puts the sleeping tablet on it and J. Szücs swallows it like a giraffe.

"And now a sip of juice afterwards. Like this. Good girl. You'll be asleep in a moment."

"Thank you very much, sis."

"You're welcome. Have a nice dream."

The door closes. She has gone out. But maybe she didn't go out, she just pretended to, she opened and closed the door and stayed in the room. And is now stalking me.

"Go out now, little sister, and let me sleep," he says to the empty room.

But he gets no answer. Complete rest. Now I'm going to sleep. Etuka, do you know that I'm going to sleep now? And you, are you sleeping too? What else could Etuka be doing at five in the morning? If she's not tossing and turning sleeplessly in bed because she's worried about me. My poor thing. How much excitement for her, and now my accident. I have to tell her not to mention the toilet. She's supposed to say that I'd an electrical cable, that the cable was broken and that's when I fell. The colleagues shouldn't laugh uproariously that the dreaded J. Szücs fell off the ladder while repairing the flushing cistern in the toilet. They would add: straight into the toilet. I know them. They colour it in and make it up, and someone is bound to say: He fell into the toilet? That's he belongs. Too bad nobody flushed it down the toilet. Because they fear me. And rightly so. They're jealous of me. Because I am an assistant at the university, because I work in an editorial office, because I have made a name for myself on an international scale, because I have a pretty wife, because I realised the core of things very early on, the secret and the standard of common comprehensibility: that a work is true and good if the deputy minister or the central office personally have written it

could, of course only if the deputy minister or the central office could write, and because I am modest and plain, that's why they are envious, I am plain and simple in an everyday way, unlike the others, nothing about me is flashy, provocative and garish, I despise outward appearances and cheap finery, my thing is hard intellectual purity, the sparkle of ideas. That's why they're jealous. Would I be lucky? I don't think so. Here is the proof. Behind it is the merit. I'm not broken - that's the proof - and in the floods of winter I didn't kneel and beg for words. And one more thing. I do not ask, when one must be afraid, whether I should be afraid. I am afraid. Very much. But you can't see it on my face. I don't show it. Nobody notices when I'm afraid. No carrion notices. Not even Etuka. And she lives with me, with me, next to me. She's never seen me falter either. Babsi only once. The second time, that doesn't count. It's as if it hadn't happened at all. The fact that I'm afraid is my biggest secret. That I've been afraid ever since I was a child. Of everything and everyone. All the time. Even now. How many things are there to be afraid of, do those idiots, those rude fools! Of horses and calves and dogs and cats, as everyone knows, of little green lizards, of caterpillars and flies, but not because they're insects like others, I'm afraid of the fly because it spreads typhus, diarrhoea and cholera, sits on me, infects me, then I'm infected, sometimes even pulmonary tuberculosis, or who's afraid of flowers? I am, and very much so. Real and unreal. I sniff them, sometimes I only need get close to them and they chase their pollen up my nose, I breathe it in, it penetrates with my breath

It gets into my brain, where it starts to rot and rot, I get a tumour and go to the dogs in terrible agony. Or it sticks to my nasal mucosa, the bees get wind, or even the wasps, they attack me, one alone wouldn't be so bad, but they come in swarms and sting and sting, and many a person has died from it. Or the chlorophyll in the leaves, for example, at night it produces carbon monoxide or dioxide, I don't know, whatever, something harmful, I don't remember exactly, there's a bunch of flowers in the vase, pretty red roses or carnations, and in the morning I'm dead, even Etuka doesn't know why. From tetanus and snake venom. From sharks, for example in Lake Balaton or the Danube, they swim up to me, one is enough, and bite my leg off, right at the top, while I'm swimming. In the swimming pool before a child drowns, clings to me and pulls me down with them, or that I jump into the pool and smash my skull on the bottom, then they pull me out, I'm purple-blue, mouth open, hair sticking greasy to my face, eyes also open and twisted, dead as a doornail, brrr, horrible, I dreamt that once. What do these idiots know about how many things you can be afraid of, justified and unfounded, how many unusual and sophisticated variations of a simple road accident, for example, and how many consequences the various accident possibilities can have, not to mention the dangers inside the home, from slipping on the freshly tiled floor to falling off the ladder while repairing the cistern, to the coffee machine exploding in the office or a splinter drilling into my finger, I don't even notice it, pus forms, general septicaemia, done. Crime novel?! Is there a dangerous

I have never had a more breathtaking, more deadly adventure than this, that I live and fear from minute to minute, since I think and remember, to this day, to the age of thirty-eight, certainly in the future, to the hour of my death, amen, no, I do not wish it, but it will be so. I don't expect any change. Because they are all just cheap, vulgar fears, these physical ones, you can get used to them relatively easily and quickly, if you can get used to fear at all, the fears are normal, concrete, tangible, even if they are unreal and unfounded, even then. But the fog ... and the sleeping pills ... Now it is beginning to take effect, but I have a strong organism, it is now fighting, counteracting, tensing, it wants to put the conscious brain to sleep, kill it, nihilise it, but I , not with me, this fog, this shadowy, incomprehensible, sticky mass that you reach out for and that melts between your fingers, it doesn't exist, but it pushes itself back together behind you, you turn around, But it's not there either and yet it's there, threatening you, and you don't know off or on, no, I always knew, I knew even as a little boy, I was never afraid of any ghosts or vampires, no seven-headed dragon could scare me, at most a little, I always knew they were fairy tales, and I once heard my father say to someone, to whom, to my mother, or to Balog: These Communists, they're like a seven-headed dragon, you chop off one of their heads and a new one grows right back, not one, seven new ones ... I was afraid of everything and everyone, but only really of the Communists, as a child of course, now I'm about to fall asleep, of the Communists, of the two Goldner sons? Never before a name and never before a figure with eyes and

Nose and ears and hands, no, back then it was something else, the people who could be heard from the big room, from behind the guardroom ... the voices and the screeching and wailing, the roaring, the muffled blows and the sound of someone falling to the floor. Well, Szabó, why don't you stroke his soles a bit with your rubber truncheon, let's see if he's deaf or dumb or both! ... I was trembling all over, someone was about to start laughing, neighing like a horse, like I did when mother tickled me, but no one laughed, then I lay in bed, in the dark, and everything was silent ... And then there was the silence, into which no-one laughed, when are you going to start neighing?! And then a scream, from a distance, muffled, barely audible, apparently father noticed that the door was open, he closed it, and mother, in the morning, to father: Ferenc, at least close this goddam door when, what's the child supposed to do ... Somewhere blue music sounds, the sleeping pill, the blue music is built into it ...

Chapter ten

But he is still not asleep. The movement with which he reaches for the other sleeping pill on the bedside table is already dazed and hesitant, he puts the pill on the tip of his tongue, but he doesn't find the time to a sip of juice, because he falls asleep again for a moment, he can only lift his head briefly from the waves of sleep and think of the great danger that he will swallow the pill, that it will get stuck in his throat and that he will vomit on it.

he swallows the tablet quickly and without juice, it tastes bitter, I have a strong organism, he is now fighting against it, the light blue music built into the tablet is gradually turning dark blue, a storm is brewing, the fighters are standing on the beach, a sandy beach, light yellow sand, dark purple clouds in a strange milky, unfamiliar light, they are naked, so they stand there with their arms pointing at each other and slightly bent, springy knees, he feels the tiny, damp grains of sand on his soles, the other one is stronger than me, much stronger, and he is oiled, my hands will slip off, the waves rise higher and higher and get darker and darker, a big laugh, the music, dark blue music, he wants to run away, but he can't, he can't get away, he feels too weak for the slightest movement, no matter how hard he strains and tenses his muscles, he can't, again he startles for a moment and falls back, falls into the room, I break my bones, my glasses, the splinters, my eyes, I go blind, but then I land smoothly and softly on the floor, I could climb right back up, Józsa's face very close to his as it leans towards him, the strong, shaggy eyebrows almost touch him, Józsa laughs and puts his arm around his shoulder. You have nothing to fear, just admit everything, you can tell me why you killed the South American, he has no face, all he can see is his greyish temples and the big, dark sunglasses, just like Csudik with his gleaming white teeth in the Italian films, please, here's the money, he counts the hundreds on the table, he takes the money from the table and puts it in his breast pocket with the Belgian Browning, he feels the metallic coldness of the revolver.

He pulls it out by his fingers, turns round and immediately shoots at Etuka, who is walking towards the bathroom door, she is naked, she only has a blue apron tied in front of her, which she lifts up with one hand, in it she has the key, the key to the weekend house, he knows it, show it to me, you nymphomaniac tramp, he shouts at Etuka, Etuka turns round and lowers the apron, the apron is swarming with stag beetles and snails, they tumble out of the apron, crawl and creep skilfully across the floor, but you're so clumsy, Ferenc, so clumsy, says Etuka, now lying in bed next to him, she gets up, gets out of bed, she's wearing a nightdress, she leaves the room, He stays in bed, you're so unskilled, Ferenc, so unskilled, and now he should get up and fight with the naked man who has oiled himself and is wearing dark sunglasses and who, as he can see, has a mouth full of gold teeth, fight with him, out on the beach, under the dark storm clouds, in the light yellow sand, I don't understand, Major Józsa, I don't understand, he's a communist, you have nothing to fear, admit everything, you can tell me why you killed Laurentis, I didn't kill him, but we know it was you, we can prove it, here's the proof, in Józsa's hand a stag beetle with long antennae, do you still deny it? It's no use, the murderer is caught, he's carved Babsi, he goes to the door and opens it, Babsi is standing in the other room with her back to him, she just turns her head back, in slow motion, she's almost swimming in the room when she turns her head with her long, golden-blond hair, her arm is swimming, her arm floats too, as it moves backwards, as if Babsi wanted to cuddle it, now he can see her breast too, Fefe, come here to me, don't be afraid, you silly, says Babsi, Babsi, Babsi, she gets out of bed and walks out of the room.

He stays in the room, her hair floats again, her arm, I'll tell Etuka, says Babsi, no, don't, don't tell her, there you go, and Józsa leans towards him, denial is useless, just admit it, no, no, he screams loudly, wakes up from his scream, but only for a second, the second sleeping pill starts to work, it's a good thing I woke up, he thinks, then he goes back to sleep.

Single room in hospital, a summer morning. Deep, white silence. The sun is shining outside. J. Szücs can sometimes be seen sleeping in the white, iron hospital bed, wrapped around and around in gauze and bandages; he lies on his back and breathes with his mouth open; he can't breathe through his broken nose, which has disappeared under the bandage. His breathing is regular but panting, his organism is working vigorously. The world transmits its information to J. Szücs in a healthy, alert state via countless channels and lines. Part of the processed material has become a novel in him, the other part he has stored away, waiting "en stock" for further use, but the sleeping pills have finally taken effect so quickly that the somewhat precariously clear, white hospital order is only an apparent one, in reality a tremendous disorder rages between the clean walls. A large part of the raw material not used in the novel whizzes through the air, lies around on the floor, hangs from the ceiling, leans against the wall, a few wingless metaphors fly clumsily around, incessantly their wings somewhere, a large pile of tangled plot threads lies in the corner, three fat phrases lie on the floor like haughty, bloated corpses, male and female figures walk around desperately or with mimed equanimity and

They look for the situation into which they fit, several situations lie unfinished and undeveloped under the bed, the figures drag them out, rummage between them, jostle to get into them, assume poses, try out postures, often like this, but it doesn't work, a stubborn scrap of memory floats down from the corner, swaying like an autumn leaf, on which the carefully formulated sentence from an old curriculum vitae can be read: "My father was a civil service employee in the lower career", but at the height of the white lamp bell it changes shape, becoming a ghost, the ghost that for seven years fed the fears of J. Szücs for seven years until he was found out, but at a time when he least expected it, in an inexplicable, strange way, he still doesn't understand it, they were humane to him at the university, he was not exmatriculated, not interned, He was not exmatriculated, not imprisoned, not executed, in those years they even appointed him as an assistant, and they did not even exclude him from the party as an element alien to the class, he was even allowed to continue to lead the seminary, albeit only a medium seminary, but then a higher one next year, But the sentence from his CV survived this too, he had long since decided to write it out in one of the crime novels he had written in his head, to make a contradiction out of it, to sharpen it, to create a synthesis out of the clash of thesis and antithesis and thus resolve it, But it doesn't fit in anywhere, unfortunately, it appears in every crime novel and then wanders back into the raw material store as unfinished, where it spreads an unbearable stench among the otherwise well-behaved and well-combed material and roars loudly, roars incessantly: "Important is not,

My boy, where you come from is important, it's where you're going." Which ultimately true. But still. And this farm boy, with whom he lived at boarding school in 1945, who now walks around the room, the tip of his index finger on his round potato nose humming melodies, folk songs and sonatas, with or without lyrics. In the meantime, he has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics and a chair at the University of Minnesota. He doesn't know what to do with him either, and he is always there when J. Szücs is in of the imagination to compose a crime novel.

Tenundgé. Just like that. Nothing more, just that: Tenundgé. Tenundgé is also in the room, but Tenundgé is proud, he already realises that this time it will be his turn. He understands. So far it hasn't worked. But now.

Of course the nurse hasn't left the room either, the faceless, brown-haired nurse, she only has brown hair, with the white nurse's cap on top, she has no face, light blue dress, white apron, high, blue, lace-up canvas shoes that are cut open at the back so that you can see the heels, bare lower legs, the skirt is bobbing,

J. Szücs knew straight away that she wouldn't go out, now she's here, J. Szücs would have liked to have heard that she was blonde, then he would have compared her to Babsi, she

looks a lot like Etuka and is cheating on him with the young, very likeable neurologist, who didn't know any cure for Etuka's illness either. These are incomprehensible things. It is also incomprehensible what the material for J.

Szücs' essay "Freedom of thought in the form of a roll of poppies", which is in the process of being written and will appear in a periodic publication of the Academy as soon as it is finished, has to do with this.

He is not sure, however, whether the English spirit corresponds to the French esprit, he has an idea that the English *spirit* means something like petrol, schnapps or spirit. The title is good, modern, it fits, the subject matter of the essay is excellent, it will find favour. J. Szücs has found a counterpart to the famous poppy scroll in a painting by Rippl-Rónai, namely in a prose piece on a village theme by the young poet and Kossuth Prize winner Pál Csába Kiss, on a table in a majolica bowl painted with folk art. J. Szücs takes up this seemingly purely coincidental, but nevertheless meaningful and thought-provoking parallelism in the essay, where he first analyses in broad strokes the similarities and differences between the painterly and poetic view and image creation, the way in which the simplest, most everyday objects of the material world, such as a simple poppy seed roll, are transformed into eternity with the help of art. Here follows an exactly fitting quotation from Keats' *Ode to a Grecian Vase*, then the deepening and excoriation of the quotation, some thoughts on how and by what painterly means Rippl-Rónai achieves that his urban poppy seed roll remains eternally fresh in its impressionistic prostration, does not dry out and become as hard as a rock like the real poppy seed rolls when they are left on the table, then the same, but on a higher level, as on Pál Csába Kiss' table the urban-bourgeois view of Rippl-Rónai is fertilised by the emotional world of the common people, but in such a way that the progressive traditions of the urban bourgeoisie are included and the exemplary socialist solidarity of the nation is expressed in the deeper layers, pointing in the direction of a

classless society on the one hand, and to the peaks of the symbiosis of the various arts, which will surely be conquered one day, on the other. Pál very pleased when J. Szücs told him about the planned essay, "Don't praise me too much, Jot. You can praise me, but not too much. You tend overshoot the mark a little," Pál said slightly reprimandingly, but in a friendly manner and with his customary modesty. And now this essay also wants to turn into a crime novel, because such an essay is actually also based on investigation, it investigates the connections in the world, but it doesn't really fit into Major Józsa's milieu.

Never mind. I'll write Freedom of Thought as soon as I'm let out of here, then it won't bother me any longer. I will stir up a lot of dust. But even freedom of thought only just flitted through

J. Szücs' literary fantasy did not stay there, could not stay there, it has no place there, freedom of thought now stands next to a situation not included in the novel, coincidentally just next to the one in which, after Captain Ringler's morning call, Józsa and Mórka are intensely enjoying married life, rather naturalistically coloured, but freedom of thought watches them with an understanding gaze, because it is not fussy. Freedom of thought is understanding.

And J. Szücs is asleep. He is currently in the sleep phase, which is dreamless, if he were awake he would know it now, recently read the great interview in *U.S. News and World Report* that an American doctor gave on the latest sleep research, because J. Szücs informs and educates himself, he doesn't want to be haunted by surprises, he is very afraid of surprises, but right now he is sleeping dreamlessly. This phase of dreamless

His sleep will soon come to an end and another dream phase will follow. He sleeps very peacefully, with his mouth open, lying on his back, because he can't do anything else, he snores just a little, nothing can happen to him, Józsa is also asleep now, but the police apparatus is not, Lakatos, for example, is also now working thoroughly and with full vigour, Lakatos, for example, is now working thoroughly and with all his might to gather even the smallest details about the class from the list of names on Józsa's instructions, the material is actually already ready, Lakatos is sitting in his office, and as there is no typist available in view of the early morning hour, he sits down himself at the old office Royal and types his investigation report with two fingers.

Etuka is really asleep. Deep, exhausted and naked, at the side of Péter Szapragi, a fourth-year student, in his parents' flat, as his parents are on holiday in Szilvássvár. But Etuka has only been asleep for a quarter of an hour; she fell asleep at about the same time as J. Szücs. Szapragi met her around nineteen on the Freedom Square, after she

J. Szücs at the hospital. Szapragi enquired respectfully about her husband's state of health; he had heard, he said, that he had had an accident, Etuka told him,

J. Szücs had fallen from the ladder while laying an electrical cable and had suffered serious injuries, J. Szücs didn't need to tell her anything extra, she knew what to say on her own, "May I perhaps invite you for a coffee? It would certainly do you good after so much excitement," said Szapragi,

"That's true," said Etuka, they drank a coffee and a cognac with it, Péter Szapragi complained that was alone too much, his parents were on holiday in Szilvássvár, up in the Bükk mountains, because his dad was an enthusiastic wanderer, he had left the flat now.

but he didn't like going home alone, not at all, there was a bottle of cognac waiting there, but who should he drink it with? He asked her politely, and she shouldn't misunderstand him, if she wouldn't like to accompany him to his parents' flat, because she was also alone, he had got three new Beatles records from a friend in London and they could listen to them. Together. Because of J. Szücs' accident, Etuka hadn't even found the time to arrange any programme for the evening, it would have been a sin to miss the opportunity that Ferenc wasn't at home, and this Péter is a handsome lad, and so well-behaved, even if a bit young for her, but God, They carried two sofa cushions into the kitchen and sat down on them in front of the fridge, they opened it and ate everything that was in it, they drank cognac, they said to each other, "But only when we're alone, you can say *you* to me," Etuka said, and they sat down in front of the fridge.

"Well, well, you rascal," and she began to giggle, because Péter reached under her blouse and tickled her bare back. How can these boys of today kiss so well, Etuka wondered, but she didn't ask him because she thought such a question would make her look older.

"Now I'm heavy enough for bed," Etuka said later, Péter greedily offered her to lie for a while. "Like this, in clothes? Who's going to undress me?" Etuka asked, playing the offended party a little, Péter offered. "No, no," said Etuka. Péter found a solution: "I'll turn my head away." - "All right, you rascal, but don't you dare watch, little boys aren't allowed to watch ..."

Józsa was sitting in Lugosi's office when Etuka lay down, quite late, so it's quite understandable that she fell asleep earlier. Just as

J. Szücs had in mind, because J. Szücs knows his

Mrs best, first she tossed and turned sleeplessly, then she fell asleep exhausted. And now she's asleep too.

J. Szücs is fully aware that life is a perfect novel. One must never copy reality in a servile manner. Careful and exact construction, filtering, condensing, tightening, fine selection, observing the literary taste and cleanliness requirements of the public, finding a sophisticated style - these are the essential criteria of beautiful prose of a high literary standard. This is what he has learnt from his role model, Professor Lóránt, who is waking up at this very moment in Mátraszerges, where he is on holiday in the academy's holiday home, in a twin room with a bathroom, he has it good, his head is not wrapped up, he stretches out his right hand and takes his wristwatch from the small table, it's almost eight o'clock, He puts the watch back and checks his breathing, puts both hands on his chest and takes three very deep breaths, it whistles a little, it doesn't sound clean, he takes two pills from a round box, puts them in his hand and throws them into his open mouth, followed by a sip of water while he swallows, he turns on his side, turns to the other bed where his wife is sleeping, he just makes sure that she is there, even though he can hear her breathing, but one look is enough, he yawns, reaches into the neckline of his nightdress and scratches his chest a little, then he gets up, grabs his slippers and goes to the bathroom, In the meantime he thinks of Ildikó Szomotray, a first-year student, whom he likes sinfully well, he sighs, from sighing he remembers his breathing, he checks it again, now it sounds a little better, Ildikó makes Etuka come to his mind, you have to be a life realist, he says quietly in the bathroom, or maybe he just thinks it.

J. Szücs, however, sleeps deeply, sleeps in phases, exactly as research by the American navy into sleep has recently established, and he is still asleep at nine o'clock and three minutes when the door opens and Doctor Röppentyüs, the head physician, enters. He is followed by Doctors Wilitz and Fekete and the adjunct Almási, as well as head nurse Piroska and Sister Marian, but the latter is not the faceless, brown-haired night nurse, she has home in the meantime, her working hours ended at eight o'clock.

Doctor Röppentyüs lifts the tablet with the fever cure from the foot of the bed and takes a look at it.

"J. Szücs? The literary critic?"

"Yes, Mr Senior Physician."

"Aha, you can see. The medical history also shows a curvature of the nasal septum."

"Yes, Mr Senior Physician."

"Very well. He was given a sleeping pill in the morning, as you can see."

"Yes, Mr Senior Physician," says Nurse Piroska.

"Should we wake him up, Chief Physician?" asks Doctor Fekete.

"Not necessary. Let him sleep. Let the body work. In such cases, this is best."

Doctor Röppentyüs steps next to J. Szücs, grasps his left wrist, feels his pulse. Then he lowers his hand.

"Let him sleep peacefully." And J. Szücs sleeps.

SECOND NIGHT

First chapter

Investigation report.

Subject: Current status of the investigations concerning the persons who graduated from the F. Kölcsey Grammar School in 1932 from the perspective of the Laurentis murder case.

In accordance with the written directive received from Gen. Major Józsa's written directive, which was later supplemented by telephone, I drew up the logical sequence necessary for the rapid execution of the investigation, the first and starting point of which was the re-interrogation of Krisztina Csépan, née Braun, the former wife of Professor Ernő Laurents, as it could be assumed that she had also met some of his former classmates during her eleven-year marriage to Laurentis.

Mrs Csépan stated that József Braun, who was named sixth in the class list of names, was her brother and that her marriage to Laurentis was the result of a childhood love affair, so that she knew or still knows almost all of her former husband's classmates personally. She named Pál Haszlacher - today's name: Pál Harsányi -, technical manager of the PGH of dial manufacturers in Szentendre (Szentendre, Dunaköz 3,

flat: Budapest VIII, Vass Street 18) and Gyula Ru- zicska, secondary school teacher for mathematics (Budapest VII, Murányi Street 9) as those who organise the high school graduates' meetings, which are held at intervals of five to ten years, and who have kept the address list of class members up to date since 1932.

In view of the urgency of the investigation, I instructed Endre Kruszt and István Trimózer by telephone from Mrs Csépan's flat to visit the two persons named immediately and question them in detail.

In the following, I summarise the material from the investigation reports received in the meantime. I only include detailed information where it appears necessary for further investigations.

Status report on the persons named in the class list of the school magazine:

Zsolt Abelesz (present name: Adonyi), journalist. Editor of the *West Hungarian Gazette*, comes to Budapest every one to two weeks for conferences, is available at any time for confrontation and identification.

