

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

TADEJ GOLOB
GOLD TOOTH

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Tadej Golob: Gold Tooth

It kept on raining. It was no longer just a passing thunderstorm and Tomaž looked out with concern. The thunder and lightning had diminished but not altogether disappeared, while the deluge had become a steady downpour. *What if it lasts? What if the weather has taken a turn for the worse?* Peter went to the rucksack and took out a head torch. Tomaž did the same. They lit up the interior of the cave. It was much bigger than you would expect from the small rock window that protruded from the rock face and their modest torches could not fully light it. Tomaž and Peter scanned it from left to right, from top to bottom. The floor was covered with rocks both large and small. The light did not even reach the far end, but became lost in the darkness. But as far as they could see there was nothing, just rock and stone. No sign of gold, no body.

Chapter 26

Peter moved towards the unlit part, Tomaž and Franko followed. Cautiously, stumbling over the rubble and unstable rocks on the floor, they felt their way to the back of the cave after twenty metres. The roof and floor sloped towards each other, and just where you would expect the end, a wall of stone, it ran into a tunnel that led forward into the darkness. They stopped.

"Brrr," said Franko, "do we have to go forward?"

"You can get out this way," said Tomaž.

"I can? What about you two?"

"We're going out across the face. I'm not going to let a route like this get away when it's almost climbed already. If we have to wait two days for the weather to right itself, then so be it."

Franko gave it some thought.

"I can't get out this way."

"Why not?"

"If I could then my grandpa would already have the gold and Mlekuž would still be alive."

Tomaž scratched his head. He was right, he had completely forgotten about that, Sherlock Holmes. If there was a way out the nuggets of gold at the entrance wouldn't be there. Mlekuž would have taken them and if not him then someone else who had come up after him.

Peter entered the tunnel, Tomaž followed and Franko, although hesitantly. It did not lead outside, there was no sign of light. It ended in the next chamber, a little smaller than the first and in even more disorder. The floor was not level but sloped up towards the roof of the cave and joined it.

“It was here,” said Peter. “Here is where the earthquake blocked the cave.”

He climbed to the top of the rockfall and shone a light among the rocks. The passage, if there had ever been one, and it seemed that there had been, was now closed. He half turned, thought for a moment, turned back round and sniffed the rock.

“As if the air is getting in from somewhere, I can feel a draught,” he said. Again he sniffed the air where two rock faces met and raised his head. “But I can’t see anything.” He looked towards them and shuddered.

“And there’s Mlekuž,” he pointed and lit up the bottom of the pile of rocks behind them, where something lay that at first sight looked like a heap of rubbish. Franko cried out. Tomaž also shone his light there and nodded.

“It’s him, yeah.”

They went over and Franko, who had no torch, had to follow them, protesting all the way. They paid no attention. That pathetic little heap was what was left of a human being. He lay on his back with a monstrous, mummified face, looking at the darkness with empty eye sockets. His clothes had survived, although they looked so brittle that they dared not touch them. Franko, standing behind the other two, would not dream of touching them anyway. The remains were fragile, as if the stillness in this hole was all that was keeping them together.

“Poor sod,” said Peter.

He was wearing greyish trousers, in fact his whole outfit was greyish, he had an ordinary rope round his waist, and above what could have been a kind of jacket with a pullover underneath. But perhaps not, as it all blended into one grey mass.

“What are we going to do with him?” asked Peter.

“Nothing,” said Franko, “nothing. We leave him, get our things and go.”

“We have to bury him,” said Tomaž. “We can’t just leave him like this.”

Peter nodded. He looked around and gently, as if afraid to harm him, placed the first stone beside the motionless remains of the former miner. Tomaž helped and even Franko, who for some time had had no idea what to do, grabbed at the stones and began to pass them over. They worked in silence until Mlekuž had vanished beneath a mound of rocks. When they had finished, Tomaž went for a hammer, found a slightly larger flat stone and on it scratched Mlekuž and a cross.

“He was probably religious,” he said, “at that time they all were.” And he laid the rock next to the heap beneath which the head lay. For some time they sat in silence.

“Poor sod,” said Franko eventually, “poor bastard.”

Tomaž nodded. His death couldn't have been a pleasant one, judging by the horrendous expression on his face that had carved itself into his memory. Although, what death is pleasant, and that expression, that torment, might just have been the result of time. No corpse would be laughing after all these years.

They felt better after what they had done. Or at least, that is how it seemed to Tomaž, that they had done what was necessary, even though it had no point.

“He didn't have any kids or...”

Franko shook his head.

“That's what we heard. No relatives. Nobody.”

“What about his house?”