Béla Albert, deputy manager of sales outlet 386 in Pesthidegkút, also resident there. Note as above.

Bogdán Anasztáz, market gardener. Stall at the weekly market on Friedensplatz. Lives in Békásmegyer. Note as above.

Imre Balla. Was not drafted into military or labour service due to a paralysed leg. Died in the Mauthausen concentration camp at the beginning of 1945.

Jenő Bán, musician, jazz drummer. Currently under contract with his three-piece group in Greece.

József Braun (brother of Mrs Csépan). Participated as a member of the illegal Communist Party in Budapest at the beginning of 1945.

took part in the armed struggle against the fascists. He rushed to meet the Soviet troops as they were moving into Pannonia Street, but in his joy forgot to put his revolver away and was shot dead by a soldier, as the Red Army soldiers naturally did not recognise him and he was armed.

István Csákonvi. Left Hungary in December 1956, had a private circular knitting business in Budapest. Currently a textile worker in Belgium.

Gusztáv Donner. Killed as an ensign during the Don breakthrough.

Béla Ehrenfeld. Died of typhus in a forced labour camp in 1944.

Mihály Felcser (Dr Michael Felcser, MD. M. S.). Chirurg in Liverpool.

Andor I. Fischer, engineer, Kossuth Prize winner. Was a close friend of Laurentis. Head of the Metallurgy Research Institute in Szeged. Resided there.

Bertalan Glik, hotel porter in Tihany.

János Gonda, petrol engineer. Resides in Zalaszentgrót.

Pál Haszlacher (present name: Harsányi). Cf. above.

Alfréd Hauchling. Former bank director. Laurentis was employed at H.'s Kredit und Transferbank A. G. from 1942 until the summer of 1944, when H. disappeared from

Hungary. The two had been close friends in their youth. H., Laurentis and Miklós Papp (see there) formed the "trio"

or "threesome" within the class. All three came from

Veszprém, probably for this reason. H.'s name appears in criminal proceedings against the people. His relationships

with Germans in the

years 1943 and 1944.

Ferenc Ippay-Perl, former bank director. Resettled in 1952, died of pneumonia in 1953.

Zoltán Karlman, lawyer, member of the 19th An-

of the Board of Directors. Available for comparison and identification if required.

Elemér Kovács (Sir Eimer Kovacs), biologist. Left Hungary in 1935, professor at the University of Birmingham, awarded an English title of nobility in 1946. Visited Hungary in 1963 with a delegation of scientists and also met Laurentis.

Dezső Lang. Left Hungary in 1956. Currently teaches history of religion at the University of Mexico.

Ernő Laurentis. (Known)

Sándor Meitner (present name: Meszlényi), twice winner of the Kossuth Prize, merited artist, actor at the National Theatre. Currently spending his holiday in Italy.

György Meller. Was shot by the Fascists in the winter of 1944.

György Mertes. Was a civil servant in Budapest in 1943/44 and worked as such for the English Service. Was arrested in 1952, but released after six months in prison and ended up abroad under unknown circumstances. Currently lives in Khartoum as head of the Sudanese air force.

Jenő Minács, professor at the University of Minnesota, Nobel Prize winner.

Miklós Papp. Like Laurentis, he was born in Veszprém and became close friends with him during his school days. Together with Hauchling, they formed the "threesome" in the class. He went abroad in 1938 and was long thought to be missing until Laurentis told a school leavers' reunion in the summer of 1962 that he had met P., a doctor and French citizen, on a business trip to San Sebastián.

Olivér Ramaczay, former Horthy officer. Currently head groom at the Dinnyés- puszta state stud farm.

Péter Rottenstein. Left Hungary in 1939, currently manages

a beauty parlour in Melbourne. Visited Hungary in 1964, but did not meet Laurentis.

Gyula Ruzicska, mathematician, secondary school teacher. Cf. above.

Endre Sitik. Doctor of constitutional law. Executed in June 1944, martyr of the labour movement.

Albin Stafanits. Fell as a first lieutenant during the Don breakthrough.

Ede Szőnyi, former owner of a laundry salon in the city centre, currently head of a cooperative training workshop. Currently spending his holidays in Balatonlelle in the holiday home of this cooperative.

László Tapfer, deputy head of the transport department of the Investment Bank. Was unjustly persecuted during the years of the personality cult and later re-habilitated. Is available.

János Tinkai-Török, painter. Currently working at the Nagymaros artists' colony.

Barna Vázsonyi. Died in the Bor concentration camp.

Tivadar Winkler. Public prosecutor at the county court in Pécs.

Pál Illés Zima. Former Horthy officer, one of the main perpetrators of the Novi Sad massacre. Killed in an air raid in Budapest shortly before the end of the war.

I will refrain from explaining Ruzicska's statistical summary of the class in more detail, but I consider it remarkable that thirty-two years after graduation, almost a third of the students in the class in question are no longer alive; eleven former students, including Laurentis, who has now been murdered, have died, of whom only one (Ippay-Perl) died of natural causes. A total of nine have their permanent residence abroad; Bán (on tour) and Meszlényi, whose stay abroad Ruzicska learnt about from the press, are temporarily abroad. It is worth mentioning that

five former students have gone on to enjoy a remarkable career (Fischer, Kovács, Laurentis, Meszlényi, Minács). Lang and Mertes are not counted among them by Ruzicska.

Harsányi (Haszlacher) and Ruzicska are available, if necessary on telephone request, to appear at the Presidium and take part in a line-up or identification. If these two persons are not sufficient, other persons can be contacted, as indicated in the situation report above.

After questioning Mrs Csépan, I went to see Pál Harsányi (Haszlacher). He took from the top drawer of a chest of drawers a class photo taken in the schoolyard immediately after graduation, which is different from the one published in the school newspaper. Unfortunately, the Harsányi's four-year-old son had torn off the corner of the photo that contained a picture of Alfréd Hauchling; all that remains of the name under the photo is ...*ling*, *Alfréd*, the face is torn, only the right ear of the person he was looking for can be seen in the photo, along with a narrow strip of the face. I examined the right ear in the photo with a magnifying glass and found it suitable for an anthropological examination to make a conclusive identification (see Anselm - Rabóczy: *Anthropologische Untersuchungen an Hautfalten und Lappchen des Ohres zum Zweck der polizeilichen Identifikation*).

In the morning hours, I took a look at the investigation material that Gen. Józsa's investigation material so far. Knowing the circumstances, I consider it probable that Miklós Papp, who entered the country with a passport in the name of Miguel Navarro Sánchez, must indeed be suspected of the murder, although I consider the motive for the crime to be unsolved so far. Laurentis was

was close friends with the suspect from 1926 to 1938, when Papp went abroad. This was confirmed by Mrs Csépan as well as by Harsányi (Haszlacher) and Ruzicska. In 1927, one year later, Alfréd Hauchling was the third to join this friendship after he had been transferred to the Kölcsey Grammar School. Ruzicska characterises this friendship with the following words: "I sat on the third bench that year, with Papp sitting next to me. When we had to dictate our personal details at the beginning of the school year, Hauchling, the new boy, said he born in Veszprém. Then Papp whispered to me: "Now we are no longer two, but three Veszprémers! During the break, he went to Hauchling and told him that he and Laurentis were also from Veszprém. From then on, they were inseparable friends. Later it turned out that Hauchling didn't like the Jews, he didn't insult them, but he danced with them. Once, during the break, Lang approached Hauchling and asked him hypocritically: "How is it that you are friends with Papp if you don't like the Jews? Lang was displeased that the noble and rich Hauchling treated him snootily. Hauchling replied: "Papp is not a Jew, but a Veszprémer, do you understand? Lang replied: No, now I don't understand anything. The two are not mutually exclusive. Papp is a Jew from Veszprém, I'm a Jew from Budapest, what's the difference? Hauchling thought for a moment, then replied: "You don't need to understand. I would be infinitely grateful to you, Lang, if you wouldn't interfere in my private affairs. With that he turned round and walked away. I know, of course, that Papp was an exception for him only because his family was rich; Papp's father had four jewellery shops in Budapest and Szeged. Laurentis was not rich,

But he was the most intelligent in the class, always got the best grades, always way ahead of the subject matter, which is why he was at least as exceptional in the class as Hauchling was outside the class."

Harsányi (Haszlacher) said of the friendship between the three: "They even looked alike. Especially in the higher classes. All three were tall and blond, including Papp. When Laurentis was a senior in high school, he adopted his later typical posture; when he was state secretary in nineteen hundred and forty-eight, the funny papers published caricatures of him several times, and he was always depicted in this posture. He was instantly recognisable. His head between his shoulders, only his face raised to see something. Like a turtle. Papp and Hauchling remained similar later on, all three also wore similar clothes, only Laurentis was not dressed so tastefully. Always dark suits if possible, mostly dark blue and white shirts, dark ties. Laurentis couldn't always keep up with the other two, but he also had a dark blue suit that he often wore. Laurentis got on well with everyone in the class, Papp with many, but Hauchling only with Papp and Laurentis. Papp was excellent at reciting. In upper secondary school, he saved me from rushing through maths. To thank him, I gave him my Finnish dagger with a mother-of-pearl handle."

Harsányi (Haszlacher) also mentioned that Laurentis reported on his meeting with Papp in San Sebastián at the 1962 school-leavers' reunion. I asked him whether Laurentis had also said something about Alfréd Hauchling on that occasion. Harsányi denied this.

In addition to what has been outlined here, the investigations to date have yielded extensive detailed material.

I enclose this as an annex to the present investigation report for further evaluation, numbered consecutively from 1 to 18.

- 18 Attachments -

Emil Lakatos

One of the witnesses questioned, who did not wish to be named, accused Franz J. of having had intimate relations with Ottilia Göndös, née Préth, who was called Babsi among her friends, twice in his office at the university while Ernő Laurentis was attending an international archaeological congress in San Sebastián on an official mission. The porter at the university saw Mrs Göndös on 22 March 1962 at 5.30 p.m. to Laurentis' room, where Franz J. was staying. As a mitigating circumstance, it can be argued that J., although he had wanted such an intimate relationship to come about for a long time, had so far and initially also on this occasion still resisted it and did not show any willingness to take the initiative himself. Although it is true that this abstinence was not of a moral nature, but arose from fear of Mrs J., this in no way relieved Franz J. of responsibility. In his defence, J. argued that his wife and Ottilia Göndös had instigated a conspiracy against him, but he was not prepared to admit that the intimate intercourse had taken place, and in particular denied that this had happened twice, thus tacitly admitting that the intercourse taken place at least once during the above-mentioned period. According to her own statement, the nurse Magda Hollner said goodbye to J. at 4.55 a.m. with the remark that she would now the room, but she found the patient's behaviour suspicious and took advantage of the fact that J.'s head was in the room.

The patient, who was connected and could not see anything pretended to leave the room but actually stayed inside, while she observed how the patient also took the second sleeping pill she had prepared for him and a little later, probably in his sleep, raised his free left hand and made a movement as if he were shooting someone with a revolver. Soon afterwards he began to cry out in his sleep, "No, I didn't kill her", he cried, and immediately afterwards "Babsi, Babsi", followed by a short pause and finally the cry "No, don't tell her!". Even if our investigative organs do not attach any special significance to this little interlude from the point of view of the already proven facts, this also only emphasises the fact that J. cheated on his wife with her best friend and that this depraved subject threatened him that she would inform his wife about what had happened. The body of Ottilia Göndös, née Préth, was recovered from the Danube, dismembered and mutilated, already decomposing, but traces of strangulation were still visible on her neck, and the fingerprints proved that the murder had been committed by Franz J. He had put on gum before the crime. Although he put on rubber gloves before committing the crime, he probably missed the fact that two of the fingers of one of the rubber gloves had holes in them due to his excitement, so that his perpetration can be regarded as proven. The investigating authorities have no reliable as to whether Ottilia Göndös actually informed J.'s wife that she and J. had become intimate. Some witnesses unanimously state that Mrs J. had repeatedly made allusions to her husband which indicated that she had been informed about the sexual intercourse between Ottilia Göndös and her husband.

Göndös and Franz J. was informed. However, none of this is to be regarded as proven factual material, since Mrs J. is not obliged to testify in this respect according to our laws and since Ottilia Göndös can no longer make a statement. The motive for the murder committed by J. can therefore be fear and revenge in one or both of them. Our executioner placed one hand on Franz J.'s throat while the other plunged the knife deep into his heart and twisted it back and forth twice. J. saw with breaking eyes how the executioner and his assistant put their heads together close to his face and whispered as they watched the result of their actions. "Like a dog," mumbled Franz J., and it was as if his shame would outlive him.

Second chapter

Then evening and morning became the other day. Or, wait a minute. Exactly the other way round. Morning and evening. That's how the second day began. The boundaries are blurred, the transition is elastic and sticky like melting rubber, the questions of identity are extremely problematic. It is clear that Lakatos sat at his desk in the office in the early hours of the morning and typed the report, but when did he finish? Was there a period of time during which J. Szücs was awake and thinking about all this? And who was feeding him? And what did he eat? Perhaps it was Mórika, with her warm and strong white arm under J. Szücs' - or Józsa's? - neck stretched, perhaps it was his mother, sometime in his childhood, perhaps also the

Night nurse or another one. Maybe Zsu? Where is the line between Babsi and Etuka? And when did he drink? And when did he the highly embarrassing functions of the metabolism? Like a predator that has to go, he suddenly thought, and that did him good, because in addition to the feeling of defencelessness, abandonment and helplessness, the mere fact of being a predator suddenly, the very sound of the word awakened strength and a healthy, predatory ferocity in him. Predator, predator. Yes, that's good. Predator, beast. Sleek muscles and ripping teeth. Strike between them! Sugar! Shoo! The hippo leather whip cracks. The ring is one giant bug - jump! Babina, you beast, he hisses and lets the whip whistle, and Babina raises her left front paw against him with her claws outstretched, but then she goes crazy and lowers her paw, jump, Babina! Babina, the big, muscular Bengal tigress, leaps through the fire, followed by Edina, the lioness, all obedient, I'll you! Like a predator that has to go. I'm at their mercy. I'm at their mercy too. Just like the doctors. I've fallen into their hands. A careless movement, a reprimanding or suspicious tone, and they tear me apart, mistakenly giving me the wrong medication, strychnine for example, but leaving no trace. Excuse me? I dreamt it, I'm sure I only dreamt it, Etuka whining and complaining to the doctor in her slightly piqued, oh-so-familiar voice that she's been so nervous lately, so restless, it's not really insomnia, just ... And the doctor to her in a calm and dispassionate tone - you know how it is - that she go with him to the examination room, that I was still asleep anyway, that he would examine her, that I would do the same if I were a doctor, with a woman as pretty and petite as Etuka ... I was dreaming, of course,

and the rubber gloves, one of which had holes in two of the fingers, also that they agreed in my presence that the doctor would examine Etuka, in the other room, but I didn't dream about the nurse who brought me dinner, not that. I remember the evening meal, very clearly, she said there was cocoa and milk rolls for the others, but she brought me savoy cabbage stew with meat, it was fibrous beef, I didn't dream that. And now? Am I dreaming now, or am I awake?

He reaches to the edge of the bed with his left hand and grasps the edge of the sheet pushed under the mattress, rubs the fabric a little between his thumb, forefinger and middle finger, it's a fresh sheet, a new one, not yet washed, the finish is still in it, I'm not dreaming. Definitely not. That's for sure.

Unfortunately, Józsa doesn't dream either.

"My lord, we are not wild beasts. Tell us why you killed Ernő Laurentis."

"I'm telling you, I didn't kill Ernő Laurentis."

And that's true. Unfortunately, it's true. Lakatos is a fool. The whole suspicion that Miklós Papp killed Laurentis is humbug. Out with the dream, finished, end. The investigation has to start all over again.

He already knew it when he started questioning Papp. But he wasn't sure. And you have to follow a lead to the end.

The night porter at the hotel claims in the most decisive manner that Papp had returned to the hotel nine minutes after half past nine, that he, the porter, had just ordered a taxi for an Indonesian guest, that the train for this guest was due to leave at twenty-two seven, that he had

He looked anxiously at his watch, hoping he wouldn't miss the train, because the taxi was a long time coming. The porter also claimed that Miklós Papp, alias Michel Navarro Sánchez, had left the hotel at ten-six.

According to the police officer András Takács, the clock showed nine minutes past ten when he pointed out the parking ban to the owner of a dark grey Jaguar in front of the Hotel Royal. The foreigner nodded with a smile, he understood from the policeman's gestures what was meant and signalled to him with his hands that he was about to drive off, then he asked something and the policeman understood with difficulty that the foreigner wanted to refuel.

"Petrol? Petrol? Yes, yes," said the policeman.

He took the foreigner by the arm, led him to the corner and showed him where the nearest petrol station was. He explained to him in detail how he should drive, which of course wasn't easy. As he did so, he glanced at the nearby clock, where it was thirteen minutes past ten. The policeman's shift ended at eleven o'clock.

The foreigner went back to his dark grey Jaguar parked in front of the Royal, got in and drove off in the direction described. When confronted, the policeman in Papp recognised the owner of the dark grey Jaguar without a doubt. He then saluted and left.

"So you're saying it wasn't you who killed Laurentis?"

"Yes."

There is a knock. Elzike. She enters, places a sheet of paper on the table in front of Józsa and leaves.

Kálmán Bitura, the little boy who saw a dark grey car with foreign number plates near the crime scene at the time of the crime, strongly denies that it was the car of Miklós Papp alias Miguel Navarro Sánchez that he saw, according to the report.

"Surely I know a Jaguar! What do you take me for, Uncle?" he said to the detective, who showed him the dark grey car.

Papp's alibi is perfect. The limit times of the execution of the murder, twenty-one forty-five and twenty-two fifteen, comprise the maximum anyway. The offence could not have been committed before or after. Only between the two points in time.

Józsa's head is weighed down by a large, heavy, grey block of concrete. The investigation material. When Miguel Navarro Sánchez, alias Nicolas Papp, alias Miklós Papp, was arrested on reasonable suspicion of having murdered Professor Ernő Laurentis, two passports were found. He travelled to Hungary via the Hegyeshalom border control station in a dark grey Jaguar with an English number plate with the passport in the name of Miguel Navarro Sánchez. The entry visa issued by the Hungarian authorities is in order. According to the entry stamp and the required report, entry took place on the 15th at twenty-two o'clock. A few minutes before midnight he arrived at the Hotel Royal, where he had booked a room by telegraph from Vienna the previous day in the name of Miguel Navarro Sánchez. After receiving the information, he went to his room and spent the night there. The next morning, the 16th, he came down at half past nine and had breakfast in the patisserie, where, according to the waitresses, he stayed for about an hour. Then he left the hotel. The doorman saw him get into his car and drive away. According to Miguel Navarro Sánchez, he drove for two full hours criss-crossing Budapest, curious, he said, to see how the city had changed since he had last seen it. He openly admitted that his original name was Miklós Papp

and 1938 to have left Hungary, travelled to Holland and studied law there in Utrecht. He had not visited Hungary since then. The waiters in the Centennial Restaurant recognised him from a photo and said that he had entered the restaurant at around a quarter to one, alone, had spoken English, had lunch and left again at half past one. All the interviewees agree that he spoke English everywhere. No-one heard him speak English.

According to Miguel Navarro Sánchez, as he drove across Roosevelt Square to the Chain Bridge, he saw Professor Laurentis leave the academy building and walk off in the direction of Attila József Street. Miguel Navarro Sánchez circled the square, but only saw Laurentis get on a number one bus in front of Café Gresham. He followed the bus and watched to see when the professor would get off. This happened at the bus stop near Hotel Gellért. Laurentis walked back from the bus stop to the hotel and took a seat in the terrace café. Miguel Navarro Sánchez's, alias Miklós Papp's, testimony is essentially the same as Mrs Tamacskó's, and the times also coincide. When asked why he did not speak to Laurentis when he left the terrace at two o'clock and inform him of his identity, Papp replied that he had decided to call Laurentis. The professor had given him his telephone number in San Sebastián in 1962, where they had met by chance (Laurentis was there as an official delegate at an international archaeological congress), and asked him to call him if he, Miklós Papp (Miguel Navarro Sánchez), to Budapest from time to time. This part of the statement seems to correspond with what Lakatos says in

in his investigation report on this question. Papp's statement also seems to correspond with what Mrs Tamacskó said during her interrogation. When asked whether there had been intimate intercourse between him, Miklós Papp, and Mrs Tamacskó during the afternoon - how many times do I have to tell you, Elzike, Mrs Tamacskó spells her name with cs, not ch - he answered with a decisive yes. He even emphasised that this had been the case several times and mentioned that he had not informed Mrs Tamacskó of his real identity or of the fact that he spoke Hungarian. The two spoke exclusively in English. The dates given by both of them in their statements seem to coincide, but not to such an extent that there would be reason to assume that they were in collusion.

This is, of course, labour. This spider's web of elaboration, this careful tinkering with details, under the magnifying glass so to speak, it's hard to imagine that no-one will ever notice this unaffectedly simple, almost rough-and-ready nature of the investigative material and its stylistic beauties. Nobody and never. Or they? What actually is a J. Szücs? And who is he? And to what extent is he what he is? What kind of ingenious twists of the simultaneous, simultaneous multiplication of human consciousness are these? In how many levels does a person live? And with what intensity?

The novelists march in confused, disorganised rows along a long path towards the pyre. Some in hiking boots, others in felt slippers, some in Greek sandals, some booted or barefoot. In their faces boredom, indifference, cynicism, the aristocratic arrogance of the industry. Order? Straight, aligned, closed

Order? Not at all. All smug, conceited individualists, they shy away from discipline like cats from water. A disgraceful, grey-bearded old man, barefoot, a simple priest's coat over his arm as if it were only his raincoat. He smokes a cigar. Every now and then he takes off his green, grey and black patterned Grusinian cap and scratches his bald head, then puts it back on and walks on. To the pyre. He knows he is going to the stake. The others know it too. They go singing for the truth. What else interests them? The truth and nothing but the truth. And to the stake for them. Heavens, what an amazing feat of subtle imagination this is! One disguises himself as a simple chief accountant. Shabby grey luster jacket, stiff collar, thin tie, two-piece suit, black trainers, trousers worn bare at the bottom. He too is going to the stake. J. Szücs would like to go to the stake with them, but they won't tolerate him among them. If only they knew! At the edge of the sun-hot, long, dusty path sits a very small novelist, whimpering and whining that his feet hurt, that he's been walking on them in the pointed Italian shoes.

J. Szücs pity on him, he bends down and takes him in his arms, the little novelist calms down, the tears on his cheeks dry, he puts his arms around J. Szücs' neck, he trusts him, happiness rears its head in J. Szücs, he goes his way modestly, like the others, walks towards the funeral pyre with the little novelist in his arms. Now and then he looks anxiously and cautiously to the side, wondering what the others think. Strangely, they don't even seem to notice that he is going with them. With them on the pyre. But suddenly he realises that the writer, whom he has long

He wears the leather apron of the Martin steelworkers hung around his neck and tied around his waist, an everyday sight for everyone, so that this writer looks as if he were not a real working-class writer at all, but just a simple citizen, someone who has embarked on literature and is now turning green and yellow with envy, that he is not a real working-class writer at all.

J. Szücs is walking with them with the little novelist on his arm, who has sore feet, this pseudo-writer, this Martin steel worker, now elbows the old man, who despite his red shirt is an imposing figure, says something to him and points to J. Szücs with his head. The grey-bearded old man turns around, startled and threatening, and looks at J. Szücs, but then he sees the little novelist on his arm, who has been running his feet off, his gaze slowly softens, the disapproval in his eyes is replaced by recognition. Oh no. He smiles wisely to himself.

"Let him come with me," he says. "Maybe one day it will turn out that he writes excellent novels."

J. Szücs acts as if he has seen and heard nothing, he devotes himself to the little novelist, jokes around with him, tickles his chin.

"I am to you as your own father," he says to him.

The little novelist sets off stiffly

J. Szücs' arm and becomes restless.

"Put me down! Put me down now!"

"But why is that? What's wrong with you all of a sudden?" He puts him down. The little novelist walks on his own two feet next to J. Szücs, with his own aching feet, ungrateful and complaining, and he even steps with one aching foot.

J. Szücs against his shin, then he leaves him and goes to a small woman in her forties who is carrying a plant identification book under her arm, her other arm stretched out far from her, holding an automatic camera in her hand with which she takes photos of herself from different angles at every moment. And she is not afraid to dance and sing while doing so. The young novelist strikes up a conversation with her. Nobody cares about J. Szücs any more. He continues to the pyre. Maybe they won't notice, he thinks, and he sneaks off to the cart, where novelists are also sitting at eight marble coffee house tables pushed together, debating loudly and shouting.

"Whether they are immortal will be shown on the scrap heap!"

"Of course, of course! But until then ... Who could create order among them?"

J. Szücs remains silent, pretending not to have heard the allusion, even though he knows it is meant for him.

How many hearts a man has besides the one that beats in his breast, he thinks bitterly, and each one pulls him somewhere else! ... But this many-heartedness also gives him a certain sense of security. You'll see who I am!

Then he lowers his head and walks on. To the pyre. With them.

The debate at the marble tables on the long trolley is getting heated. I'd like to bet that they're not discussing literature, thinks J. Szücs thinks. The honorary, that's what interests them. Ugh! The only thing they can discuss so passionately is the royalty system.

But he is wrong. And sighs deeply. Reality is always much more complicated. Even J. Szücs can be wrong. Rarely, but even he is sometimes wrong. The writers in the press debate about J. Szücs.

"A dilettante. A cheap little amateur."

"Dilettante yes, but not a cheap amateur. A brilliant dilettante. Like Schwartz-Bart," exclaims a youngster enthusiastically. "Only he can't write. But what compositions! This tight, balanced construction! And these characters! This characterisation. J. Szücs does not create paper figures."

J. Szücs crouches in the shadow of the cart and listens, he squints his eyes a little, his face contorts painfully and knowingly, he nods thoughtfully. Unfortunately, that's the way it is. He does not allow himself to be blinded by arrogance and conceit. He knows all this. I am a dilettante. But a brilliant one. Like Schwartz-Bart. But I am at the mercy of a different fate.

The pyre can already be seen in the distance. It is huge. For so many writers!

"The funeral pyre! The pyre!" the writers shout overjoyed.

One of them pulls a short Roman sword from under his tunic in ecstasy and puts the tip to his stomach, his facial muscles, he clenches his teeth and stabs, a terrible cry of pain, because they are all wimps, then he shouts: "Take my body, take my corpse to the stake!"

But nobody pays any attention to his reputation, they leave him in the dust, he suffers agony, such a selfish, conceited gang, they all only care about themselves, everyone just wants to be immortal on their own, no collective spirit, ugh!

...

"The poets! Where are the poets?" yells the enthusiastic young man, who secretly also writes poetry, jumping up from the marble table.

"Fool," J. Szücs calls up to the cart in a surprisingly stern and harsh voice, "Fool! The poets are forming the funeral pyre. Look at them!"

And while the young man looks towards the pyre, where the poets are dipped in pitch and piled up at intervals of three centimetres so that the fire has the right air supply, J. Szücs now pulls the fiery red executioner's robe with the hood at the head from under his coat, puts it on and steps firmly and with dignity to the pyre, lifting a fat young poet with one hand and holding him over the marble bowl, which rests on four legs and in which the Olympic flame blazes, fuelled by burning alcohol, the poet begins to burn crackling, flames flicker along him, and all the novelists watch in fascination as J. Szücs places the poet on the pyre. Szücs throws the poet back onto the pyre.

Among them stands the novelist J. Szücs, and he sees that the time has come to shout a question to that other J. Szücs, the one in the red frock and red hood, who is pondering the little tricks and twists of the trade with his arms folded amidst the heat and the stench.

"Just one word! Will I become immortal?"

"You will not become immortal," says the executioner J. Szücs to the novelist J. Szücs indulgently, but with unrelenting sincerity. "Not immortal, but a classic. A classic of the crime novel."

Third chapter

"Tenundgé. Hello, Miklós. Good afternoon," says the man entering, first to Miguel Navarro Sánchez, then to Józsa, but Józsa doesn't give him time to continue, he strikes, wildly, like a hawk strikes a jay.

"Miklós? Did you say Miklós?"

"Yes, this is Miklós Papp. Tamtatam, Miklós," the man repeats, facing Navarro Sánchez.

"Tenundgé, Hassan."

's a sublime feeling, a marvellous feeling of power, of dominance, that Józsa is now completely at his mercy. He can't do anything if I don't help him, come on, Józsa, now jump if you can ... He can. Józsa has his own means. J. Szücs only likes one thing, as he realises. If he wants to, can destroy Józsa physically - or not physically, but mentally. He is authorised to do so, or rather not authorised, but he can do it. He cancels the novel, he never picks up Józsa's character again. That would be possible. But as long as Józsa is a major in the police force, Józsa is not just a decorated factotum, especially not in the current state of events. The facts and events with their logic also dictate a J. Szücs. Józsa as the hero of a novel, indeed as a positive hero of a novel, acts according to the laws of the Hungarian People's Republic. J. Szücs sighs. Now it doesn't matter. He makes a polite movement with his free left hand. Please. Here you go.

"Sir, this is not the aristocratic casino. Please answer my questions. Your name?"

"Pál Harsányi. Yes."

"Harsányi, formerly Haszlacher?"

"That's the way it is. And Hassan. The boys at school call me Hassan."

"I understand. And tenundgé, what does that mean? I heard you right, didn't I? You're not wanted!"

Because Miguel Navarro Sánchez has already opened his mouth to answer Józsa.

"Tenundgé is tenundgé. I don't know what it means. It was a kind of school greeting for us. I have no idea what it means."

"Do you ?" Józsa asks the other sternly.

"Yes," replies Papp. "Harsányi can't know. It was the secret song for the three of us, for Laurentis, Hauchling and me. Part of an old battle song. God, who has protected the fatherland from hardship and danger for many thousands of years ... Do you understand?"

Miguel Navarro Sánchez sings the old battle song, but Józsa still doesn't understand.

"... from hardship and danger ... This is where this phrase comes in, *ten* and *Ge*. At first, only the three of us used this greeting, then the others adopted it, just out of habit, because they had heard it from us. But only the three of us knew where it came from. So that's *te- nundgé*."

"I understand. Does it have any deeper meaning?"

"No. It was just a secret slogan. A slogan."

"Political content? I mean, because it's an old fight song?"

"No. This part was emphasised in singing lessons. It sounded funny and pointless. That's why."

"Very well. That's settled then." Józsa turns to Harsányi. "So you claim that this gentleman is identical to Miklós Papp, your and Laurentis' former classmate."

"Yes. It's definitely him," says Harsányi. And to Papp: "You haven't changed, Miklós. I recognised you straight away."

"You haven't changed either, Hassan. We've just both got a bit older."

"Yes. A little."

"Yes. Poor Lauri."

"I read it in the paper this morning. That he died unexpectedly of a tragic death."

"Please end your conversation now. You have been summoned for questioning. For an official interrogation."

acceptance. Thank you, Mr Harsányi, you're ready. Thank you for your help."

"Please, you're welcome. Hello, Miklós. Are you still staying at home?"

"Don't answer that question!"

"Good, goodbye, Hassan. Thank you."

"But for what? Goodbye. Goodbye." Harsá-nyi leaves.

Józsa calls Elzike in on his phone and says:

"Mr Ruzicska is waiting outside, he's been summoned. Tell him that we no longer need him and thank him for his efforts. If necessary, we'll ask him to come back."

Józsa is tired and without hope.

J. Szücs is also tired and without hope. As fond as he is of this South American, his sense of his profession as a writer triumphs over his jealousy and subjective aversion. Miklós Papp, alias Miguel Navarro Sánchez, becomes more and more sympathetic to him. It is clear that he is not the murderer. His alibi is tight, but exemplary. The pathologist considers it completely ruled out that the murder was committed before quarter past three or after quarter past eleven. And facts are stubborn. Who said that once? Never mind. They are stubborn, unyielding. J. Szücs is not allowed to do violence to his characters. In fact, who can J. Szücs do violence to? The reader rightly expects something his money. , in a crime thriller, above all suspense. So far, however, this thriller is shallow, boring, dry. Everything can be calculated in advance. Only there is no murderer far and wide. So that's what's left of this horny South American whom justice and J. Szücs' punishing hand were supposed to bring to justice. Pretty. Hauchling was just a dream. Józsa is up to his neck in the dip. The deputy minister! Promotion soon! Quick result!

nis! J. Szücs comes up with the most stupid ideas. It's not the South American who is the murderer, but his twin brother. Ridiculous. Ridiculous? Hilarious. Only one Miklós Papp is pictured and noted in the school newspaper. What if the twin brother went to a different grammar school? Nonsense. Harsányi is the murderer, Haszlacher. Or Ruzicska, the maths teacher Józsa sent home. Impossible. Bogdán Anasztáz, the vegetable gardener? He heard by chance about a misstep by the young Laurentis, and one day, as he sits among his peppers, tomatoes and young onions at his stall on Peace Square, he writes Laurentis a letter of demand. That he should pay. And Laurentis doesn't pay. He just laughs at the letter. That's why. Or is it Zsu? Yes. Zsu. She's learnt that Laurentis wants to leave her, that he's in love with a first-year student. Zsu could still be identified as the perpetrator from the investigation material so far, the timing could be right, the circumstances could be adjusted. It doesn't work. Not possible either. Or it was a robbery after all. That would perhaps be the most obvious. The robber was also at the post office when Laurentis picked up the book parcel, he saw the money in his wallet when he identified himself, he went after him and him, but when he tried to rob him, was disturbed and fled. And that would even be a modern resolution. The simplest, free of psychology. Around middle of the twentieth century, every better writer blushes when he hears the word psychology, writes Nathalie in an essay on romantic theory. That may be so, but it would be a pitifully cheap resolution, even if it were free of psychology. Who else would we have?

J. Szücs goes through the list of names again in his mind
of Laurentis' former classmates,

first eliminates the dead, then the foreigners, then takes on the people who have remained in the country. Nobody fits. General failure. Like when a patience doesn't work out. There is still one possibility. Introduce a new character. Cheat her into the novel in such a way that she seems completely unsuspecting, but set her up from the outset in such a way that a motive for the crime is given, and then serve her up as a huge surprise to the unsuspecting reader, i.e. J. Szücs himself. But what is the point of the whole thing then? If I make it up beforehand and want to surprise myself with it in the end? Where's the surprise in that?

How, for example, would Faulkner proceed? Because if a J. Szücs is looking for a role model and methodical help for his novel, he doesn't turn to Edgar Wallace. Not even Agatha Christie. Rather to Sime- non. Simenon is good. But Faulkner is even better. What would Faulkner do? What Faulkner would do is perfectly clear. Outline the social background and develop the characters within it. In the huge, tangled, opaque web, the figure of the murderer would suddenly emerge, the motive for the murder would come to light. Grafting the crime novel onto a Greek drama, as Malraux said about "Sanctuary".

J. Szücs is always a little impressed by how well he knows his way around literary provinces. Dostoyevsky, for example, would also be good, but with such a role model he would have to juggle with psychology all the time. And he shies away from that effort. It would make him blush. He needs proper, solid factual material. Material reality. History and society. Or the lullingly gentle, anecdotally credible relentlessness of a Mikszáth. As you read, sugar-sweet peach juice drips from both corners of your mouth, but all at once you bite down on the bone-hard, bitter

Kern. Also a special course at the university in autumn, the basic questions of epic. The inner and outer methodology of the great novels of the twentieth century. Sounds pretty good. And will cause quite a stir. Etuka can be proud of me.

Somehow, the resolution is already contained in the previous material, it is somewhere in the middle of the plot threads and circumstances, somewhere there the murderer and his motive are hidden. Unfortunately, in this case I have to refrain from being God. I will begin my lecture with these words. I step up to the lectern, raise my arm like the Petőfidenkmal and say: There is no God, dear friends. He does not exist. And there is no God in twentieth-century fiction either. Even the novelist is no longer a god. Now I lower my outstretched arm, raise it to my chest and tap it twice, look the audience deep in the eye, pause briefly but effectively and then speak into the expectant, tense silence: "I am not a god either. As strange as this may sound to you. You will laugh out loud, but what does it do? That is necessary. *Captatio benevolentiae*. This will win me people's sympathy, I'll have a winning game with them for the whole academic year. You have to find the strength to openly admit that you are not a god either. And I can muster the strength. I descend from my heavenly throne. Yes, I do. Down to the people. I start a new life with Etuka. I forbid her to have any contact with Babsi, and if she doesn't react, I tell her flatly that I will no longer tolerate it. She'll laugh in my face. *You* won't tolerate it any longer, Ferenc? *I will*, I will tell her, *I will* no longer tolerate it. Ha, ha, ha, she'll say. And then I'll slap her in the face. Force her

to our knees. And we start a new life. I might even confess to Babsi. What if she says she already knows? That Babsi told her? It's not impossible that Babsi has initiated her. And I'm at their mercy. Until they blackmail me. Two of them. Because it a conspiracy. They blackmailed me like the vegetable gardener blackmailed Professor Laurentis. The Bogdán. Never mind. Nevertheless. Speak out everything. To make the treacherous loneliness that forges its intrigues in the remotest hollows of the heart speak, just like the universe. And write the novel. With a machine, on paper. With a real typewriter on real paper. Even if it takes five years. Checking every word, every comma a thousand times before I write it down. But then the novel crumbles under my hands. Just like this one is now. Never mind. Faulkner. And Kafka. He's no longer taboo either. Unbridled realism. There's room for everything. Behaviour or methodology? There is also room for socialist romanticism. And strict, merciless credibility. I am not a god. I am a human being. And thus grow beyond myself. My firmament is the clarity of the mind. I am Mrs Bovary. And Ferenc J. Szücs.

When he came out of the office one afternoon, J. decided to go shopping for dinner and then not to leave the apartment, but to continue the work he had started in the office at home, carrying the documents with him in his briefcase. He made his way to the shop where he usually shopped, where the shop assistants already knew him, greeted him with a smile and asked him what he wanted. As he stood in front of the shop, he noticed with annoyance that the blinds had been lowered and a cardboard sign was hanging in the doorway. The sign said: Closed for stock. The nearest shop

is located ... and the address followed, two streets further on. Now I'm allowed to trot two corners further in this heat, J. thought angrily. Many people were out and about, the sun was blazing, even though it was almost six o'clock, J. was wearing his usual black suit, you have to dress properly in the office, that's what visitors expect, and that requires respectability in front of the other officials, especially the subordinates, plus a white shirt and tie. This is where it will be, thought J. and stopped in front of the shop, the blinds were also lowered in front of the shop windows, probably because of the heat, but the door was open, so he entered. Everything inside seemed very gloomy to him, they should at least light the place if the blinds are already down, he thought. But lamplight also spreads warmth. In fact, compared to the heat outside, it was quite cool in the shop. A woman with grey hair but a youthful face approached him in a white work coat and asked him what he wanted. "I'd like something for dinner," said J., "butter, cold cuts, a loaf of white bread and some fruit." The woman smiled regretfully. "I'm afraid we only have pre-packed permanent goods," she said, pointing to the shelves. J. leaned forward a little, he had to stretch his neck because in the semi-darkness it was impossible to see clearly what the boxes, which he could see indistinctly, contained. The woman - perhaps she was the shop manager, as she seemed more cultured than shop assistants in general - approached the shelf, took out a box and held it out to J.. "Babsi doll," she said and smiled. Her smile betrayed a certain curiosity as to what the valued customer would say about it. "Special quality," she added. "But I want to buy something for dinner," J. repeated, disconcerted. "This is pure meat, sir, tender and

But look at it closely," said the woman, "we don't sell bread, but I still have a piece of my own that I'd like to give you." J. was so embarrassed that he didn't know what to say. This woman must out of her mind. He smiled shyly back, remembering darkly that you shouldn't contradict crazy people, he took the open box in his hand, then he said to the woman, "A Babsi doll, indeed, a Babsi doll." There was indeed a naked doll in the box. First-class workmanship, he thought approvingly, very lifelike, but for dinner?

"May I?" said the woman and took the box from his hand, lifted the doll out, held it skilfully with two fingers wrapped around her waist and, as it seemed to him, pulled her up with her other hand, then she placed her on the counter, the doll began to walk, she turned and raised and lowered her arms as if she were dancing. "If you press this button, she can talk too, wait, I'll show you," said the woman, but J. interrupted her irritably, "no, thank you, no," he was now sure that the woman was mad, "the doctor told me not to do that. Are there dolls like that in all the boxes?" he asked, so as not to arouse suspicion or cause a stir. Who knows, maybe the woman would suddenly have a fit of rage and attack him. "Unfortunately, we don't have a large selection, but I could recommend these to you. The last few pieces," she replied and took another box from a smaller goods carrier. "Etuka dolls," she said and held the box out to J. "No, thanks, I only bought one of those yesterday, it's not finished yet," J. fended her off and would have been glad to have left the shop with his skin intact. "Is something wrong?" asked a deep, calm male voice behind him. J. turned round. He looked at the

The tall, elegantly dressed gentleman immediately realised that he was used to uniforms, even though he was now wearing a dark suit. "Are you Franz J.?" the man asked in German. "Jawohl," replied J., also in German, and was angry with himself because he noticed how he assumed the posture of a superior when answering. But he was at most the shop manager, he thought, possibly a supervisor from above. "Do you really have a doll like that at home?" the man asked, emphasising the word as if he doubted that J. was telling the truth. "On my word of honour as a soldier," J. hastened to say, annoyed that he did not know how to control himself and did not firmly and indignantly reject the suspicion he had overheard in the man's words, even allowing himself to be carried away into giving a word of honour. "That's a question of fact, of course," the man said with a smile. "It can be checked by us at any time. Unfortunately, the management hasn't provided a more extensive range. We can't come up with any more. Incidentally, I've already suggested demoting the shop manager. He is also facing disciplinary proceedings. And we will reduce his salary. Goodbye, Mr J. See you again soon." With that, he turned round without waiting for J.'s reply and disappeared into the back rooms. J. looked at the woman, who was still standing next to him, smiling wordlessly and obligingly. "Goodbye," said J. She silently, and J. stepped out onto the street. But he had hardly taken a few steps when he realised that he had left his briefcase on the counter. He went back, but he looked in vain for the shop. Where it should have been was a dairy shop. He bought butter, Emmental cheese, a bottle of yoghurt and three rolls for supper. At the

The next day it turned out that he had left his briefcase with the prepared work documents on his desk in the office.

"Do you suspect anyone, Mr Papp? Do you have any idea who might have killed Laurentis? After all, you were his friend," says Józsa and, with a nod that she immediately understands, tells Elzike to bring the coffee.

"Absolutely," replies Papp. "I'm almost certain that the murderer was Hauchling."

"Hauchling?! Alfréd Hauchling?"

"Yes."

Chapter Four

33, horizontal. First name of Gulliver's spiritual father, also apple variety. He writes it down without thinking: *Jonathan*. 33, vertical. Well-known young literary historian and critic. Starts with F, twelve letters, the seventh is a J. Who the hell could that be? He doesn't know. Never mind, we'll figure it out. 34, horizontal. Egyptian sun god. But he doesn't have time to write it down because the phone rings next to him. He slowly picks up the phone.

"Lieutenant Bodoki," he says, and suddenly he sits up straight. He pushes the puzzle paper aside, pulls out a sheet of paper and takes notes. "Yes, I repeat the order. I want the Veszprém Town Council to establish how many copies of a birth certificate were issued yesterday in the name of Papp, Márton, with two p's, born on the tenth of May eighteen hundred and eighty-four, mother's name: Cecilia Rosenblatt, father's name: Mór Popper. I

repeat: Papp, Márton, with two p's, born on the tenth of May eighteen hundred and eighty-four. I have understood." Then he listens intently. To finally interject: "There is only one difficulty, comrade Józsa. Today is Saturday, three o'clock in the afternoon. There won't be anyone at the town council." He is silent again. "I understand, from under the ground if necessary. I'm already on my way."

He hangs up. For a moment he hesitates whether he should enter the Egyptian sun god, two letters, but then his sense of duty wins out.

Yes, it's reminiscent of Faulkner. J. Szücs concludes that he won't dwell on the details now, he only sketches the Sunday afternoon in Veszprém in passing, the air vibrating with heat, the almost empty streets, Bodoki going to town council, he learns from the porter that the chairman of the council has gone swimming with his family to Balatonalmádi, The deputy to Csopak, Bodoki goes back to the police and asks for a car, half an hour later he has the chairman of the council called out on the beach, the chairman arrives in wet bathing trousers, from him Bodoki learns that the head of the council office is called Mária Ikkán. "Oh, Aunt Mariska," says Bodoki, "know her." thanks her, gets back into the car, drives back to Veszprém and to Aunt Mariska's flat, but she's not at home, the neighbour, a certain Mrs Hackel, shrugs her shoulders and tells him to try her son-in-law, Lajos Rubletzky, He lives somewhere at the end of Kossuth Street, Bodoki goes there, Aunt Mariska comes out of the bathroom, because she goes to her daughter's every Saturday to take a bath, but she doesn't remember, Bodoki waits until she has dried off and dressed properly, then they go to the registry office, Aunt Mariska opens the register,

Now she remembers, that was yesterday, that's why she didn't remember right away, but now she remembers, one of them was a man with glasses, he came to pick up the extract from the register in the afternoon, the other came five minutes after the first had left, she was sorry, Aunt Mariska said to him that she could only make the extract the next day, i.e. today, on Saturday, but Saturday was not office hours, but the man begged that he was travelling, she should be so kind, he would show his gratitude, "but what are you !" said Aunt Mariska indignantly, whereupon the man, a tall man with slightly greying hair and a very straight posture, smiled that he hadn't meant to offend her, he only wished to reward her extra effort, because he was asking her for a personal favour, but Aunt Mariska knows no fun in such matters, "I couldn't look in the mirror if I did something like that," she said to Bodoki. "Tomorrow morning, ten o'clock, I said to him, it's still against the rules, because we don't have office hours on Saturdays." The man thanked her and left, but on Saturday at ten she waited in vain, he didn't come, please, there's the other birth register extract, Márton Papp, with two p's, born on 10 May 1884, mother: Cecilia Ro- senblatt, father: Mór Popper. "All that work was for nothing," says Aunt Mariska to Bodoki, who is an ambitious young man. Sitting in his office again, he first writes down a draft of his report, which he will give over the phone, then he copies the draft neatly, the open puzzle newspaper lies next to him, he doesn't give it a glance until the work is done, he reads through the copied report twice more, adds a correction here and there, lights a cigarette, stubs it out again and reaches for the phone.

"Put me through to the Presidium in Budapest, Major Józsa," he says. "But urgently. Very urgent."

J. Szücs does not elaborate on this, it remains a sketch. Later, when he writes the novel, he will describe in detail, broadly painted and luxuriantly this summery Saturday afternoon in a small town, the beach, the characters, how the chairman of the council scratches his head in dripping swimming trunks as he stands in front of Bodoki, Lake Balaton, how the sun's rays sparkle on the green-grey, smooth surface of the water, the bright, colourful picture of the bathers, but now he doesn't want to go into detail, for now this is enough for him as an allusion. And how beautifully he has painted himself in the corner of the grandiose painting, modest, unspoken, but he is there. Like the great Italian masters of the Renaissance, he thinks contentedly. Well-known young literary historian and critic. Begins with F, twelve letters, the seventh is a J. Outstanding. This Bodoki is a good figure. Grateful material. Yes, that's already a bit Faulkner. That's how you do it. Introduce a new, surprising situation, somewhere far away, with a new character, accompany them through their actions, then return to the starting point with an unexpected twist when the interim has passed, and in the meantime something has changed, the reader knows something new, something essentially new, like here, for example, that Hauchling also at the Veszprém registry office, a few minutes after Miklós Papp, but he didn't get the extract from the register, or rather he didn't pick it up on Saturday.

However, the Ivo Andrić is not bad either. The is also an epic that rolls along broadly. Even if it is more like an oriental fairy tale, like a tale out of dew and a night, the modern, modernised version of which, the so-called drawer novel, *roman á tiroir*, like

The different stories are linked together, like Arabic script, rambling, overlapping, in one story someone tells another story, in another someone tells a story that's connected to the first, that's not a bad method either, it's essentially no different from what Faulkner does, and Faulkner would do it in such a way that Józsa lies in bed at night, Móríka lies in the other bed, Józsa talks, he tells her what has been going on in the office during the day, the exciting story Miklós Papp told him while they were waiting for the report from Veszprém, whether Hauchling was there, and the one from Hegy- eshalom, whether Hauchling had left or was still in the country, but nothing was known at the border, the report had already forwarded to Budapest, Józsa Lakatos to look for Vicenik, but Vicenik wasn't at home either. Who would be at home in such merciless heat on a summery Saturday afternoon! In short, while this urgent, tense, nerve-wracking search and investigation was underway to Hauchling, Miklós Papp told him the story, which Józsa unfortunately cannot tell his wife at night, as Faulkner would have done, because there is the vigilance, Józsa does not talk to Móríka at home about official matters, he knows: what someone does not know does not make him hot, he cannot talk about it. So Józsa doesn't blab anything. Writing directly, the way Papp tells it, is boring and old-fashioned, but it's a tried and tested novelistic method. J. Szücs is about to use this method, but he comes up with a better solution: he will have Papp speak on tape, which also has the advantage that the text is not tied to the time of the novel, Józsa can switch on the tape recorder at any time, and ultimately he can play back the passage he wants or needs.

A fine example of this, thinks J. Szücs thinks, as if he were giving a lecture at the university, how an achievement of modern technology is given functional significance in the technique of the novel.

But now Papp is speaking on tape, it is Sunday evening, 18 July, fifteen o'clock, in Józsa's office, while Bodoki is canvassing Veszprém to get the information he wants.

"I was born in Veszprém," Papp begins the story, "just like Laurentis and Hauchling. But we didn't know each other as children; it was only at grammar school in Budapest that we discovered we came from the same city. That's where our friendship came from. Veszprém is a pious city, but my father, who had a watchmaking business there, got into trouble during the White Terror because he was Jewish, and Laurentis' father had a similar fate, as it turned out later, but for different reasons. We moved to Budapest at the same time and my father opened a watch and jewellery shop there. The business went well, my father specialised mainly in gemstones, the turnover enabled him to afford this hobby, and he didn't want to bother with small things, so he set up branch shops, including one in Szeged. In the summer of nineteen twenty-six, we spent a month's holiday in Abbazia, where my father met the Dutch jeweller Jan Van Doorn, they got on very well, became friends and also established business relations. Later, Van Doorn visited us in Buda-Pest several times, he was always our guest. My father hardly ever talked about it, but Van Doorn came to Budapest not only business, but also to visit his girlfriend Mária Zucker. She was around thirty years younger than him, but he didn't care much about that,

and when his Dutch wife died in Delft in nineteen thirty-seven, he took Mari with him and married her. They had no children; Van Doorn's first marriage had also remained childless. As long as she lived in Budapest, Mari was supported by my father on Van Doorn's behalf, in a noble way of course. That may have been in the early 1930s, when I was already close friends with Hauchling and Laurentis, so my father opened an account for Mari at old Hauchling's bank, the Kredit- & Transferbank, from which she received her monthly allowance. In accordance with the agreement, Van Doorn up an account for my father, or more precisely, an account and a safe, at a Swiss bank, to which he transferred the equivalent of the amounts that my father paid to Mari Zucker each month via the Hauchling bank, as well as half of the profits from the joint business transactions that had been realised over the years, and he deposited certain precious stones and valuables in the safe. Both the account and the safe were not under one name, but under a code number. May I ask you, Mr Major, to offer me a cigarette?"

"Please," said Józsa, "help yourself whenever you like." Then he tells Elzike to make two strong coffees.

Papp takes a deep breath, then continues: "Our friendship with Laurentis and Hauchling took a strange turn. The relationship between the three of us was interesting. Although we never talked about it, I felt more attracted to Hauchling, Laurentis to me and Hauchling to both of us in the same way, he even tactfully made sure that there were no jealousies between us. That was probably an instinctive attitude on his part, he had been used to everyone having a crush on him since childhood.

was very good-looking, for example, I always felt flattered when someone made an allusion that I looked like Hauchling. We were similar too, but only on the outside. Hauchling always had a distinct personality, I didn't, or at least I felt pale and ordinary compared to him. Lauri was different. Lauri made fun of things like that. He was also a strong personality, but not in the Hauchling way. Lauri was clever. We never knew when he was studying, nobody ever saw him cramming, not even reading, but he had always read everything when it came to books, and no subject matter caused him any difficulties in class."

Józsa couldn't stop himself, he interrupted Papp. "Imagine, Laurentis, that you are a participium praesens in the genitive..."

"How do you know that?" asked Papp, smiling in amazement.

"We don't live by twiddling our thumbs," Józsa grumbled modestly. "Please continue. I apologise for the interruption."

"Hauchling was pretty, elegant, rich and clever. I was wealthy and clever, but only in my own way. Lauri was poor, but when it came to brains, he had us both in a bag. The girls fancied Hauchling. You know the type of man, Mr Major, always a little lofty and aloof, but nice and smiling, women are crazy about him. Hauchling was fourteen when a real countess seduced him. We knew about it the very next day, of course, and we organised a big party, there was a pub on the corner of Dobstraße and Rottenbillerstraße, the Kreuz-Sieben, where we had the back room to ourselves when we needed it, Hauchling spiked the taps, for us it was the pub Zum Admiral Benbow, Hauchling was John Silver, he limped on a common limp.

thought Krücke, as if he had a wooden leg, sometimes he snorted at the imaginary parrot perched on his shoulder, we sat down at a table, the three of us alone in the whole room, and ordered three raspberry sherbets and fifty grams of rum, which we distributed among the sherbets, Then we sang one, signs hung above us, *No pumping here*, including *Singing and noise forbidden by the police*, we sang *Zu siebent auf dem Totenschiff, yo-ho-ho, und eine Buddel Rum, bis dass uns dann der Satan holent, yo-ho-ho, und eine Buddel Rum*. And then Hauchling had to tell us, in great detail, how it was with the countess."

"Excuse me," Józsa interjected, "but a little shorter if possible. The essentials, if you please. Just the essentials."

"Of course. So, the Mari Zucker. I fell in love with her. Mari was a shop assistant in one of my father's shops, I had known her for a long time, but only by sight, I didn't care about her at all until my father invited her to my sixteenth birthday with Van Doorn. That was in the nineteen-thirties. That's when I found out what it was like. I was sixteen, Mari twenty-two, Van Doorn fifty-one. He went back to Delft a week later, I called Mari in the shop the next day and said I had something important to talk to her about, that I would wait for her after the end of the day. The Hauchlings had a villa on the Schwabenberg, which wasn't used in the autumn and summer, and that's where I took her, I'd had Hauchling give me the key. It wasn't difficult, but it wasn't easy either. Mari was worried that my father and Van Doorn might find out. But I was able to reassure her about that. Our relationship lasted until January nineteen thirty-two, when Mari fell in love with Hauchling, whom she met once in the bank when she was taking her

I picked up an apanage. Hauchling spoke to her, it turned out that Mari knew me, later Hauchling said that he had stolen Mari from me out of revenge because I had embezzled her from him and Lauri. It hit me hard, but I my best not to show it."

"That's your private matter, Mr Papp. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you have to understand that time is pressing. Just the essentials, please."

"Good. The essentials." Papp is a little annoyed.

"The main thing is that I only reconciled with Mari after our A-levels when Hauchling went abroad to study. After graduating from high school, the threesome broke up. Lauri studied in Szeged, Hauchling went abroad, I stayed in Budapest, sometimes I helped my father with business matters, but mostly I didn't do anything. In the meantime, my father found out that I was having an affair with Mari and he made a big fuss. He was worried about his business relations with Van Doorn. 'I'm building your future and you want to tear down what I'm building! Have you lost your mind? Aren't there enough other women in the world, does it have to be Mari?' I tried to react confidently, but that didn't work with my father. He was maybe thirty-four. Yes, thirty-four. I'd served my year in the army as a volunteer at thirty-three. After that I spent a year in Paris, at the Sorbonne, where I had a Spanish girlfriend and learnt Spanish from her. I came back at thirty-five and lived in Vienna for six months at thirty-six, where I spent a lot of time with Hauchling again, but in the meantime we laughed about the fact that I had been jealous of Mari because of him. When I was thirty-seven, Mari got married and went to Delft. My father began to worry about the political situation. He wanted me to be safe. 'It's not enough, my son, if you con-

'You have to be Aryan in Europe today,' he said. Without telling me, he went ahead with my Aryanisation. Through Van Doorn he made contact with the Nicaraguan consulate in Antwerp, when Van Doorn was in Hungary for a few days he gave him a few photos of me, and in March thirty-eight I travelled to Belgium with a Hungarian passport. Van Doorn was waiting for me in Brussels and gave me a Nicaraguan passport with my picture and a Dutch visa, the passport was in the name of Miguel Navarro Sánchez. Together we travelled to Utrecht, where I began to study under my new name. There were a few loose parcel bars in my Utrecht flat, under which I hid my Hungarian passport. Van Doorn owned a car and a house by the sea, between Middelburg and Vlissingen, where I sometimes met up with Mari, but only rarely. I knew that she still loved Hauchling. The relationship between us was now more of a friendship, two compatriots in a foreign country. We took good care that her husband didn't notice anything. Then, at the age of thirty-nine, war broke out. Van Doorn called me in and, on behalf of my father, told me about the safe and the account in Switzerland. He asked me not to touch either, he would cover all my expenses, that was my father's wish. 'We will all be able to make good use of the money and valuables in Switzerland after the war,' he said. On this occasion I also learnt that the combination of the safe and the account was the same and that no one else but the two of them could know it, the combination consisted of two groups of numbers, the first was the registration number of Van Doorn's birth certificate, the second was the same number of my father's birth certificate. I didn't know at the time whether Mari knew the combination. In the spring of nineteen forty-four

The Germans occupied Holland, a week later Van Doorn was arrested, I never saw him again, three days later Mari was also taken away. I was living in Van Doorn's Vlissingen house at the time and was preparing for the exams. When I returned to Utrecht, the house I was living in had been destroyed by a bomb, my Hungarian passport was gone, I was on German territory as a Jew with a false Nicaraguan passport, so I couldn't contact my father either without exposing myself to danger, my assets amounted to one thousand three hundred and twenty-one guilders and fifty cents."

"I understand," says Józsa. "You see, Mr Papp, that was the gist of it. But unfortunately we don't know whether Hauchling was in Veszprém, nor whether he's still in Hungary."

He glances at his watch. Only twelve minutes past four.

Only?

Already.

Fifth chapter

"Tell me, Major, did I mention the shares for the uranium mine in Katanga?"

"No, not yet."

"But then you can't understand anything yet. And everything I've said is far from being essential. But let's take it in turn."

Józsa sighs deeply. But as neither Veszprém nor Vicenik answers, he has no choice. Fine. Let's go in turn. The South American is a little talkative. Józsa is interested in Hauchling, the story, the explanation, but above all

for the person of Hauchling. He wants him. To be able to put a result on the table for the deputy minister. But no, he has to sit still and listen to fantastic stories. It's maddening.

J. Sziücs sympathises with Józsa, but unfortunately he can't do anything for him. What am I supposed to do when my writer's imagination works like this? This story carries a social message. Or not yet? Never mind. That's not important now. That will be decided later. What is important is the story. The great historical painting of war-torn Europe. He gives Józsa a hint to switch on the tape recorder again, waits until it's done and gives the floor again to Miklós Papp alias Miguel Navarro Sánchez.

"Major, tell me, but quite frankly, what would you have done in my place back in Holland, in May nineteen forty, in a situation like this?"

"I think I would have joined the resistance movement."

"That idea never even occurred to me. Perhaps also because there was no resistance movement at the time. It only got organised later. But by then I was no longer in Holland. I was taking my exams and by then I had realised that I had to find some way of getting to a country that wasn't involved in the war, and Spain was the only country for miles around. I just didn't know how to get there. I spoke Dutch, German, Spanish and French, and of course Hungarian, but I never used it, I didn't want to risk being recognised, I would have been deported to Hungary. I volunteered as an interpreter. With the Germans. Yes, with the Germans. At the Utrecht

I had a German fellow student at the university who was already head of the Nazi youth organisation in Holland at the time, he put me in touch with him, but I wasn't hired as an interpreter, but as a censorship officer. I had to censor the Spanish and French letters from the civilian population."

Half past four. Józsa can hardly contain his impatience. But he doesn't let on. Only for a moment had he visibly lost his inner balance when Papp told him bluntly that he suspected Hauchling of murder. Józsa couldn't control himself, he hastily opened the dossier Vicenik had brought him and slammed it in Papp's face.

"Look through it! Is he there? Which one is it?" Papp opened the dossier. "That's me up here."

"I know. And Hauchling? Which one is Hauchling?"

Papp calmly leafed through the other eleven. Relate or only seven. The eighth was Hauchling. That is, Dr Hans Stefan Huber, Swiss lawyer. Born in Winterthur in 1913.

"Are you sure it's him? You're not mistaken?"

"Well, listen! I really don't confuse the puffball."

"What do you think, would Harsányi recognise him too?"

"That may be. Now he wears a moustache, back then he didn't have one. Apart from that, he's hardly changed. At least not for me."

"Listen, Mr Papp. I know that it wasn't you who murdered Lau- rentis, unfortunately, I have proof of that. But formally you are still being held in custody as a suspect for the time being. Understand me correctly. I've already arrested one foreigner by mistake. I can't risk a second one. I need proof."

"Don't you have an old photo of him?"

"No. We only have one of his right ears. Laka- tos! Elzike, get me the Lakatos, now! And a call to the border crossing points. Doctor Hans Stefan Huber is to be stopped temporarily if he wants to leave the country under any pretence. But politely! Thats it. Send the Lakatos to me!"

Three minutes later, Lakatos entered. Józsa held out the completed form with the photo in the top corner like a juggler and simply said: "Anselm- Rabóczy!"

Lakatos' face shone like the rising sun.

"Anselm-Rabóczy! The skin folds and the lobes of the ear?"

"That's . And immediately! It's a matter of seconds."

Lakatos stormed off with the form.

And then Papp asked the major to phone Veszprém and enquire whether Hauchling had obtained an extract from the register of births from the city office. This was also proof, even if only indirect.

So Józsa rang Veszprém. It was three o'clock.

And now it's half past four. No news from the border, Vicenik is on an excursion or has gone swimming, the whole apparatus seems to have stopped, Lakatos was here again, the Anselm-Rabóczy investigation has shown beyond doubt that the Swiss lawyer Dr Hans Stefan Huber is identical to the owner of the right ear, which is signed ...*ling, Alfréd* on the Abitur photo.

"It's lucky he's not holding out his left ear in the passport photo," says Lakatos with a relieved sigh.

Meanwhile, Miklós Papp is currently the Nazi Spanish censor in occupied Holland, going by the name Miguel Navarro Sánchez.

Józsa feels as if tiny sparks are coming out of the tip of his nose from nervousness. But he has himself under control. He leisurely lights a new cigarette, Papp is also allowed to help himself, he even takes the carefully guarded representative schnapps and two glasses from the far corner of his desk, fills them and clinks glasses with Papp.

"Cheers to you!"

", Major." Papp tips the cognac.

"Well, I'll continue now."

That's right! Etuka is dead. That's good. Babsi is dead. To hell with her. Professor Lóránt is dead. Who cares about that? Or rather, they're not dead, they're just not alive for J. Szücs. They don't exist. And it's as if they had died. This is pure happiness. Vain, sunlit happiness.

No, this happiness is no longer completely cloudless, because the Kaschau teacher Jakubovits, dressed in the uniform of a German sergeant, floats in from the east with slow wing beats, quickly flies a few laps of honour over the French city of Amiens, then lands and sits down on the terrace of the *Chez Paul* restaurant, where he orders a glass of red wine and begins to wait for Miklós Papp, who is currently still a Spanish censor in Holland. Or is he no longer?

"My censorship work didn't take long. No longer than until I had dusted off a few stamped forms, which wasn't easy, but not particularly difficult either. Then I took three days' leave to go to the Nicaraguan consulate in Antwerp to extend the validity of my passport. I travelled to Antwerp officially, and from there onwards with the false papers that had been filled out in the meantime, i.e. illegally, first to Lille and then to Amiens."

J. Szücs is becoming increasingly anxious; when Papp and Jakubovits there, no

God restrained from incorporating Jakubovits' story into the already overloaded plot of the Laurentis case. However, Faulkner would not be influenced by such external considerations. He would tell the story as it came to him. All right, thinks J. Szücs thinks modestly, but I'm not a real Faulkner yet. Faulkner would know how to construct an essential function for Jakubovits in Miklós Papp's story, but J. Szücs hasn't got a clue yet. Let's leave it to the future. How many billions of threads must chance bring together at a single point for two people to on the terrace of a pub in a town in northern France in a war-torn Europe! If just one thread is not right, it's all over. Then they may never meet. And that's when J. Szücs comes up with the saving idea. The Germans haven't invaded the Soviet Union yet! Riga is still the capital of the Latvian Soviet Republic, Jakubovits is still living happily and contentedly in Riga, he can't even be in Amiens when Papp is travelling through there. So, got away again. Maybe later, in two years' time. Before that, the Germans the Soviet Union, occupy Riga, and Jakubovits ... Let's leave it now, shall we? Józsa sits on pins and needles and listens to Papp's horror story, and there's not a trace of Hauchling in .

"But Hauchling! What about Hauchling? Tell me about it. When is Hauchling coming?"

"Hauchling? Not until August nineteen hundred and forty-four."

"Oh yes. He was still seen in Budapest in the summer."

"There you go. But I don't want to overstretch your patience, Major. Lille - Amiens, Amiens - Paris, Paris - Bordeaux, Bordeaux - Hendaye, that's where I took my time.

a clean sheet of paper with no more than a special Gestapo stamp, and on the sheet I wrote: For the attention of all relevant departments! The bearer of this document, Miguel Navarro Sánchez, is on a particularly important intelligence mission. All wishes are to be fulfilled without further enquiry. At first I wanted to sign as Heinrich Himmler, but I was afraid that someone might recognise that the signature was forged. And perhaps Himmler had a special stamp. So I only signed as a simple Obersturmbannführer. I dated the paper two days later, made out in Paris. Then I took it to the Wehrmacht commandant's office in Hendaye and demanded that they immediately get me a visa for Spain in my passport and hand over 52,620 pesetas. If they didn't that much money in cash, they were to give me a document stating that the same amount was to be paid to me in Madrid. They only had 17,000 pesetas in cash in the house, so I took that with me. I got a certificate for the difference of 35,620 pesetas for the German embassy in Madrid, but I didn't dare be so bold, the certificate is still somewhere in my flat in Petit-Bourg. I got the visa straight away. A clerk took a stamp from the desk, opened my passport and the visa. 'For what period, Mr Navarro?' asked the captain standing next to me. Stupidly, I only said for one year. That was all I dared say. Then they took me to Irún by car and from there I travelled to Madrid train. I rented a small flat in Calle Serrano, number eight, and the next day I enrolled at the Medical University of Madrid. I was accepted immediately on the basis of my university index from Utrecht. I had worked out that if I paid six hundred pesetas a month

the Germans' money would last me almost three years, or at least two and a half. Because in addition to the 17,000 pesetas, I also had a few Dutch guilders."

"You mentioned some shares in a uranium mine in Katanga earlier," Józsa interjects grumpily, just to say something. These shares don't interest him in the slightest. And Papp just chats away to pass the time. Half past five. If he wasn't a foreigner unnecessarily recalled from the border, he would have been in a cell long ago, where he could tell himself something. His stupid emigration stories, as Józsa has heard hundreds of them. Of course he could take the interrogation into his own hands, get the essentials out of Papp in a focussed, direct manner and with precisely ordered questions, but he's a little tired. Let the bloke blather on.

Chatter? He talks like a waterfall. J. Szücs would not allow anything else.

"I didn't dare write to my father, I feared not only for him, but also for myself, by now I had been Miguel Navarro Sánchez for almost three years, but I still hadn't got used to it, I was still afraid that someone would find out about me and I would be deported to Hungary. But because of the account and the safe in Switzerland and because I wanted to inform him somehow about the fate of Van Doorn and Mari, I absolutely had to try to get in touch with him. I decided to write to Lauri. In Spanish, as Miguel Navarro Sánchez. So I wrote him a polite letter saying that I had learned that he was a stamp collector, that I was interested in certain Austrian and Hungarian series, that I copied some from the Zumstein catalogue and slipped an imaginary Tenundgé series in between, values from a

Kreuzer to three crowns. Lauri would recognise that the letter was from me, he would tell my father my new name and address, and he would find a way to get in touch with me. But Lauri didn't get my letter. The letter came back two months later, cross-stamped and labelled, *Opened! German military command, Abierto por las autoridades, Correo de España, Ellenőrizve! Ouverte par le control militaire allemand en France*, and the postmark *Recipient unknown, return to sender*. I waited two months, then wrote a similar philatelic letter to Hauchling at the bank. There I listed other series, but I included the Tenundgé again. Again there was no reply, but the letter was not returned either. I harboured the hope for a long time that it had arrived and I would hear from my father. In the meantime, my time was taken up with cramming and exams, and my money was dwindling. I knew that Hungarians lived in Madrid, sometimes I heard people speaking Hungarian, but I avoided them out of caution, and I gave the Hungarian embassy a wide berth."

"Aha, a big bow?" asks Józsa. Because he's getting fed up with Papp always talking and him not saying anything. Two or three times he was about to nod off. The question now was silly and out of the ordinary. It's because of this terrible heat, Józsa thinks. And asks in a stern voice: "When was that, Mr Papp?"

He hopes a little that Papp will answer that it was 1944. And then comes Hauchling.

"When? Just a moment. Yes, that must have been in March nine ten hundred and forty-three."

J. Szücs has smelled blood. Ernő Jakubovits is haunting his mind again. What a fantastic

Possibility! Jakubovits really was in Madrid in March 1943. Although no longer in Wehrmacht uniform, he could have met Papp. For example, in the small pub "Los dos hermanos" in Calle Alcalá, where Papp eats roast leg of lamb, which he always favoured, and at "Los dos hermanos" they know all about roast lamb, it's crispy and juicy. Suddenly he listens, because a melancholy gentleman sitting alone at the next table suddenly coughs and curses quietly to himself. He is eating fish and a bone has got stuck. No, that's nothing. "Los dos hermanos" only serves sea fish, and sea fish doesn't have bones that get caught. Maybe a knuckle. From a roast chicken. That would work. Superficially, that would be conceivable. But for the inner credibility of the figure, it is impossible for it to swear in Hungarian for whatever reason. Jakubovits would be risking his life. And what if Papp says something in Hungarian? He'll be careful. It's war. And he is Miguel Navarro Sánchez. So the two men sit three steps apart in the pub, Papp chews the crispy, juicy lamb with relish, Jakubovits quickly finishes the glass of wine on the table (a scrubbed wooden table), then he beckons the smaller and fatter of the two owners of "Los dos hermanos" to come over, pays, gets up, walks out, trots to Ventas metro station, looks back at the Plaza de Toros from the stairs and then, with this image so typical of Madrid in his mind, travels to the north railway station, from where he will take the evening train with the Czech group to London. Jakubovits will unfortunately never meet Miklós Papp again. They have missed their last opportunity.

On the third evening of the conference in Prague, J. Szücs with a larger company in the hotel lobby, of course.

The debate is now once again centred on the modern novel. And about the significance of Romanticism, including socialist Romanticism. Ippolito Goppino, whose name and appearance make him look like a living monument to Romanticism, fresh out of a Puccini opera, bangs his fist on the table and shouts: Nix! Niente! She has no right to exist! René Montferru, a lecturer at the University of Lyon, plain, grey and fat, but with groats in his head (like me, J. Szücs thinks, moved), spouts a mass of monosyllabic words, consisting of guttural and nasal sounds, apparent indifference and the smells of red wine and cheese: *Pah! Tu sais. Moi, j'suis d'avis pu'il a raison ...*; this refers to Goppino's opinion. Zubomir Čalačič (from Belgrade) laughs and points to the other side of the hall. "All theory is grey, dear friend," he says, "and green the golden tree of life. There sits one of the greatest novel heroes of our time yet to be written."

Everyone turns round. Sitting at a table with a young, very pretty lady is a man of around forty-five with slightly greying temples, striking facial features and a protruding chin, more ugly than handsome, very dark eyes shining out of his face. He laughs loudly and a little tipsily. His companion joins in the laughter.

"Who is that?" asks J. Szücs, because he is not only a critic, he is also a novelist, but the others don't know that.

"This is Ernő Jakubovits." Zubomir tries to pronounce the name in Hungarian in consideration of J. Szücs.

"I know him from the Miranda concentration camp, that was at the end of nineteen forty-two. He is currently head of department at the Czech Ministry of Culture."

Then the story. He was studying at the teacher training college in Kashov when the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia. He was Jewish, got scared and fled to Poland. There he joined the Communist Party, but he didn't have much time, the war soon broke out and he was in the Soviet part of Poland. He went to Riga, enrolled at the university there and underwent military training with other students in September 1940. When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, he first fought in the ranks of the Latvian Red Army, then remained in German-occupied Riga on instructions with illegal papers. Once he brought false papers to a Jewish university professor who had to go into hiding. He handed him the papers, but took the professor's with him. I'll be home in ten minutes, he thought, I can destroy them there. That was against the rules, but it had turned out that he had no other choice. The situation didn't seem dangerous. He was caught with the Jewish professor's papers, but he escaped with his life and was sent to the Riga ghetto. He escaped from there, but returned on orders and began to organise the resistance in the ghetto. His father had been a tailor in Kaschau, he also knew a little about the trade, he was sent to the small tailor's shop that belonged to the German ghetto commandant's office, where German uniforms were repaired. One day a German constable came into the workshop to have his field blouse mended, it was torn under the armpit. While Jakubovits sews, the sergeant sits on a three-legged stool, smokes and hums a tune to himself. The Warszawianka. Jakubovits listens. And hums along quietly. A cautious, wait-and-see conversation with the constable.

He was a communist. Jakubovits suspects a trap, he assumes that the Germans want to sneak into the ghetto's resistance organisation in order to stifle it. He does not hand himself to the constable. He leaves. Three days later, he returns to find his jacket torn open on his blouse. There is a piece of paper in his pocket, Jakubovits feels it with his hands. The constable goes outside the door. Jakubovits looks at the paper. A transfer order to Amiens in France, duly completed and stamped, in a German name, with the rank of sergeant. The German sergeant comes back, looks at Jakubovits and sees that he has already put the paper away. As he puts on the repaired field blouse, he says to Jakubovits: "Off tomorrow morning. Five of us. The constable will be in command. Jakubovits chooses one of the German uniforms in need of repair that suits him and makes it complete. The next morning they really set off. Across Europe. In Cologne they go to a café in the evening, where a long outdated sign hangs outside: "Forbidden for Jews and dogs!" As if there were still Jews in Cologne. He meets a girl and goes with her. She notices that he is circumcised and accuses him of being Jewish. He is arrested. The constable travels on to France with the three others. During interrogation, Jakubovits says that he had had a foreskin constriction as a child and had been operated on. His papers are fine and the story is believed. He travelled alone after the others to Amiens. But he never meets them again. His papers are only valid as far as Amiens. Shivering with fear and wearing a German uniform, he manages to get to Biarritz in eight days. At night, he walked over to Hendaye, took off his German uniform and swam across the Bay of Biscay in nothing but his pants. The next

Tomorrow, Spanish gendarmes find him lying unconscious on the beach. When he is interrogated by the gendarmerie, he pretends to be mute, hoping that this might prevent him from being sent back to France. He spends a week in prison in Irún, from where he is sent to the concentration camp in Miranda. The Czech consul in Madrid, Formanek, who was already working with the Allies at the time, took him out of the camp with several other Czechs and he stayed in Madrid for a few weeks before taken to London. In England he was trained as a paratrooper, in the spring he jumped in the area around Budweis, known for Schwejk, made his way to Prague and made contact with the resistance movement, after the liberation he went into the diplomatic service, he worked at the Czechoslovak embassy in London, then he was recalled and arrested in the Slansky trial, he served almost six years, and now he is here. No one has ever written about him.

I will, J. Szücs cheers inwardly, but only inwardly. In the meantime, the debate about socialist realism and socialist romanticism continues. The main topic of discussion is whether Semprun's *Great Journey* is a socialist realist work. But that is no longer interesting.

And so there was the great opportunity to bring Papp and Jaku- bovits together in Calle Alcalán, in the "Los dos her- manos" pub in Madrid. It didn't work out. Ernő Jakubovits, like all the other characters in J. Szücs' novel who have not yet been utilised, must continue to wait. But once he utilises him! Then Faulkner can hide.

Sixth chapter

Everything is right. It can only be Hauchling. Papp says he was at the Veszprém town hall shortly before half past four to pick up the extract from the birth register. The extract was ready, he only had to accept it. Hauchling must have arrived shortly after him, and the head of the registry office didn't feel like working overtime because of him. Hauchling should come back on Saturday morning, she said, and then he would receive the extract. Márton Papp's birth certificate was copied a second time, but Hauchling didn't show up on Saturday.

Papp gets excited. Hauchling doesn't need the certificate itself, the registration number in the register of births is enough for him. Perhaps the registrar only opened the big, thick book, Hauchling bent down and took a look inside, which was enough for him to memorise the registration number. Was that why he didn't go again? Or had he simply run out of time? Because he had to escape. Because he was afraid of being suspected of Laurentis' murder and arrested. But why should he fear that?

Józsa cannot follow the logical reasoning. The fact that he suspected Hauchling of murder was a consequence of the train of thought initiated the school-leaving paper on Laurentis' desk. When he saw it, he remembered Hauchling's name from 1945 and followed the trail. At first he came to a dead end, then it turned out that the trail hot after all. But Hauchling couldn't have all that. So how is it that ...? Józsa goes out and leaves Papp alone in the room, but first he carefully locks his desk. Outside, he walks slowly three times in the gloomy

up and down the corridor. He placed his right hand on his forehead. Once again the whole train of thought. He opens the newspaper. Reads the list of names. Of course. Why was the newspaper on Laurentis' table? Because he had met Hauchling. Of course he had. Laurentis recognised Hauchling. Good. He recognised him, so what?

Józsa tries to visualise the scene.

'Hello, Alfréd. Are you in Budapest?'

'Hello, Lauri, yes, I arrived last night. I have a room at the Gellért.

In the meantime, Lakatos has established that Doctor Hans Stefan Huber lived in the Hotel Gellért.

Just a moment. I have to ask Papp, he followed Laurentis, who was travelling by bus, from Roosevelt Square to Gellért by car, I have to ask him if Laurentis had time to meet someone in front of Gellért. Possibly with Hauchling.

Józsa goes back to his room. Papp sitting there smoking. Józsa questions Papp. Papp replies that it is impossible. He only took his eyes off Laurentis for minute he needed to turn round.

So Laurentis never met Hauchling, or if he did, it was at a different time. Further. To whom could Laurentis have imagined that he had met Hauchling? If he had met him.

Józsa sits down, opens the desk, takes out all the investigation material and starts looking through it. There's Laurentis' schedule for 15 and 16 July. Compiled in connection with Miguel Navarro Sánchez, but that doesn't matter now. There is only a difference of three hours between Hauchling's and Papp's arrival in Hungary. Hauchling arrived three hours earlier. And straight to Gellért. Is that true?

The trolley! The dark grey trolley!

A dark grey Mercedes! That's right. It's on Vi-
cenik's list of foreigners who have entered the country and applied
for a visa.

Lakatos! Bring in the boy, Kálmán Bitura!

Lakatos sets off to fetch the boy. Józsa's brain motor is
working at maximum power consumption and maximum
performance.

On the evening before his murder, i.e. the evening of 15
July, Laurentis and his regular group went to the Zum
Goldenen Hirsch restaurant, where they ate dinner every
Wednesday. Afterwards, he walked with Professor Berkesi
to the Freiheitsbrücke bridge. There the professor said
goodbye and walked home. Laurentis told him he would
take the sieve home. According to the night porter, Doctor
Hans Stefan Huber had already arrived at the Gellért. So
there could have been a meeting between Hauchling and
Laurentis in the neighbourhood.

Or not. This is just a hypothesis. There is no evidence.

Papp tries to say something several times, probably
wanting to continue his damn story. But Józsa doesn't fall
for it again.

"Mr Papp, I don't have time now. Help yourself, there's
the brandy, there are the cigarettes, but keep quiet. If I
need you, I'll let you know."

Papp shrugs his shoulders, pours, drinks, lights a
cigarette. Sits in an armchair and watches Józsa. Józsa
walks up and down the room. Mumbles incomprehensible
things himself, growling noises, sometimes shouts softly.

The most he can understand is
Sometimes an "aha", sometimes an "of course", sometimes
an "impossible".

Laurentis arrived, according to the caretaker, on the evening
of

15 July around a quarter to twelve. Shortly after

he, the caretaker, had locked the front door. Message from a secretary at the academy: Laurentis has ordered a car to his flat for the 16th, eleven thirty. The car arrived and drove Laurentis to the academy, where he told the secretary that he no longer needed the car. But at sixteen o'clock he had the car come again to take him home. In the morning he sat in his office, signed letters and dictated two letters, in the afternoon he was also in the office, but nobody knows what he was doing. At three o'clock he asked for a coffee. It was made and brought to him. In the meantime, according to Papp, Mrs Tamacskó and the waiter, he only spoke to Mrs Tamacskó and the waiter. According to Mrs Tamacskó ...

Mrs Tamacskó is a superficial, lottery-like woman. What if the only reason she didn't mention that Laurentis had told her about his encounter with Hauchling was because she forgot? She was only interested in the fact that Laurentis was flirting with her. Saying nice things to her. Courted her in a somewhat old-fashioned way.

Interview Mrs Tamacskó! Very specifically! Did Laurentis mention to her that he had met an old acquaintance, possibly a former class cameraman?

Lakatos answers the house phone. Kálmán Bitura, having carefully leafed through the international vehicle catalogue presented to him, recognised without a doubt the Mercedes, built in 1963, the car he had seen near the crime scene at around the time of the murder with foreign registration plates. And the boy claims that the car was dark grey.

That is now clear.

And the next call straight away. From the border, from He- gyeshalom. The carbon copies of the documents that had already

The people travelling with Captain Vicenik have arrived. Doctor Hans Stefan Huber left on 17 July 1964 at twenty thirty-two in a dark grey Mercedes.

Hauchling has escaped!

J. Szücs can't believe it. Great creator, what have I done?! Once again he couldn't resist his cursed realism and, throwing law and rule overboard, let the murderer escape in a crime novel. He wants to bang his head against the wall, but it's too late. Besides, he can't move anyway, and only his left hand is free. You can't bang your head against the wall with one hand. But now he really doesn't know what to do. He should have held him back. A flat tyre, at night, on the road between Székesfehérvár and Győr. A police patrol drives past, they help the foreigner, but he behaves in a way that arouses their suspicion. Why would a foreigner behave suspiciously on the motorway at night? Or he has an accident and is now lying in hospital with broken bones and wrapped in gauze and bandages. Like me. It serves him right. What did he have to kill! I didn't commit murder, yet I'm lying here.

And there is no way back. No punctures and no accidents with broken bones. The time of a *deus ex machina* is finally passé. Realism depends on little things like this. That's just way life is. Sometimes even such whiffs slip away. Of course, according to the law of large numbers, justice simply has to triumph, as our previous experiences have brilliantly demonstrated, but every now and then it does happen that the murderer slips through your fingers. Not in true crime novels, of course. But who wants to claim that

J. Szücs writes true crime novels? On the contrary. Therein lies his originality. It would be more typical if Józsa could stand in front of Hauchling, put his hand on his shoulder and say to him: "Alfréd Hauchling, who also calls himself Doctor Hans Stefan Huber, I hereby declare you under arrest in accordance with the laws of the Hungarian People's Republic." In this way, however, the novel is atypically typical, that is, it becomes typical precisely because it is not typical. You can spin it any way you like, but one thing is certain: if he really did write this novel, on real paper, with a real typewriter, Hauchling would not be allowed to escape.

That is a fact, that is a fact. I, as a responsible citizen of the state - of course in the literal sense of *citoyen* and not *bourgeois* - I, as a responsible cadre of the middle and soon the executive level, have the damned duty and obligation to convince the citizens of this country - in the sense of the *citoyen* concept, which unites proletarians and bourgeois - of the triumph of justice. Hauchling must therefore atone. A thriller is like beer: liquid bread, popular with hundreds of thousands of people. They have to be convinced - reality or no reality - that justice always triumphs, day and night, in life and death, in waking and sleeping, at all times. Which of course includes: *ego sum via, veritas et vita*.

So that would be the ideal statement of the thriller I wrote for myself, in which Hauchling escapes. A warning hint of danger. I don't scream, the earth roars. What a delicious, what an uplifting responsibility! And it's not just me who feels it. Pál Csába Kiss does too. And many others. When I think about it, I am always deeply moved. Even now.

J. Szücs ponders. He would like, if it turns out so

somehow let this novel roll out in such a way that the goat is satisfied and the cabbage preserved. An ending that satisfies everyone. That's what he needs. And you also have to think about the reader: if he finds the twist that keeps the reader in suspense and satisfies his sense of justice, that is at the same time morally appealing, intellectually demanding and artistically significant, almost Faulknerian, then it doesn't matter that Hauchling has escaped. Then the idealistic statement also rebounds and takes a different path, perhaps it is able to rise above narrow-minded pragmatism and approach the heights of world literature, a statement that applies to all of humanity. A great and noble task. A hard nut to crack. But J. Szücs does not shy away from it. He is cut from a different cloth.

The world is like a pile of logs thrown on top of each other. One thing above, below, next to the other, and so each is determined. That's right. The world is an intricate tangle of complicated relations. J. Szücs, for example, knows that Etuka is only a saint as long as he, Ferenc J. Szücs, is a saint. Everything depends on whether J. Szücs is even capable of questioning his own sanctity. Of course, he also falls into this temptation from time to time in clear, unrelenting, self-destructive moments, but then the balance of the world is immediately thanks to hard control. It is also due to such intertwined relationships, for example, that when J. Szücs is brooding to himself, Józsa also has to brood to himself. And that is what he is doing at this moment.

Hauchling has escaped. Full stop. No exclamations whatsoever. He simply crossed the border with a regular visa. That's a fact, that's a fact. Numerous threads

are still in limbo, unconnected and unsolved, but it is an inexorable and unfalsifiable fact that the murderer has escaped. What will the deputy minister say? Józsa has to write a detailed report. And it is not yet clear how, why and by what means Hauchling committed the murder. And that Papp! Sits around unmoved, almost indifferent. Incomprehensible. Because Hauchling possibly has the registration number. Maybe he doesn't know the Van Doorns yet. And that's why he can't yet plunder the account and the safe in Switzerland.

Oh, and anyway! It is possible that these Swiss funds and assets belong in full to the Hungarian state. As abandoned property. But even in the worst case, they are foreign funds that have to be reported to the Hungarian National Bank! What citizenship does he actually have?

"Tell me, Mr Papp, what citizenship do you actually have?"

"The French one. I applied for and received French citizenship in nineteen forty-six."

"But you're Hungarian by birth."

"Yes, but in nineteen forty-seven I applied for and received my release from Hungarian citizenship."

Dreadful. If we could at least get something out of it for our country. Then the deputy minister would take a milder view of the bankruptcy.

"Are you sure, Mr Papp?"

"That's for sure. Why don't you have a look?"

"Well, we'll go and see."

Lakatos in touch. Mrs Tamacskó, when he called her

Laurentis had mentioned in a conversation on the terrace in front of the Hotel Gellért on the afternoon of 16 July that the previous evening he had met a former classmate or a person who looked very similar to a former classmate. He had spoken to her in Hungarian, the person in question had smiled and replied in German that it was probably a misunderstanding. "The guy's name was Huba," said Mrs Tamacskó. "Ernő didn't get over it at all. But the German told him that as much as he looked like him, he wasn't who Ernő thought he was. He was just some lawyer."

Józsa can't even be happy anymore.

The phone rings again. It's a long-distance call. Who might it be?

"If you don't mind," says Papp, "this is for me. Zurich."

"For you? Zurich? How does Zurich know you're here?" asks Józsa, puzzled.

"I called Zurich earlier when you weren't in the room. Excuse me..."

Józsa hands Papp the phone, because it really is Zurich.

Papp speaks German. With his Zurich lawyer. Józsa understands German. Papp gives his lawyer the registration number from the register of births and instructs him to find the bank director tonight, from wherever, so that he can block the account and the safe for anyone who comes forward with this number or with both numbers, and guarantee Papp the right of priority to the account and the safe. If someone had already come forward, the lawyer should register Papp's protest and, if possible, have the account and safe blocked by a court until the matter is resolved.

"Thank you, Doctor," says Papp into the receiver. "I'll get back to you. Goodbye."

Józsa sits there silently. He is speechless.

Chapter seven

The night, my boy, is for sleeping, mum always said. Which is true. But mother didn't think of such special cases when there is no difference between day and night under the bandage and only the light of creative thinking shines. Sometimes the light goes out, like now, and then the battery has to be recharged, for which he has his countless tried and tested methods, but even that is risky and doesn't always work. Now, for example, drinking lemon juice has not proved successful. The vitamin C contained in lemons is not refreshing, also creates a good general state of health, it revitalises. If you also take a caffeine tablet containing 0.1 g of the active ingredient, you generally reach a biological state in which the antennae of the brain's nerve pathways receive signals even from great distances. This is probably not the case for everyone, but it works for him. In general. But not this time, it seems. Another method. A situation is given. In addition, the threads that make the situation clear, but are already known. The situation must be moved away from its static state. Towards an end. J. Szücs knows that one must not tug at the threads that lead into or out of the situation, they break easily, and today they are particularly fragile for all their quality, that is certain. So: one

A lever under the Archimedean point, then a single quick movement, hop, le voilà, and the world unhinged. It's incredibly simple, or so it seems. But where is the certain point that Archimedes wished for? In such cases, the novelist J. Szücs asks the critic J. Szücs for help. He has nothing to be ashamed of, they are a clan. The whole thing must be subjected to a , meticulous, thorough and detailed critical analysis. Under the effect of the lemon juice and the *caffeinum purum*, the antennae of the cranial nerve tracts begin to tremble finely, is a great feeling, a hunting fever through you, it is clear that everything is more difficult now, because things are coming to an end. J. Szücs leafs through the world's literature as if he had a packet of magic cards between his fingers. Where could a good idea be stolen? A striking one, a surprising one. To take the reader's breath away, to shivers down their spine, to make their hair stand on end. Stealing is not only allowed, it's downright obligatory, but you're not allowed to steal badly. And not out loud. Shakespeare stole. Lope de Vega too. Everyone steals. J. Szücs of all people shouldn't steal? But from whom? And from what? The mind stops, they say. Then you have to talk him into moving on, like a stubborn donkey. But it stands still and won't budge. At most, he stretches his neck and bares his big, yellow shovel teeth, then he shouts his ee-ah into the world. But the novel! What will become of it?

Because the novel is the inner line of defence behind which
he cannot retreat any further, the last, the secret, the refuge admitted to no one, the asylum of the asylums, a bunker with full comfort, built in and painted, but filled with real Babsis and

Etukas, the warm protection of rare childhood eyeballs, the only place that is safety itself, from which you can reach the innermost, most protected safety at the push of a button through a secret door and a convenient tunnel, the unbreakable glass sphere with a simultaneous view in all directions, unthreatened by cosmic quakes, landslides and flash floods, where you can't fall off the ladder in the toilet, where revenge is taken immediately if your wife cheats on you, where the ego is both the ego and everyone, Mrs Bovary and J. Szücs, but also Faulk. Szücs, but also Faulkner and Kafka, if I want: Sholokhov, if I want: Dylan Thomas or Franz J., where, as long as you're in it, you can't die, you can only live, live forever, beyond death, where you don't need to be afraid. But the novel. What will become of it? What will happen to Józsa, who has become flesh and blood from an abstraction? And where does Hauchling escape to? And will manage to find Papp in Switzerland?

It is not only the case, thinks J. Szücs thinks that the reader must be offered something for his money, even creative work cannot serve its own ends. If I at least knew what purposes then. The purpose, according to Hochhuth, is the truth, the work's own truth, regardless of everyone and everything. Oops, colleagues! Is that possible? We live among people, in a society. If the truth of the work deviates from the truth as it is generally understood, which is not the case, but let's assume that it does (a writer can all kinds of thoughts in his head), where is the guarantee that this truth is not harmful? Then it does not allow the self-defence power of the immense army of readers to have its say. And whether it is harmful is for me to decide. By J. Szücs,

the editor and critic. That is my task. I stand there, alert and unshakeable, on the front line.

But what would happen if the temptation came to me, the novelist J. Szücs, if I allowed myself to be seduced by a false truth? What conflicts I would have to endure, inwardly! What a hard test! Fortunately, harmful truths cannot seduce me. Because if a truth is harmful, then it is no longer a truth. That is logical. The train of thought is satisfactorily completed.

Things are simpler than you think. Józsa is back to his old self now that the heat is beginning to subside. Thirsty for action and self-confident. The sluggishness is blown away. With a firm hand, he takes charge of the investigation again. The circumstances must be clarified, the exact motive for the murder must be included in the report for the deputy minister in the most precise manner, if only to bear witness to Józsa's detective skills, his firmness of principle, his highly developed awareness. So: question-and-answer game. On tape.

Question: When and for what purpose did Hauchling come to Madrid, and under what circumstances did you meet him?

Answer: Things are not as simple as you might think, Mr Major. Someone else came to Madrid before Hauchling. I bet you can't guess who.

Question: Mária Zucker.

Answer: Gosh! How did you come up with that?

Question: I know the author. We've been working together for decades. He never long without an arousing female figure. He just never thinks about it,

that he's bungling my investigation. (A strange rattle on the tape: Józsa sighs.) In order, tell me about Mária Zucker, Mr Papp. When she came, how and why.

Answer: When? At the end of February 1944, I had just come out of the Callao cinema in Madrid, where I had seen a good American film, a Hitchcock, when someone shouted quietly to me from the side in the vestibule: Miklós! Unfortunately, I couldn't control myself and immediately looked in that direction, and Mari Zucker was already around my neck. So I had been found out.

Question: How is it that you, who have been living abroad since 1938, know this rare word: blown up?

Answer: Your question doesn't embarrass me, Major. When Mari Zucker threw her arms around my neck, she said: So, now you're busted! I won't forget that as long as I live. Mari Zucker is, in I haven't mentioned it, my wife.

We got married in 1946 and went on our honeymoon to San Sebastián, where I met Laurentis in 1962, because we celebrate our wedding anniversary in San Sebastián every year. My wife will soon be fifty-six and she's still

beautiful, but you should have seen her when she was thirty-six! She looked younger than twenty-six. And how elegant she was! So I had made a mistake, there was no turning back. Mari introduced me to her companion, a gentleman in his fifties called Edmundo Zinner-Loewe, of

Hungarian origin, based in Madrid, owner of an export-import agency, often travelling, Mari had met him in Paris the previous October, he had invited her to stay with him, Mari was glad to get out of Paris, which was teeming with Germans.

out, so she went to Madrid.

Question (with a caustic sneer): Travelling from Paris to Madrid during the war was child's play, wasn't it?

Answer: For Mari, yes. She was working for the Gestapo. Or rather, the Gestapo thought she was working for them, in reality she had already been recruited in Holland by the British secret service, for whom Van Doorn had been working for ten years, as it later turned out, but the Germans had no idea when they took him away. They also took Mari to Germany, her language skills saved her, a general made her his interpreter and she returned to Paris with him. In Paris, the English got in touch with her again, and after Zinner-Loewe had negotiated with the Germans in Paris about the delivery of a large consignment of tungsten, Mari travelled to Madrid on behalf of the Gestapo to monitor Zinner-Loewe. She had in turn been instructed by the British to prevent or at least delay the handover of the Portuguese tungsten delivery to the Germans. The tungsten would have been a great help to the Germans at the time, as it was a bottleneck in their armaments industry.

Question: Another rare word, Mr Papp: bottleneck. Where did you get it from?

Answer: Yesterday I wanted to buy a pack of good cigars, but I was told that they were in short supply.

Question: Do you know the answer to everything?

Answer: Not everything, Mr Major, just some things. If you had questioned me back then, for example, I would have been at a loss for answers, because I only found out about most of these things after the war, even though Mari and I had just as close a relationship the next day as we did in Budapest or Holland. There she had cheated on Van Doorn with me, now it was Zinner-Loewe.

Question: I already said that we want to leave these private matters out of the equation.

Answer: I only mentioned it because it's part of the story. In August 1944, Hauchling turned up ...

Question: Well, finally!

Answer: Yes, in my flat, Calle Serrano eight. He had received my Tenundgé letter, he said, and informed my father immediately, my father had wanted to write to me straight away and send the letter by a roundabout route. My father's letter never reached me. Which is quite understandable, because he never wrote such a letter.

Question: Why not?

Answer: Hauchling had lied. He hadn't informed my father.

Question: Why not?

Answer: Probably because my father was already on the list back then. Don't ask me which list, I'll come to that anyway. On the list of those who had secret foreign assets after the Germans accepted. Which was not registered in Hungary. Do you understand, Mr Major?

Question: I think so.

Answer: No. You can't understand it. Hauchling claimed that he had miraculously managed to escape from Hungary. The Germans had wanted to arrest him, but he had expected it and had prepared himself for it, having escaped the day before. At this point he reached into his left inside pocket, pulled out a passport and handed it to me. I opened it. It was made out in the name of Miklós Papp, with my photo on it, all the details were correct, only the *denomination* section said: Reformed. I mentioned that Hauchling looked a lot like me, didn't I?

Question: Yes, you mentioned that.

Answer: I was still harbouring a bit of the old jealousy, I thought I could keep it from him that

Mari was also in Madrid, today I know that been impossible. He knew that she was also in Madrid. I helped him rent a room in Calle Narváez and asked him if he had any money, even though I hardly had any left myself, yes, he replied, then he asked: Do you need money? I said I still had a little, but if he had that much, I'd get in touch if I needed any. Just get in touch, he said. We agreed that he would call me the next day. But he didn't call, he came round at the agreed time. With Mari. There were two of them. I still had no idea. In the evening, the four of us went to Pasapoga, a fancy pub, the fourth being Zinner-Loewe. On the way there Hauchling arranged it so that Mari and Zinner-Loewe went ahead, we stayed a few steps behind, and he told me that he didn't want to cause any complications with the name Miklós Papp, so he had introduced himself to Zinner-Loewe under the name Paul Bender, in Mari's presence, so that she would also know, and I should call him Paul too. Of course, I still had no idea about the Portuguese tungsten and Mari's Gestapo and Intelligence Service connections. The only thing that made me wonder was how Hauchling was able to get out of Hungary and cross the whole of France, where the Allies had already landed. I decided to ask him at the next opportunity. It was at Pasapoga, when Mari and Zinner-Loewe were dancing. When I asked him, he laughed. Just like you Miguel Navarro Sánchez, he said. With money. I only needed to buy a few people, I had money. Then he asked about Van Doorn. He said that he had seen my father at the beginning of June, but not after that. He had tried to prevent him from being deported, but then his situation had become increasingly difficult.

Before he left, he had heard from whom, he no longer knew, that my father was in the provinces. When he saw him at the beginning of June, he looked well and worried about me. Poor father. He was no longer alive at the beginning of June.

Question: Didn't Hauchling talk about Laurentis?

Answer: Yes, he did. Lauri was being harassed by the police for all sorts of activities, he had always been a sociopath, he said. He was supposed to join the military, but Hauchling prevented that and him into the bank, where he needed a clever head anyway. Lauri had married in the meantime, his wife was called Kriszti and was a very pretty teacher. I asked him what was going on with the bank. He replied that he no longer knew and sighed as if the bank was causing him great grief. Then he said: "I had three hours to escape. Just enough to save a little money and a few valuables. I asked what had happened to my father's money that was deposited in his bank. He laughed and said: "Where do you live? You can tell, at the other end of Europe. Your father's deposits are Jewish capital and have therefore long been frozen, but I warned him in good time so that there wasn't much left in the account.

Question: Are you aware that Hauchling was in Hungary in the summer of 1944 ...

Answer: Yes.

Question: How do you ? From whom?

Answer: From Laurentis. He told me everything in 1962 when we met in San Sebastián.

Question: Please continue your report now.

Answer: Good. Well, Major, I know about everything. I learnt a lot in April 1945, and Lauri told me two years ago what was still missing. But in the last months of 1944, I didn't know anything at all.

and I didn't harbour the slightest suspicion about Hauchling. I thought him just as good a friend as I had at school, and I envied him just as much, only I was no longer jealous him because of Mari, I don't know why, perhaps because of Mari's behaviour, she never left me in any doubt for a moment that she really loved me. And sincerely. I loved her too. Hauchling led a distinguished life, he always had money, a lot of money, he spoke of outstandings with Spanish business friends of the Kredit- und Transferbank A. G., which had been paid to him, and now he was planning to build a small, solid business, perhaps in Tangier.

Question: Did he have women's affairs in Madrid?

Answer: Of course. He had a girlfriend, a singer

I met a woman who pretended to be Cuban, but she was just a simple Andalusian gypsy, her name was Nina Montes, a splendid woman. Yesterday in Almádi I heard the song she sang for the first time in Andalusian. *Bésame, bésame mucho* ... Do you know her, Mr Major?

Question: Me? The singer?

Answer: No. The pop song. (On the tape, Papp sings the hit song. Quite wrong.)

Question: Please come back to Hauchling.

Answer: Oh yes, Hauchling. Apart from Nina, he also had the wife of a Serbian shipyard owner who came to Madrid by plane, I don't know where from. Nina was madly in love with Hauchling, but Milaja, the Yugoslavian, was not. I'm sure of that. I always had the feeling that she was only with Hauchling out of necessity. I asked him about it once, but he just waved it off. Incidentally, he had found himself a three-room flat, he often came to see me, because he his rendezvous with Nina in my flat, he couldn't see her because of Milaja.

to take with him. In the meantime, I had completed my last semester of medical school, my studies in Utrecht had been recognised, Hauchling gave me a passport in the name of Miklós Papp, I remember it was on the day he asked me where my father had actually been born. Today I know why he wanted to know. I was surprised by his question and answered: 'In Veszprém, you know that, why are you asking such rubbish? Oh yes, of course, he said, in Veszprém. That was the day before Zinner-Loewe's call, on 17 February 1945, so on 18 February Zinner-Loewe called me, he spoke Spanish and asked me very politely to come and see him. It was very important. I would be there in half an hour, I said. It was a cold day, in Madrid such cold is a rarity in February. I had already picked out my transition coat, but because of the cold I put on my winter coat, I still had my gloves in my coat pocket, which I also put on, and I put on a hat, which I never do. Today it's different, at my age you have to be careful. Zinner-Loewe had a seven-room luxury flat at the beginning of Calle Alcalá, Mari lived with him as a guest, it was a corner flat, three rooms facing Puerta del Sol, on the first floor. He had rented it from a Spanish count who was doing diplomatic service in the Philippines and couldn't come home because of the war. I took the metro and got off at Puerta del Sol. As I turned towards the Alcalá, I involuntarily looked up at the windows of Zinner-Loewe's apartment. I was actually interested to see if Mari was at home. But there was only a light on in the last room, the seventh. I went up the stairs without anyone and was about to ring the doorbell when I noticed that the front door was open. I stepped inside and closed it behind me. I hoped to find Mari,

I hadn't seen her or spoken to her for three days because I had exams coming up again and I didn't want to be distracted. I walked through the empty flat, there was no anywhere. There really was a light on in the last room, but it was also empty. Then I started calling out loudly: Edmundo, Ed- mundo! But Zinner-Loewe didn't answer. I cautiously opened the door to the bathroom, first I saw the bathtub with water in it, someone had been bathing, but now the tub was empty. When I looked to the side, I noticed Zinner-Loewe lying face down in front of the long bathroom mirror, dead, his head on the tiles, in a red bathrobe, my Finnish dagger with the mother-of-pearl handle sticking out of his back, his left hand lying under his body, his right arm stretched out, his index finger touching the bottom edge of the mirror. I was terrified. Don't touch anything, was my first thought. Then I realised that I was freezing. Mari! What about Mari? That was my second thought. I ran into her room. The double room was unlocked, but also empty. Mari wasn't at home. I didn't notice anything special in the rooms. I went back to the bathroom. Only now did I realise that I was still wearing my gloves. I sighed with relief. They wouldn't find any traces of my fingers. By now I was shivering with cold. I carefully lit the gas stove in the bathroom. I didn't dare take off my coat. I crouched down next to Edmundo and examined him, I was almost a qualified doctor, I convinced myself expertly that he was really dead. I was familiar with the flat, I went through all seven rooms again and also took a look in the adjoining rooms, there was order everywhere, not a soul to be seen. Zinner- Loewe had an old cook, a kind of maid for everything, her name was María-Pilar. She was an excellent cook. She wasn't at home. In Edmundo's study

I looked at the desk, but I didn't find anything unusual. I was worried about Mari, I was afraid she had killed Edmundo. I couldn't have given a reason, but I couldn't think of anything else. But why would she have done something like that? I didn't understand anything. I went back into the bathroom, maybe there was a clue there after all. I remembered to look in the pockets of Edmundo's bathrobe. I crouched down again, but something caught my attention. Just what? The mirror! Yes, the mirror. The mirror was steamed up from the heat of the gas stove, someone had scribbled something on the mirror glass in uncertain writing: Bender, Gesta... The a led down to Edmundo's index finger, which was lying at the bottom edge of the mirror. I knew Hauchling had killed him. He had murdered Zinner-Loewe with the Finnish dagger he had stolen from my flat.

Question: Was that the same dagger that you received from Hasz- lacher as a thank-you for the audition in maths class?

Answer: Yes! But how do you know about that, Mr Major?!

Question: Aren't you hungry, Mr Papp?

Answer: Yes, very.

Chapter Eight

"Nachricht aus dem Jenseits oder Der verräterische Spiegel" (Message from the Beyond or The Treacherous Mirror) is the label on the message naming the murderer that the dying victim scrawls with trembling fingers on the steamed-up mirror in J. Szücs' literary prop chamber. When the air in the bathroom cools down, the writing disappears.

When the heating is turned back on, damp fog once again settles on the glass and the writing becomes legible again. This is the third novel he has written in his head using this solution. He knew from the start that he would have to steal. He didn't steal from Shakespeare, Dürrenmatt or even Simenon. He stole from J. Szücs. Incidentally, he was forced to do so because he has never been able to find an acceptable solution to the question of how the figure the victim finds in the bathroom can heat the room in such a short time (and above all why) that the mirror fogs up while he is still there. He has never succeeded in doing this credibly as a writer. But now there was the appropriate preparation, the cold February night, the winter coat, the gloves, the inner shivering, so it goes. And the Finn dagger works too. Haszlacher's dagger. These are the little subtleties that convince J. Szücs time and again that he is a born novelist. The nonchalant superiority of the way he brings back the incidental thread, almost forgotten by the reader, as a punch line and then lets it float away as a meaningless trifle. Incidentally, *Message from Beyond or The Treacherous Mirror* is a unique solution in international crime fiction, as far as he knows, harrowing experiential material, taken from life; but the ordinary reader has no idea of the agonies a writer has to endure in order to collect such experiential material. Nor does he need to know. The reader should amuse and educate himself. *Panem et circenses!*

Etuka's train to the Romanian border, which she used, to meet Aunt Titike and pick her up there, left the Westbahnhof at seven o'clock in the evening, Aunt Titike was coming to visit for a week, she was almost seventy, they had arranged by letter that Etuka would drive to the border.

They are very nice people, old Töreki is already retired, but Frici, his son, is the stationmaster there, Etuka later praised him for how polite he was, courteous, sympathetic, very kind, J. Szücs even had to write Frici Töreki a letter of thanks taking his wife in so kindly. Aunt Titi- ke arrives in Biharkeresztes on the morning train, Etuka joins her, and they arrive together at the western railway station at eleven twenty-five. That was the arrangement.

J. Szücs and Babsi took Etuka to the seven o'clock train, the train set off, they waved, Etuka waved for a long time too,

"You could really invite me to dinner, Fefe," Babsi said as they walked out of the station, "two straw widowers among themselves, if you take me seriously." Her husband had just had an inspection in the province, of course he took Babsi seriously, They ate fish soup in Altbuda and drank a bottle of wine together, then they went to Szücs' flat, because Babsi wanted to him another coffee, but she hadn't home all day, "I'll have a quick shower," she said and turned on the gas in the bathroom, then she started to undress, J. Szücs wanted to go out, but Babsi wouldn't let him, and when Babsi got out of the bath naked, she stood in front of the steamed-up mirror and wrote something on it with her finger, but it looked

J. Szücs didn't, because he had gone into the room to make up the bed, he didn't want to lie down on the couch, Etuka's stories about the couch were all too vivid in his mind, when she had left the flat to Babsi, Babsi also came in and lay down in Szücs' marital bed as if she were at home, as if it were her own, just like Etuka, maybe Babsi is actually Etuka, J. Szücs thought, why not? Szücs, why not, they are one heart and one soul, they have no secrets from each other, they talk about everything,

That put J. Szücs was a little put off, of course, but then he reassured himself that she wouldn't tell Etuka, then he remembered that he should have checked the timetable again, perhaps something had come up and Etuka was getting off in Szolnok, then she could be back in Budapest now and could burst in at any moment, I should call the information centre to find out when a train from Szolnok was arriving, he thought, but he didn't dare, he was ashamed of Babsi, so that night, even though he managed to persuade himself not to sleep with Babsi but with Etuka, didn't go entirely smoothly, Although he could talk himself into sleeping with Etuka rather than Babsi, the night was not entirely trouble-free. Later, during the night, he woke up several times and listened to see if the door was open, if Etuka suddenly came in, and then he fell asleep again, Babsi, however, slept like a log, lying on her back, arms and legs stretched out in all directions, she was naked, but beautiful, but still, only a corner of the sheet covered her belly a little, something so shameless, thought J. Szücs, then with difficulty he managed to fall asleep for the third - or fourth? - In the morning Babsi woke up fresh and rested, while J. Szücs was shattered, humiliated, destroyed and tired, Babsi pranced into the bathroom and showered with ice-cold water, because Babsi showers with cold water every morning, summer or winter, then she got dressed and dashed off to the office, J. Szücs even made the coffee for her. Szücs still made the coffee for her, but he was glad when she was finally out, finally quiet, now he went into the bathroom and turned on the gas, he took a hot shower, and then, when he got out of the bath, he saw Babsi's characteristic handwriting with the letters leaning to the left on the steamed-up mirror, seven words, written one below the other: *And - now - will - Babsi - Little - Fefe - seduce!*, a terrible idea, he would not have discovered this in time, Etuka comes home and wants a bath, and

Then the inscription appeared on the mirror, it was painful just to think about it, but it only became really embarrassing a few minutes later when the telephone rang in the room, J. Szücs went and answered it, it was Babsi, she asked how he had liked it, what a shameful thing that was, and then she asked what he would say if she told Etuka about that night. Then it happened that J. Szücs sank to his knees, the telephone receiver to his ear and mouth, and begged Babsi to just drop such thoughts, but Babsi only laughed, she teased him, now she would let Etuka in on everything, on the smallest detail, J. Szücs begged for so long that she would tell him everything. Szücs begged until Babsi graciously agreed that she would tell Etuka as if she had not slept with J. Szücs but with someone else, but Babsi couldn't get any more out of him, nothing more, although J. Szücs also reprimanded her for her irresponsible, careless writing on the mirror. And if Etuka recognises me, he asked himself, deeply shocked, if she finds out from the details that Babsi has been with me? What then? An unnecessary worry, as turned out later, he didn't even know whether Babsi had told her friend anything at all, and if she had, then what; it also seemed suspicious to him that Etuka hadn't told him anything about such an evening with Babsi; she had made a few mocking allusions from which one could conclude that Babsi had told him, but there was no concrete evidence of this, perhaps the two of them were conspiring against him and wanted to blackmail him. A terrible story. And this terrible story is behind *The Message from Beyond* or *The Treacherous Mirror*, it is J. Szücs' own personal experience, lived through and endured a thousand times. But what does the reader know about it! He doesn't need to know.

I, Ferenc J. Szücs, swear on honour and conscience ... This is how a sacred oath must begin, because

J. Szücs now makes a vow: If I ever come out of this hospital safe and sound, and why shouldn't I succeed in the end, and finally write this novel, with a real typewriter and on real paper, because I have to write this one, unlike the previous ones, which I always only intended to write and then nothing came of it, but this one is different, I will write it, yes, I will ... But the vow does not refer to that, rather he wants to swear to himself that before he starts writing, he will go to the police, for consultations and to study criminal police work. So far, apart from necessarily forgotten childhood experiences, he has only spoken to live police officers twice. Once two years ago, on a summer night, when he and Etuka came home from Professor Lóránt's, Etuka was a bit tipsy, they'd had a drink at Professor Lóránt's, Etuka can be very nice and sweet, then they stood outside the front door and rang the bell, but the caretaker didn't come to open the door, Etuka had to, she was already dancing on one leg and swearing at the caretaker, and suddenly she couldn't stand it any longer, the street was deserted, Etuka quickly lifted her skirt, crouched down next to the pavement and called out: "Etuka is a very, very little girl, Etuka is wee-weeing", and Etuka did wee-wee. The policeman stepped out from behind the corner and Etuka just managed pull her skirt down. "Would you do the same in your room, young lady?" the policeman asked sternly. "Your identity card, please." Then it was a hail of questions, father's name, mother's name, where born, where living, where employed, married, children - but not order, but in a sophisticated jumble.

The other was in case the person in question had memorised the identity card and now got everything mixed up. Etuka didn't confuse anything, even though she was a little tipsy. "Are you husband and wife?" the policeman asked, whereupon J. Szücs also pulled out his ID card and handed it over, the police index finger moving back and forth between Etuka and J. Szücs several times, "and you live here in this house?" The yes made him a little milder, he shook his head, apparently he was new to this neighbourhood, "serious, grown-up people, t-t-t, and do this sort of thing. The street is not a toilet, young lady." Then he helped them lure the caretaker out, which wasn't easy because the front doorbell was broken, it turned out.

The second time, he only exchanged three or four words with a policeman, or the one with him, as J. Szücs wanted to cross the Great Ring at a place where there was no zebra crossing. But that was meaningless. All of this does not, of course, mean any particular expertise in police work, but for an inveterate novelist, the fragments, the molecules of reality, are enough to build a tower out of them, more durable than steel, for the edification, instruction and amusement of future generations. Thus: "I, Ferenc J. Szücs, swear on honour and conscience that before writing my new novel I will study the apparatus and activities of the Hungarian police in detail. So help me God." J. Szücs realises that oaths should end differently, and he decides to make detailed enquiries as soon as he is released. Of course, an oath must also contain the date, but he doesn't know that. He can only guess. According to his estimate, it is between two and three o'clock in the morning, perhaps later, possibly even later

not so late. He's not exactly tired, he's not exactly in pain, the novel is medicine for everything, he thinks, but only for himself, writing it down would sound too pathetic, he still has lemon juice, he doesn't need caffeine pills now, but Etuka's wee-wee awakens a need in him too, he no longer needs to bother the nurse, there's a duck on the bottom shelf of the small table, he fetches it into bed with left hand. He can go wee-wee on his own. Like a big boy. He puts the duck back. The vow is done, now he can continue writing his novel.

J. Szücs is on form. He is determined not to worry much about the details now - plot and structure are the essential points, there is time for the fine-tuning, the detailed elaboration will come later. When writing properly. Perhaps political questions still need to be decided, because if he writes without thinking, he might get into trouble. He knows from the outset that he will not take a position on the internal discussions of the international labour movement. in the novel, of course. The situation in South-East Asia would seem artificial here, because a year ago, at the time the novel is set, it was not yet so acute, so he can do without it. Is Hauchling supposed to switch from the Gestapo to the American imperialists and carry out rooting work against the Soviet Union and the people's democracies? That is not an option

J. Szücs does not do this because he wants to avoid the essential questions, not at all, he tells the truth to everyone's face, it would just be too cheap artistically, rattled off a fact that has already been described a thousand times, no, he cannot afford to do that. Moreover, he is an unwavering supporter of peaceful coexistence, a resolute advocate of peace and friendship among nations, not peace at any price, of course, but peace at any price.

Peace. And he also thinks about it a little, only in passing of course, because that is not a decisive point of view, that it would not be a bad thing if he get a Ford scholarship next year or possibly the year after and go to the United States for a year, or even just six . The Cuba question does not belong here because it cannot be directly linked to Hauchling's activities in 1944; the same applies to the independence of the colonial peoples. Although the Congo is not bad material, he has already hinted twice at certain uranium mining shares in Katanga, something can be done here, this is how you recognise the important novelist, the conscious conception takes precedence over instinctive knowledge, the material to be written down carries all its possibilities a priori, the writer's work consists only in breaking down the material, subjecting the instinctive realisation to the control of consciousness and shaping the characters and situations, and the novel is finished. It's as simple as that. But the ideal statement of the Laurentis case is militant anti-fascism, because it not only uncovers hair-raising new details about fascist crimes, but also clearly shows the reader how these crimes reach over the distance of twenty and thirty years into the present, it proves that the murderers are still with us and will kill again and again if necessary. Seen in this light, it doesn't matter if Józsa can't catch this puffball, we erect a memento for the reader: Remember! Fascism is still alive today. And that, unfortunately, is the full truth. So.

Now need a lively, action-packed situation, the murky, stagnant water of the statements needs to be stirred up a little, the police office all the time, that gets boring, all the time only Józsa and Papp, question

and answer, it would get on my nerves too if I were a reader.

How about I send them both out for dinner? Józsa could invite Papp round, as Papp mentions that he hasn't eaten broad beans with smoked meat for ages. No, that's no good. There's already enough family life. And poor Mórika sits at home all the time, she never has a Saturday evening when her husband goes out with her. I can't believe she puts up with it.

Józsa should just call home, then the three of them go to a restaurant, now find a good restaurant name, let's say "Goldener Knurrhahn", excellent. So they go to eat at the "Goldener Knurrhahn". But just the three of you? What if Papp were to suggest inviting Mrs Tamacskó, who is also sitting around at home because Józsa has offered to herself available to the police at any time. At first Józsa wants to protest, it is a rebellion of his innate sense of decency to be seen with such a woman, he thinks, and then Mórika with her at the same table, that is not possible, but then he is embarrassed to give Papp a rebuff, after all he has been arrested innocently, besides, and this is ultimately the most important thing, Mrs Tamacskó may know something else about the Laurentis case that is not yet known. The circumstances of the murder need to be clarified and reconstructed even more precisely than before, so that in the end professional considerations win out, Józsa arranges for the Jaguar to be unblocked by the police, Papp calls Mrs Tamacskó, Józsa calls his wife, they go downstairs, Papp gets behind the wheel of the Jaguar, first they pick up Mrs Tamacskó, she lives closer, then Mórika, and when all four are together, they go to the "Golden Knurrhahn", where all the tables are occupied because it's Saturday evening, and there's dancing on the dance floor in the middle,

But the head waiter knows Józsa, it has to do with a foreign exchange matter and dates back a long time, 1946, he immediately has an additional table set up for four people, the menu, the order, two bottles of Badacsony Riesling, the head waiter fills Papp's glass first, Papp tastes the wine and clicks his tongue, excellent, hm, outstanding!

So, now everything looks completely different, he should have a nice evening in Budapest, maybe the novel will be translated into other languages, a bit of advertising for tourism is always good. See Krúdy.

Chapter nine

"Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty, I counted, facing the wall, eyes closed. It always helps, I knew it, I breathed in and out deeply and had myself completely under control, it always calms me down. It was the same now. In the meantime, I didn't even think about what I should do. I concentrated on regaining my calm. I succeeded. I turned round. I knew that Edmundo been killed by Hauchling, and that Hauchling for the Gestapo. The conclusion was obvious: that I was in danger. And that Mari was in danger too, even though I had no idea of her secret connections. The Finnish dagger pierced diagonally into Edmundo's back would have been a danger in itself. Edmundo had often been seen with me, or rather I with him, I didn't have the means to determine whether Hauchling had left fingerprints on the dagger's handle, but I had the dagger

I'd held the dagger in my hand countless times over the twelve years, and a few of my fingerprints would have been enough to suspect me of the murder. I didn't have enough time to go home and see if Hauchling had left the leather sheath of the dagger there or taken it with him to come back here. And if he had taken it with him, was it still somewhere in this flat, with my fingerprints on it, or had he taken it away after the murder? I didn't understand why he hadn't shot Edmundo. Once, at the beginning of September, he had been with me, it was very warm, he took off his jacket and I saw that he was carrying a revolver in his breast pocket. I asked him why. He took it in his hand, it was a simple Belgian Browning, then he pulled something else out of his pocket that looked like a pipe, now I know it was a silencer. What was the gun for, I asked. He laughed and replied: "If I ever have the Germans on my tail, they won't get me for free. So I came to the logical conclusion that he wanted to direct the suspicion of murder towards me. But I didn't realise what his aim was. I only realised that months later. I only had to fear the sudden return of the old housekeeper María-Pilar, not Mari if she came, and apart from me Edmundo probably hadn't asked anyone to come round at the same time, otherwise he or she would have arrived by now. I glanced at my watch. There were three minutes to eight. María-Pilar was probably at the cinema. Edmundo could have sent her away, or she could have taken the day off. If I didn't want to be noticed, I had to leave the flat as soon as possible. I was primarily interested in the leather sheath of the dagger. Mari knew the dagger herself, and maybe Nina too, if Hauchling had shown it to her at my place.

I had to make the dagger disappear, so I had to take it with me. And the sheath too, if it was in the flat. I sighed, it was a disgusting feeling, but I had to do it. I pulled the dagger out of Edmundo's back and wiped the blood off Edmundo's red bathrobe. The tiled floor wasn't very bloody, I looked at my shoes and there was no trace of it. To be on the safe side, I found a cloth and, after making sure that the case wasn't in the bathroom, I wiped the floor in front of me clean so as not to leave any footprints. I had studied forensics, I know a bit about it. If my footprints were identified outside in one of the rooms, it wouldn't be a big deal. It was no secret that I frequented Zinner-Loewe. I removed my scarf from my neck and wrapped the dagger in it, tucking the bundle into my coat pocket. Then I looked for the sheath, also in Mari's room, but I didn't find it. If I were Hauchling, I thought, I would have left the sheath in my flat at all costs to draw suspicion to myself. The dagger fits right in, that would be more proof. I kept my gloves on the whole time. Hauchling couldn't have known about the message from the other world, he was probably convinced that Edmundo was dead, but he had dragged himself to the mirror with the last of his strength and written the name of the murderer on it. But that didn't free me from suspicion. Hauchling, as I said, looked very much like me. The dagger and the fodder bowl it fitted into were just as strong evidence against me as the mirror inscription against Hauchling and Bender respectively. And the political background to the murder, i.e. that the perpetrator was to be sought in the Gestapo, would certainly be covered up. The Spaniards boasted in February of the nineteen hundreds

The Allies have long since ceased to be generous towards the German secret service. They are already going to great lengths to convince the Allies of their Western democratic convictions. I thought about all this almost automatically, somehow on a second level of thought, while I searched for the case, endeavouring to make as little mess as possible. But the case was nowhere to be found. I had to leave if I didn't want to risk found next to the murdered Zinner-Loewe. Because then I'd have been delivered: the bloody dagger in my coat pocket, the case at home. Presumably, anyway. I carefully opened the front door and listened. Everything was quiet. I ran down the stairs and past the dark caretaker's alcove into the street. Now get out of here as quickly as possible! While I stopped an empty taxi on Preciados and got in, I was only worried about Mari. I almost gave the driver my address, but I remembered in time that it might come out that I had been in the area of the crime scene, so I preferred to be driven to Atocha station, where the passenger train from Toledo was just arriving, I mingled with the arrivals, and as I left the station building I provoked a small argument with an elderly railwayman standing at the exit, who would certainly remember if I had to prove my alibi that I had come out with the travellers from Toledo. Then I took another taxi, got out near my flat, looked for a manhole and, when no one was around, dropped the dagger between the bars of the grate into the shaft. Then I went home, cut the scarf into small pieces with a pair of scissors and flushed them down the toilet, being careful not to cause a blockage.

under. The empty case really did turn up. I put my coat back on, went out and let it disappear into another gully. Then I realised that I was behaving as if I were the murderer. I kept thinking about Mari while, back at home, I cleaned the soles of my shoes with petrol-soaked cotton wool and my hands with another wad of cotton wool. Then I undressed and took a bath. In the bathroom, I remembered poor Zinner-Loewe again, lying on the black and white mosaic tiles in his red bathrobe, accusing his murderer with a frozen index finger. The murder had certainly been discovered by now. I was very upset. To find peace, I took a light sleeping pill and lay down in bed, I opened Don Quixote, forced myself to read and waited for sleep to come. And it came."

That's how it's done somehow, thinks J. Szücs thinks. That's probably how good old Michelangelo Buonarotti it on the scaffolding under the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; half lying on his back, charcoal in hand (he probably used charcoal - look up exactly how frescoes are painted!), he the sketch, then, to get an idea of how the whole thing would look when it was finished, he painted an angel's hand in colour in perspective foreshortening, he wanted to see how the paint soaked in, whether it didn't crumble off, how it adhered, the next morning he would also see how vivid the tones were, because by then the colour would dried to some extent, from which all sorts of conclusions could then be drawn, all right, so somehow this is what the details will look like, technically not bad at all, statement and inner monologue in one, or as we Romantic theorists say, *monologue intérieure*, so that seems to be all right, he doesn't need to tinker with it any more, that's honest craftsmanship.

work, now it's time to back to the big composition, the wide-ranging painting with its relativised partial proportions, the artistic linking of the figures and, most importantly - the good old Buonarotti couldn't do that, of course, his possibilities lagged behind those of us draughtsmen - the temporal movements, forwards, backwards and sideways in time, quite compulsively, the constantly interrelated changes of figures, settings, situations and times. Of course, you have to know how this is done. I know how it's done.

The content is there on the whole, now look for the appropriate form. The tape recorder will really be the best, puritanical simplicity fits here, a text, grey in grey, with small built-in dialogues, otherwise only text and nothing else. Not from the outside to the inside, but the other way round, and nothing garish or blatant. Golden gurnard? Out of the question! Text, text. Like a documentary radio play.

Before they left the police station, Józsa had put a small, battery-operated tape recorder in his briefcase, a nice foreign-made device, but why a foreign one? A Hungarian one, of course, our news technology industry is really impressive, we can produce something like that too, especially if it's needed by the police, five and a half to six hours on both sides of the tape, there's room for a lot of things, even the golden gurnard, Józsa also knows something about tape and radio technology, what doesn't Józsa know about? Józsa knows something about everything, otherwise he couldn't be the hero of J. Szücs' novel, and operating a small, battery-operated tape recorder doesn't really require any great technical qualifications.

Józsa is already preparing for the report he has to write for the deputy minister, when the material has been recorded he will listen to it in the office, edit it like a radio reporter, add the appropriate explanations and additions and have everything typed up by Elzike, then he will read it through again, correct it, add to it, put it into the right form a little, Elzike will copy the final text again, and the deputy minister will be presented with a concise and precisely worded report on gleaming white paper, with nothing crossed out, crossed out or written in; the report will only contain what the deputy minister is interested in; it remains unmentioned that Papp asks Mórika to dance after the essay, of course only after he has obtained Józsa's permission; they go to the dance floor, Mórika, who so rarely has the opportunity, Mórika, who so rarely has the opportunity to enjoy herself in this way, laughs loudly during the dance, and in the meantime Mrs Tamacskó, who (and there can be no doubt about this) is touchingly beautiful, as she is made up of Etuka and Babsi, They are all a little tipsy from the Badac- sony Riesling, even Józsa, who has already drunk his representative schnapps with Papp in the afternoon, and Mrs Tamacskó succeeds in wrapping Józsa up by a hair's breadth, But Józsa is saved at the last moment by his tape recorder, because he realises that the machine is on, set to record, but Józsa is far too cunning to fall into such self-made traps, he reaches for his briefcase, opens it, reaches in and switches off the machine, only now he discusses with Zsu that he will visit her on Monday afternoon for a little crime scene inspection, because her husband won't arrive until the next day.

He returned from his congress in Berlin on Tuesday morning and called this afternoon.

Józsa reaches into his pocket again and switches on the device, because the Madison is over, Mórika and Papp come back to the table, Papp offers Józsa a fine Cuban cigar, here he has finally been able to buy good cigars, and Józsa, in whom the sense of duty never wanes, steers the conversation towards Papp's story. The tape recorder registers every word as if a cute little goblin were sitting in it, headphones in his ears and a microphone in his hand. The two women listen to the horror story with curiosity and stares.

"You haven't told me yet, Mr Papp, what happened to Mária Zucker."

"I received a letter from Mari a day later dated the day before the murder. In it she wrote: I love Hauchling, I'm travelling with him, don't be angry with me, I can't help it. What I read there was of course devastating for me. When I had recovered a little from the initial shock, I started to think. Edmundo's call that he had something very important to tell me; the murder; Edmundo's message from beyond the grave that Hauchling or Bender, as he knew him, was a Gestapo agent; Hauchling's attempt to divert suspicion of the murder onto me - all this made me doubt that Mari had written the letter of her own free will. The affair seemed all the stranger to me because Milaja had disappeared with Hauchling and Mari. Where, how and when they had disappeared, I didn't know. In connection with the murder of Zinner-Loewe, I was of course questioned by the police, but I was as reserved as I could be; from the questions I learnt that the message on the mirror had had its effect and that they suspected only Bender, i.e. Hauchling. Next to Zinner-Loewe's lieutenant

The old housekeeper's body had been found; she had probably succumbed to a heart attack at the gruesome sight. So Hauchling now had the deaths of two people on his conscience."

At this moment, J. Szücs's doubts arise: the situation in the Golden Gurnard is implausible from a literary point of view. There's nothing wrong with Papp's story, but Józsa's behaviour - no, that's not how it works. Mrs Tamacskó can't have a police officer in her pocket. It's impossible for him to be charmed by someone like that. And this tape affair in the nightclub: fake. A completely fake, contrived, speculative fantasy without any claim to reality. He thinks about it: if he were given a novel to edit or review that contained something like that, he wouldn't let it go through. He would gently urge the author to revise these passages, and to revise them thoroughly. And no matter how much the public craves good Hungarian crime novels. We hardly have a few writers who write any, and what they write, the public swallows without hesitation. Bestsellers. J. Szücs can't go to the editor with such an out-of-the-blue, inane situation, let to the widest readership. A J. Szücs would sink to the ground with shame if he received even ten lines back with the comment that they were unbelievable from a literary point of view. No. He will thoroughly revise this part when he writes the novel. Not the fable itself, just this situation in the Golden Growler. Cut, end. That will be revised, save yourselves another word.

How proud Etuka will be of me when the novel is published one day! And Babsi too. Babsi will be proud too. As if she were my wife too. Bálint won't count. And Professor Lóránt will be bursting with envy. Wis-

A degree, a seat in the academy, a professorship, this title and that rank, that's all very nice, but to become a classic of contemporary prose and, what's more, of a genre as beloved as the crime novel! As I said, he will be bursting with envy. And in one fell swoop Babsi will give up her dissolute lifestyle, and Etuka will no longer have anything to say about Babsi that borders on pornography or sometimes even crosses it, she will no longer be able to pretend that she experienced it all herself and not Babsi, who dares to deceive a successful crime writer, because he will find out, he will find out, he has a logic that is as sharp as a razor blade, he inspires fear, oh yes, and how! Fear not only of being discovered - because he will find out - but also of grim revenge. For the true crime writer is only prevented from committing the perfect crime by his high moral conscience, he is the master of the world, he is ...

Only once, just once, he it, he still doesn't quite realise how it happened, the mosquitoes, it with the mosquitoes, with the fact that they stung unbearably as he sat outside on the veranda and worked, every moment he had to slap his feet, his arms, his back, he couldn't concentrate on his work at all, because the beasts brought their tiny, painful needle bites quite suddenly, They would suddenly and unexpectedly apply their windy, painful pinpricks in the most impossible and unpredictable places, for example on the tip of his second toe, seen from the outside, on his right foot, then under his left eye, under his glasses, and then on his shoulder, it was unbearable, he wanted to put something on, but he couldn't do that either, who puts something on in the shade at thirty-three degrees when your swimming trunks already a nuisance, but they even crawled under his bathing trunks and stung him there too, the damned bugs.

The overgrown garden in front of him, opposite the fence that was in need of building, on the roadside in front of it the three walnut trees, in the garden the two cherries and the small pear tree, weak but promising, along the path the pink petunias and the group of low red carnations, from his place he also saw the yellow student flower and next to the vine-covered arbour the daisies, on the right the small grey-blue cottage with the wheel fountain in it, which looked more like a locus, and all this embedded in a varied, multi-layered and yet uniformly coloured green, To the right, the small, grey-blue cottage with the wheeled fountain in it, which looked more like a locus, and all of this embedded in a multi-layered green, layered in many ways and yet uniform in its colour effect, from which the small white daylilies, the centaury, the tufted grasses and here and there the already yellowing, gently bending stalks of wild rye shone out with varying brightness at different times of day.

Only the mosquitoes were obnoxious on the veranda of the small summer house. Had Horace been bitten by the mosquitoes too? He probably was too. How might he have defended himself? By smearing himself with an ointment? Quite possibly. Did he have an insect repellent? Maybe that too. But back then ... insect repellent. Etuka packed a spray somewhere, just in case. Where is it?

He goes into the summer house, looks in his bag, then in the small suitcase, there lies the box, pretty and colourful with a white lid on it and instructions for use, he reads it through, systematically, that's science, you can't be sloppy, "for from my tender childhood I felt an unquenchable desire to follow the scholarly paths of science", he once wrote this sentence in all his CVs without exception, later he omitted it, perhaps because he had taken these paths, the scholarly paths of literature and the arts, and he had already made great progress

on them, far, yes, far! Recently, however, he has been increasingly haunted by the thought of whether this immense world-literary education is not in fact technical idiocy, especially in view of the almost boundlessly rapid development of the natural sciences. Shouldn't we live closer to nature, back to nature, *retournons á la nature*, as the honourable Rousseau once said, but at a higher level, at the level of the times, as natural scientists? Unfortunately, I'd be too late for maths, and I don't really have a talent for it either, so what then, physics, astronomy, technology, machines and so on, all that requires maths, no, that's not my subject, chemistry? Maybe.

Biology. The biology of mosquitoes. The series of experiments begins, always hold the spray head vertically and make sure that clothing, furniture covers and curtains are not sprayed, that nothing gets into our eyes, that we don't inhale too much of it, the food is not here on the table in the veranda, bring in the bottle of soya, cigarettes and ashtrays too. Now. Off with the cap, now it's time to spray. Surprisingly, it doesn't stink, it smells pleasantly sweet, the mosquitoes will also sniff favourably. Sweet death. *La dolce morte*. We put an end to the irresponsible activities of the mosquitoes, dirty, haughty little things, die! It doesn't look like they're dying. They fly away. One sits on the windowsill, I aim at it: it flies away. Another one on the wall to the left: it flies away too. Just fly, you won't come back alive! There's a whole swarm of them, right in the middle! And up to the ceiling and into the corners, there they perch en masse.

Then Alfonso appears on the ceiling, one of my spiders, I have given them all names, between the roof and the power line dwells the Great Madam, she comes

She is also the largest and calmest, she has something dignified about her, she carries the cross on her back like a knight of the Order of Malta, like Hauchling's father, and Traufi, the Great Grey, the Little Grey, Kügelchen, the Little Red and the stupid Bubu, I know, these romantic namings are telltale signs of an anthropomorphic view, but unfortunately this is part of my literary-centric attitude, my favourite is Ladislaus, although my scientific education does not extend so far that I could determine which are male and which are female, maybe Ladislaus is a girl, I don't know! Ladislaus also gets food from me, when I find a dead fly or a fallen bee, I always hang it in his net, not because he is more likeable to me than the others, no, I can only reach his net most easily, on what external things the sympathies of man depend! Ladislaus is not greedy, he is pleasantly reserved, he does not seek my friendship, he takes the food in his web calmly in his eyes, if he has already eaten that day, he spins it carefully and then returns to the centre of the web, waits and works, he does not leave his workplace because he is full, he has a sense of duty, instinctively only, but nevertheless something like that impresses me. So Alfonso appears from under the ceiling, the young little spider who is always so lively and full of fun and is constantly nervously tinkering with his web that you almost feel like working yourself.

But now there's something wrong with Alfonso, he sets His eight legs are limp and sluggish, his gait is stumbling and ever more stumbling, he pauses, sways, holds his balance with difficulty, and it is only then that I realise

It's clear that Alfonso also got some of the mosquito spray, poor boy, what's going to happen to you? I didn't want to hurt Alfonso, spiders are useful, they kill flies, mosquitoes and similar flying insects that spread plagues and diseases, but if he's already been hit, I have to observe the effect, I'm overcome by scientific interest, I have to suppress the pseudo-humanism that wants to arise in me, science, like nature, is merciless and indifferent, *sine ira et studio*, Alfonso behaves as if he were drunk, he stumbles and staggers, then he pulls himself together, but suddenly, as if he could do no more, he falls from the ceiling, but only a few centimetres, a delicate thread holds him, so he floats like a small pendulum, he now rests, gathers his strength, shimmies upwards, apparently he only feels safe up there, near the net, but before he reaches the top, But before he reaches the top, his strength leaves him again, he plunges down again, but this time even further, rests again, twitches from time to time, then climbs up again, swings out at the height of my head like a pendulum, nerve paralysis, it can't be anything else. The insecticide is acting on the central nervous system, I realise that now, Alfonso takes no notice of it, he wants to live, to live with all his might, he is not a mosquito, his organism is more highly organised, we almost unintentionally lend him the illusion of consciousness, the illusion of the human, but if I turn the question around, consciousness or instinct, I would suffer just as much in his place, twitching, trembling, brrr! Dying must be terrible.

Alfonso's suffering is unbearable for me, I don't like it but I see it too, this scientific interest, now he's on the floor, by the sixth or seventh time he couldn't take it anymore.

The last time he tried, he only managed four or five centimetres, now he sits wriggling on the stone floor, trying to walk, to escape, to flee from himself and from death, somewhere, but he can no longer, a few unsteady steps and he falls over, lies on his back, closes his eight legs over himself like a protective grid, but still twitches, He is still alive, I can see that he is still alive, but no, now I can no longer tell whether he is alive or dead, so I nudge him with the tip of a branch, he is still moving, perhaps these are just bioelectric reflexes, no, he is alive, he sees the branch as a lifebuoy, wants to hold on to it, he succeeds, I lift the twig, he to it for a while, then it falls down, I try again to push the twig between his legs to lift it up without it falling down, the third time I finally succeed, very carefully I stand up and leave, the twig with Alfonso on it in my hand, now I hang Alfonso carefully in Ladislaus' net, because science knows no mercy, and I want to know whether God really punishes the sins of the fathers down to the seventh generation, or what was that again, in short, I want to find out whether the insecticide that will kill Alfonso within moments, there is no doubt about that, whether this agent will also affect Ladislaus if Ladislaus eats the poisoned Alfonso. In other words, whether Ladislaus will also die.

Because J. Szücs is free of pseudo-humanism, he is indifferent and merciless like nature. Alfonso is still vibrating a little in Ladislaus' net, but no longer even has the strength to let himself fall. In the evening, when it is dark, Ladislaus will spin him in, and then it will become clear whether the drug is also effective *per os*.

Like this. Where's the spray can? Once I've started, I go straight on, out into the sun-drenched garden, the air shimmers in the midday heat, somewhere I saw ants the other day, I already know where, little black ants, they have an underground nest with two exits, close to the garden path, there they swarm, busy little ants, but science can't stop you, unfortunately, take off the cap, adjust the nozzle, I press, it sprays, first the first entrance, then the centre, then the other entrance and again the first, how they flee! Vermin. Maybe the spray makes me dizzy too, I feel something like a rush, ha, they behave as if they've shot in the stomach, tilt to the side, lift their front legs in front of their bodies, twitch and wriggle. Another jet, right into it! You want to run away? I'll you! Nobody can escape from J. Sziucs! Now the winged ants are coming out of the burrow, are they the mothers? Do you want to save your larvae? Cattle! Let them all die, all of them! My thumb on the push button, I press, release, press, release, press. A larger ant with translucent wings, graceful and delicate, it tipples away, has already reached the centre of the path, wait, you'll get your dose too! Babsitox and Etutox. I hate them, what is scientific interest, dispassionate observation? Nobody escapes me! In the calyx of a petunia a fine-tailed, slender wasp, it too is destroyed, it falls out of the flower onto the sand, wriggles there, I aim at a cabbage white butterfly but don't hit it, but catch a grasshopper in the jump, ants are still crawling out of the nest, the spray can is still not empty, psss, that's how you do it, I'm the master of the world! Concentrating the preparation twentyfold, fiftyfold

and then go, press a button, you obey or you die. You shall die, one and all!

No, in the end he decides not to send the results of the series of experiments to the spray manufacturer after all, even though they could certainly utilise the experience gained in practice for the benefit of mankind. He sits on the veranda, staring out at the stupid daisies, the mosquitoes continue to bite, he thinks he can hear their mocking laughter. He swats at them with his hand wherever they are biting, on his back, his stomach, the back of his hand, his neck, his forehead. Never mind, they stabbed Horace too. Nevertheless, he has become a classic. The two are not related to each other.

Chapter ten

To summarise. Now we must summarise, we must not allow the loquacious Miklós Papp alias Miguel Navarro Sánchez to finish the story himself. Short and sweet, that's what . The deputy minister doesn't want to read a crime novel, but the report on the satisfactory conclusion of the Laurentis murder case. Józsa thinks through the part of the report he still has to dictate on the basis of the tape and his own notes. So.

To summarise. At eight thirty on 6 May 1945, Mária Zucker appears in Papp's Madrid flat, straight from the hairdresser's and tells Papp that her freshly bleached hair is snow-white under the dye, that Hauchling and his cronies are in front of her.

Mária Zucker had fled from the house in Torreldones for two days, where she had been kept in a concrete cellar and tortured daily. She had been told to betray the cipher for the safe and the account in Switzerland. Only now, back in Madrid, did Mária Zucker tell her friend Papp that she had been working for the Intelligence Service and on its behalf for the Gestapo; Hauchling had been sent to Spain by the Gestapo with the task speeding up the Portuguese tungsten deliveries to Zinner-Loewe. Hauchling realised that Zinner-Loewe had betrayed him, he had leaked the tungsten - the last five deliveries - to the English, so that Hauchling was not only unable to fulfil the Gestapo's order, but was also deprived of the considerable bonus that Zinner-Loewe had promised him as a share of the profits the event of the deliveries. therefore killed Zinner-Loewe, not in a sudden burst of rage, but according to plan, and in such a way that suspicion had to fall on Papp, since he knew that a living Papp at large would at least make it more difficult to obtain the joint Swiss assets of Van Doorn and the old Papp. As a result of Hauchling's torture, Mária Zucker confessed that the number combination of the account and the safe consisted of the double number group of Van Doorn's and old Papp's birth certificates. Without these two groups of numbers, the Swiss fortune remains out of reach. But she had already told Hauchling this during her first tortures in Madrid, on the day before Zinner-Loewe's murder, so Hauchling asked Papp where his father was born. Hauchling was unable to find out the exact registry numbers because Mária Zucker did not know them, but she not believed. Hence the abduction

to Torrelodones and the further torture. Hauchling did not want to kill her, however, as he assumed that as Van Doorn's sole heiress she might still be of use to him in obtaining the Swiss assets. However, due to the stupidity of a Spanish police officer, the police came close to Hauchling unintentionally, so he had to flee. He absconded with Milaja, and two days later Mária Zucker was found in the concrete cellar by a well-known toreador and his lover, the actress Juana-Dolores Men doza y Montalbán from Barcelona, who were meeting for a secret rendezvous in the torrelodonese villa of the toreador, chained to iron rings as thick as an arm embedded in the wall and with greying hair as a result of all the suffering she had endured. After that, Papp and Mária Zucker lived relatively quietly in Madrid for a few months, and in June 1945 Papp received his medical degree after passing his state exams.

Immediately afterwards, they both travelled to Holland, where it turned out that the Delft house had been completely destroyed and burnt out, and Van Doorn's birth certificate certainly also a victim of the flames. The wing of the Delft town hall in which the registry office documents were kept was also destroyed. This makes them realise that neither they nor Hauchling can get hold of the Swiss assets, and so Papp does not bother to his father's birth certificate from Veszprém. He does not return to Hungary, but instead travels back to Spain with Mária Zucker after taking care of a few official matters. There she receives an official letter from England stating that Mária Zucker will be honoured with the Victoria Cross in recognition of her services during the war and that she will also receive a modest pension in the future. Mária Zucker is also honoured by the French authorities.

She is also awarded the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour for her services during the war years. This all comes as quite a surprise to Papp, but at Mária Zucker's side he gradually gets used to such things. In March 1946, they married in San Sebastián, applied for and received French citizenship and in Petit-Bourg near Paris, where Papp opened a medical practice. They travelled to San Sebastián every year to celebrate their wedding anniversary.

In March 1962, Papp and Professor Laurentis, who was attending an international symposium on archaeology, met in this northern Spanish spa town. At this meeting, Professor Laurentis told his former school friend the following:

Thanks to his connections, Hauchling managed to get Laurentis exempted from military service at the beginning of 1943 because of his recurrent neuralgia, so that he could not be called up for forced labour service. There would hardly have been any escape from there. Laurentis a position at the Kredit- und Transferbank; he knew that he was completely at Hauchling's mercy and could be arrested and taken away at any time without his support. At the beginning of 1943, however, he did not yet suspect anything and attributed Hauchling's intervention to their childhood friendship. At this time, the Kredit- und Transferbank was already fully an organ of the Gestapo in Hungary, and Hauchling was the Gestapo's Hungarian resident for economic and banking matters. In the 1930s, the majority of Hungarian assets had transferred from their owners to Western countries, and the Germans would have liked to get their hands on these funds, Western assets such as gold. Hauchling was given the primary task of tracking down these assets and procuring or securing them for the Germans by any means necessary. However, all this was done in the greatest silence and

Laurentis himself only found out about it by chance.

One day, he entered Hauchling's room when he was not there. He had gone to the toilet for a moment. The oil painting of his father, the knight of the Order of Malta Alberto Hauchling in full regalia, hung on the wall above the desk, but it was pushed to one side and there was a secret safe that was open. Laurentis only had time to glance at the document on top. It was a copy of the interrogation protocol of a Budapest banker with the Gestapo stamp underneath. Before Hauchling returned, Laurentis was already sitting in the other corner of the room. This happened in January 1944, when Laurentis was already familiar with the bank's business, but now he was looking at everything that was going on with different eyes. He wanted to gather more information, so he pretended to know nothing. Over time, his private enquiries allowed him to see through all of Hauchling's activities. He only realised that old Márton Papp was also on Hauchling's list when Hauchling sent him his regards one day. Laurentis now tried to track down Márton Papp and found out that the old jeweller, who had been hiding in Budapest with Aryan papers, had been arrested a week earlier. Nobody knew where he was being held. Laurentis concluded that Márton Papp was a Gestapo prisoner. That was in July 1944. He confronted Hauchling, but he just laughed: "What do you think, Lauri! Should I get my hands dirty? The old man is no longer alive, unfortunately. He was picked up with false Christian papers, arrested and interrogated, unfortunately I only found out about it too late, apparently he had something wrong with his heart, he couldn't the excitement, he died of a heart attack

died. I feel sorry for him, poor chap." That's what Hauchling said to Laurentis.

At the end of January, Laurentis searched the building of the Kredit- und Transferbank with the approval and support of a Soviet major of Hungarian descent. Albert Hauchling's painting was still hanging in its place, behind it was the safe and the protocols, including that of Márton Papp's interrogation. Hauchling had personally conducted his interrogation. According to the transcripts, Hauchling had told Laurentis the truth in part, Márton Papp's heart could not the torture, he clutched his chest, and died after only being able to say that he had a bank account and a safe in Switzerland together with Van Doorn. The protocols contained information that was of interest to the Soviet authorities, which is why the material was sent to the Soviet counterintelligence archives for analysis, so that it was not even mentioned in the Hungarian court documents. Laurentis made these statements to his former school friend Miklós Papp in San Sebastián in March 1962.

Of course, all this has to be worked out meticulously and in the Faulknerian manner. Just thrown down like this, that's not how it works. Colourful and rich in variety. Papa Hauchling's life-size portrait with the Grand Cross on his chest, behind him the secret compartment in the wall. Or, for example, the hideous interrogations at the Gestapo, the torture chambers, the concrete cellar in Torrelodones, where the torero and his lover find the greying Mária Zucker chained to an iron ring. Possibly a scene at the hairdresser's in Madrid when she has her hair bleached. What images of life, what vibrancy in the material! But not now. Now he is exhausted, his nose hurts him, and unfortunately it hurts him more and more unbearably, perhaps

a generalised sepsis begins, something is wrong with his nose, he is lying helplessly in bed and will die, when someone comes in he is already dead. Etuka will cry her blue eyes out, but she'll be happy because she can have a black dress made for her, black suits her perfectly, she's always liked wearing black, those delicate black nylon stockings, and what splendid legs she has, I'll make Etuka happy, I'll make her happy even in death, be happy, Etuka, just be happy! How good I am. Will Babsi lead her astray? That would be terrible. And she won't be proud of me because I won't have time to write the novel. No! I want to live. The doorbell! Somebody come! Save me! I'm dying here, going to the dogs, alone, all alone! And the end of the novel is yet to come. But first I have to catch my breath.

Ferenc J. Szücs in time, and time in Ferenc J. Szücs. He in bed, she on the earth, the earth under the sun, the solar system in turn moving amidst a myriad of stars - the universe in infinity.

The calendar shows Sunday, 18 July 1965. For others, not for him. He cannot see it at the moment. But the fact that this is the case is in any case an objective reality independent of his consciousness, of course only if the generally recognised convention of time calculation is also recognised by us. So that's where we are. So this point in time currently prevails around him and outside of him. Inside his head, however, the calendar shows the time one year earlier when Józsa lifts his eyes from his desk and looks at the wall calendar. In other words, if we want to be precise, this Sunday a year ago is already 19 July.

Józsa is also in the office on Sunday, and the report for the deputy minister must be ready by Monday morning. The Laurentis murder case must be closed. Satisfactorily. Incidentally, the time theory of the modern novel can also be derived from this. When the novel is published, it will be a bestseller, a smash hit, with a print run of fifty thousand copies, you should calculate how much money you will earn for it, but let's leave that for now, and then you can use this tremendously captivating, exciting, thrilling crime novel to show students the boundless freedom that the authors of modern novels have in dealing with time. It simply has no limits. J. Szücs binds his soul, which wants to ascend to the great universe, to his body, just as one binds a free balloon to the cargo basket. This is not reality and not a dream, it is called that: he sublimates his instinct. Time in the novel, and the novel in time. The nothingness flies around in it as if it were the dust of something. But precisely this nothingness that flies around in it as if it were something, that is time.

Let's say: Eighteen forty-five on 28 October 1963 is a single grain of the enormous cloud of dust that is time as it exists in J. Szücs. In the living room of the little house in Petit-Bourg, where Miklós Papp and Mária Papp, née Zucker, are sitting in front of the television watching a thrilling crime thriller, because Mari Zucker is a sucker for thrilling crime thrillers, and while watching she is knitting a cardigan for her husband - at least that's how Faulkner would describe it - the telephone rings. Mari Zucker says angrily: "You answer it", Papp goes to the phone and up the receiver with the right hand.

He covers his free ear with his finger, because there is a lively shooting on the television, and loudly, because Mari Zuckerman, who is now fifty-five, is a little hard of hearing.

This is how the scene begins in time. The rest will be J. Szücs is still working out the details, detailed and precise, but for now only enough for Doctor Vriesland, the Amsterdam lawyer in charge of Van Doorn's estate, to call to say that *De Woonch*, a major illustrated newspaper there, had published a five-page report in its latest issue about the finds during construction work on the site where Van Doorn's house had once stood in Delft. Although he had been there the day before and had written to Madame Papp about what had happened, he had not realised that a clever reporter named Max Irvén had photographed everything before he arrived, the report consisted largely of his photographs, which unfortunately also included Van Doorn's birth certificate with the clearly legible registration number, the certificate was in a medium-sized steel box with others, which was damaged, but the papers had not suffered any damage, it had all been found under the ruins, the sensation for the magazine was Van Doorn's fight against German fascism before the invasion of Holland. It presented the Delft jeweller as a national hero, as the first great resistance fighter against the Germans, and then Doctor Vriesland asked whether he should initiate a press lawsuit against *De Woonch* because the magazine had disclosed unauthorised information that affected the private interests of Van Doorn's widow. A complicated legal situation.

Incidentally, the magazine also publishes a list of the assets deposited in the Swiss bank's safe in the photo-facsimile, unfortunately. These include the majority of shares in Union Ritifi du Catan-

ga. In 1936 this block of shares was as good as worthless, in the meantime a huge pitchblende deposit has been discovered on the mining territory, the international stock exchanges are quoting the lost shares of Union Ritifi du Catanga at top prices, the mining licence is valid for ninety-nine years, it cannot be withdrawn for twenty-five years even if the shares themselves no longer exist, or something like that. J. Szücs doesn't know much about stock market matters, he will probably have to get some information about this too, but essentially it will be correct, and the details are not important now.

Now let's go on. The number under which Van Doorn's birth was re- gistered has therefore been published, Hauchling can find it out at any time, and since it is well known that the organisations of international fascism still exist and are active, it can be considered certain that a hunt, albeit a cautious one, will begin for the account and the safe in Switzerland. But this will also require the registration number of Márton Papp's birth certificate. In the meantime it becomes known that in 1965, the twentieth year after the end of the war, the secret deposits of the Swiss banks are to be opened. But that is still a long away. A lengthy correspondence begins in order to clarify how the birth certificate could be obtained in accordance with Hungarian law. Unfortunately, this drags on, bureaucracy keeps getting in the way of a smooth settlement, Papp does not want to travel to Hungary, but when Tschombé cancels the valid mining concessions in Katanga in May 1964, he has no choice but to get the birth certificate of the deceased Márton Papp from Hungary. Papp did not want to pay inheritance tax to the Hungarian state on the assets in Switzerland. The

However, the question of whether and what financial obligations await him has not yet been clarified. It has not been clarified for J. Szücs either; he does not know much about legal issues and will have to enquire about this as well. It is not easy for a realistic novelist. After all, the novel has to be authentic and accurate. That's incredibly difficult. Well, never mind. That's the lesser concern. The bigger one is the artistic task. He has to master that. So that he doesn't end up with some meagre kitsch. To make the situation even more exciting, he adds an illness to the mix. Papp falls ill and there are only a few days left until the mining concessions expire, when he finally sets off on his journey. Almost at the same time, Alfréd Hauchling, alias Doctor Hans Stefan Huber, a Swiss lawyer, sets off to obtain the registration number in Veszprém, risking his life in the process. What a thrill! Hours decide whether a huge fortune will go to the murderer Hauchling or the heir Papp. And whether the Hungarian state can collect the inheritance tax or not. It's about money, a lot of money. The more money is at stake, the greater the tension.

This is where Józsa's logic comes into play again in the Laurentis murder case. In the novel, of course. At this point, Józsa understands the problem. Hauchling could not know what they know about him and his machinations during the war, including his relations with the Gestapo in Hungary. He exposes himself to mortal danger by trying to get old Papp's birth certificate from Hungary. He does not decide to do this with a light heart. But when the Union Ritifi du Catanga's concession is confiscated, the most valuable part of the fortune is gone. It is likely to be worth several tonnes.

million dollars. It's worth risking your life for that.

He is unlucky. On the very first evening, 15 July, he bumps into Laurentis by chance in the vicinity of the Hotel Gellért. Laurentis recognised him and greeted him. Hauchling replies in German, smiling as he tells him that there must a mix-up, that he is not who Laurentis thinks he is, but the Swiss lawyer Dr Hans Stefan Huber. As great as the resemblance may be, Laurentis must be mistaken. He says goodbye with a smile, then follows the bus in which Laurentis is travelling home in his dark grey Mercedes. He is determined to shoot him. Of course, this is not certain, Józsa only assumes it, but the assumption seems logical. For some reason, however, Hauchling is unable to carry out his plan. Perhaps there are too many people on the street, or he loses sight of Laurentis. There's no way of knowing for sure. But Laurentis - this is also a hypothesis, but a very real one - picks up the school newspaper at home and looks at Hauchling's photo in it. That is, he would look at it if it were in there. But it's not there. The foreigner, whom he thought was Hauchling, has claimed so emphatically that he is someone else and not Hauchling that he almost doubts it. Anyway, the next day he tells Zsu that he met someone he thought was his former classmate. He racks his brains, he doesn't know what to do. In the meantime, Hauchling is just waiting for an opportunity to get Laurentis, who could be extremely dangerous to him, out of the way. The dark grey Mercedes is hot on the professional's heels. On the evening of 16 July, it is still parked near Laurentis' flat when the professor steps out of the house to go to the post office.

go. He can't do anything on the busy Thökölystrasse, but time is pressing. Perhaps Laurentis has already informed the police; he must not allow the professor to return to the busy Thökölystrasse. Fortune favours him, Laurentis leaves the post office and walks along the less busy and darker side of the stadium. He follows him in the car, drives close to him, stops briefly, rests the Belgian Browning with the silencer on the frame of the lowered window pane, aims and pulls the trigger, Laurentis falls to the ground. Hauchling drives on.

What thoughts might Hauchling have had? What would I do in such a situation?

J. Szücs asks Józsa, who is absorbed in his thoughts. Go to Veszprém? That very night? Or spend the night at the Hotel Gellért and leave in the morning? The latter, of course. The question is this: if Laurentis has already reported his suspicions to the police, then he will be arrested in Veszprém just as he was in Budapest. If not, then he will be able to spend the night in the hotel unmolested. There is a third possibility: after the murder, Hauchling panics, gives up old Papp's birth certificate and sees to it that he gets across the border as quickly as possible. He can be abroad within two hours, perhaps even before the crime is discovered. But if he leaves Hungary, the fortune is gone. And Hauchling, as events show, is not the type to panic so easily. Besides, the stakes are so high that he simply has to take a risk. Apparently the police haven't looked for him in the hotel yet. Presumably he decides to go to the Veszprém registry office shortly before end of office hours on the following day, Friday 17 July, to get an extract from the birth register.

len. It is due to the bureaucratic pedantry and incorruptible character of Mária Ikkán that Hauchling does not immediately receive the desired copy, which Papp already has in his pocket. Unfortunately, we don't know whether Hauchling got to see the registration number; Mrs Ikkán will also tell Bodoki that she didn't even open the thick register in the presence of the man, but this will again be just a lazy detail in the novel; in short, Hauchling was unable to obtain the registration number, and Papp will probably have to pay an inheritance tax to the Hungarian state, although the international lawyers will be at loggerheads about this for a long time to come.

But Hauchling cannot risk more. If Laurentis had not reported him before he died, he must have mentioned their meeting on 16 July to someone, so he could not wait any longer, it really was a matter of life and death now, he had to make a run for it. From Veszprém he takes the shortest route to the border and shortly after eight o'clock in the evening he reaches Austrian territory, breathing a sigh of relief. He is now out of the woods.

Are there still threads that are not connected?

J. Szücs thinks everything through in great detail. It's very exhausting for him because he's dog-tired. His brain in particular is dog-tired. I shouldn't be working so hard, sick as I am, he thinks. But the duty. The writer's sense of duty and responsibility. That comes first. Come on, mate, come and have a look around. You work in this world, and compassion works in you. In J. Szücs, compassion works with itself. So that's how you feel when a novel is finished. Almost finished. Now it just has to be written down. If I've forgotten something, I'll write it down, it's not so important now. The only important thing now is that

the novel is finished. Now I could even sleep if I wanted to.

Somehow it still lacks a proper ending, in most crime novels it is a love scene, the detective and the beautiful, brown-haired girl, a Doris or Maud, who has escaped mortal danger, lie in each other's arms, a few nice, kitschy-banal sentences. J. Szücs does it differently, of course, because he has originality, and this novel can't possibly end with Józsa visiting Mrs Tamacskó on Monday afternoon, a decent police officer doesn't do that. At least not in front of the general public of crime fiction readers. No, J. Szücs has to be much more discreet. He can't expose Józsa in front of his superiors! And in front of Mórika! It would be a spectacle if he ended the novel like that. That's out of the question. The novel wouldn't even be printed that way. No. Józsa simply says goodbye to Papp, two or three sentences are enough, from which the ideal statement can perhaps also be inferred. It doesn't matter if its a little penetrating. The publishers love that. Publishers don't have a particularly high opinion of their readers' intellectual abilities. Neither, incidentally, does J. Szücs. Readers like it when everything chewed up and put in their mouths. But that's what

J. Szücs shouldn't worry about it now. He does that sort of thing with his left hand. Speaking of the left hand. I'm out of lemon juice. Should I take the sleeping pill? Should I ring the bell?

He has the feeling that he has slept a little in between, he just doesn't know when. Did he dream too? He can't remember that. Was the nurse in the room in the meantime? He doesn't know. Did I really sleep? I'm so tired now.

Then the door opens, two men and two sick

Nurses enter, he cannot tell from the men's words whether they are doctors or carers. They push in a frame on rubber wheels, then tell him that his bandages will be removed. They straight to work. J. Szücs decides that he will prove himself worthy of his heroes and endure the torture without a word of complaint. Just like Mari Zucker in the concrete cellar of Torrelodones.

The two men work quickly and safely. The two nurses hold him, each on one side. It doesn't hurt. Nothing hurts at all. This surprises him, but just in case, he holds his breath and clenches his teeth so that he can survive the agony manfully and wordlessly if it does hurt. It's a funny feeling, the way they're tampering with his head. And suddenly he cries out.

"Oooo!"

The bandage was removed from his nose. And now he can see again. As if through a fog, because he doesn't have his glasses on, but he can still see everything. The sudden brightness blinds him, the sun is shining outside. And at that moment, Doctor Elek Röppentyüs enters the room with his court.

"Well, how are we doing?"

A faint whimper.

"So that's the broken nose, is it?"

The senior physician palpates the nasal region with delicate, soft fingers and gently plucks at the skin here and there. J. Szücs whimpers and moans.

"Is it very bad, Doctor?"

"Michelangelo's David has a prettier nose, that's for sure. But don't worry, it will be fixed. The curvature of the nasal septum will also be repaired at the same time." Then he raises his voice encouragingly, almost shouting: "They'll make a new person out of you."

"Do you think that's still , Doctor?"

The senior physician is standing to the left of J. Szücs, he doesn't answer, he just smiles down at him and pats him encouragingly on his healthy left shoulder.

"The patient will be operated on tomorrow," he said to his assistants. "Don't worry, they'll make a handsome chap out of you. And it won't hurt either. Goodbye."

They stride out. Like a king and his entourage. Only a few vassals and courtiers remain behind, they put a new bandage on J. Szücs, again he sees nothing, he lies down again, the nurse gives him breakfast, but he tastes nothing, feels nothing, hears nothing, sees nothing. He is only afraid. Tremendous fear. He automatically obeys the nurse, swallows the sedative tablet, lies on his back, sniffles and groans, but he can't hear it himself. He has nothing but fear. The car, on the floor of which he lies bound and gagged, races along so fast that it almost stretches as it drives, becomes thinner and thinner in the middle and, as you sometimes see in popular science films when cells divide, in two, now two cars are racing. J. Szücs is sitting in the second one, in the passenger seat, next to Józsa, Józsa changes gear, accelerates, now he won't get away from us! "My bloodthirsty little monster, you," whispers Mrs Tamacskó in his ear from behind with hot breath, he turns round, the mother-of-pearl handle of the Hasz-Lacher finel dagger sticks out between Etuka's round breasts, she is sitting in the back seat, her mouth is open, Etuka, do you love me? Do you love me, Etuka? Józsa steps on the gas even more, the other car darts through the night in front of them, then a crack, they have run over Laurentis, now a thump, it's the silencer of the Belgian Browning, "he hit me, the dog, on the right shoulder," Józsa at the steering wheel, the dark grey Mercedes

slows down and rolls out in front of a white house with pillars in front of it, someone jumps out of the car, but there they stop, J. Szücs jumps out, runs the man, but he doesn't want to flee at all, he stands calmly by one of the pillars, he is dressed in white, has a neatly trimmed grey moustache and a light-coloured straw hat in his hand. J. Szücs stops and looks at him, it's not him, the man motions for him to come closer.

"Who are you?" asks J. Szücs.

But the man doesn't answer, he waves, closer, even closer, J. Szücs hesitantly climbs two steps, now he stands close to the man, who suddenly raises his right hand, in his left he holds the straw hat, and his right hand claps J. Szücs' face, twice, right and left.

"Aaaaah!" cries J. Szücs, raising his hands to his cheeks protectively, then, almost blubbing, he asks the man: "Who are you?"

"I'm William Faulkner," says the man.

But J. Szücs knows that he got the slaps from his father.

May - July 1965

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