“There was something left. The walls, with a twenty metre pine tree in the middle. I'll show you when we get down. If we do...”

He looked towards the tunnel that led into the other chamber, from where there came the steady sound of a curtain of water.

“*Od Loga ga gledaš ...*” said Peter.

No one replied.

“*... ga vidiš, ga ni ... you see it, you don't...*”

“What?” said Franko, grimacing.

“*... piselo si dobi, ...*

tam ono leži... that's where it lies...”

“My grandpa and his stupid rhyme.”

“Do you think it's stupid?”

“Isn't it?”

“It's quite possible that it is,” said Peter, “the man was a miner, not a poet. I think your grandpa, when he hid the gold with Mlekuž, used it to mark the place. If by any chance... God knows. Maybe just because, or so that he wouldn't forget where it was if he did not come for it for a long time. Or even so that you could find your way to the treasure if anything happened to him. But it's not senseless, he didn't come up with it just to amuse people in the local bar. It's very likely

somewhere inside this cave, and there is something pointing to it. The only thing I don't understand is how you could see from Log here inside and I don't know what *piselo* is. If I knew that..."

"*Pisello*, if that is an Italian word, with a double l, means pea," said Tomaž.

"Pea?"

"Yeah."

"Pea? Why pea?"

"I don't know. That's what the dictionary says."

"What about *si dobi*? What does *pisello si dobi* mean?"

"*Si dobi* means find or get," said Franko.

"Ah ha," muttered Peter. "Pea?" He scratched his head and repeated, half to himself: "Pea, pea, find the pea? Well, I'm none the wiser. We can sit here and puzzle it out, or we can simply turn the cave upside down and look for the gold or for something that reminds us of a pea."

They raised their heads, faintly illuminating the darkness in the tallest of the sequence of Bricelj's caves.

Chapter 27

"Let's start in here," said Peter.

They placed their feet carefully so as not to trip and fall on the uneven and disordered floor around Mlekuž's grave.

"We go forward from here," he said in front of the smooth stone wall that embraced the fallen rocks from the right.

"What if it's underneath all that?" said Tomaž, thinking aloud, kicking the heap of stones.

"The gold?"

"Yeah, how do we know they didn't put it somewhere here and then the earthquake buried it?"

"Let's say they didn't," replied Peter. "Because if they did we'll never see it. There's no way to dig this without heavy machinery."

"Okay," said Tomaž, "let's get down to it." And he recited the poem again.

They turned over every stone, every rock they could lift, felt the wall, looking for any sign, writing, anything that would remind them of a pea, or that might have reminded Mlekuž and grandpa of a pea. They found nothing. They were working round Mlekuž's stone burial mound when Tomaž stopped to think.

"What?" asked Peter.

"I was wondering... What if the gold is..."

"Where? Say it."

"Underneath him."

He pointed at the grave.

"You think he was lying on it?"

"I don't know."

"I'm not digging him up!" protested Franko.

"Neither will we," replied Peter. "Forty-four kilos is quite a lot, it's not just a pinch of something, it should be easy to spot. He should've been lying on some kind of heap, but he wasn't, as far as I remember."

Tomaž stood at the entrance to the tunnel, scratching his head. "It doesn't make sense: *you can see it from Log...* The gold must be in the first cave. But, how can you see it from there? Right at the entrance definitely not, we'd have seen it."

"Apart from that lump," Peter reminded them.

"Yes, except that beacon. Maybe he was thinking of that? Let's go through it again. If it's not here it must be back there, there's nowhere else for it to be."

They went back, looking on the way at the connecting tunnel. Nothing. They carefully combed the Gold Tooth, even more carefully than the cave in which Mlekuž rested. Nothing.

"It must be," said Peter, "let's look again."

They went down on their knees and like archaeologists closely examined every bit of material that could be picked up or moved, they felt every inch of the walls, but with the same lack of success.

"What about the roof?" thought Peter out loud. "If it was on the roof of the cave maybe it could be seen from Log. Well, maybe."

They used their torches to carefully scan the roof.

"It's not here," said Tomaž with a sigh, "it's simply not here."

“It must be,” Peter insisted, “It must be. Until now everything has fitted. The lump of gold at the entrance to the cave, Mlekuž, the tunnel ... If all that is here – and it definitely is – then the gold must be here as well. It’s because of the gold that everything else is here, isn’t it?”

“Not necessarily. Maybe Mlekuž chucked it in the gorge when he saw he was fucked.”

“Then he’d have chucked the lump of gold at the entrance, too, but it’s still there. It seems odd to me that he died in the cave.”

“Where should he have?” asked Franko.

“If I were in his shoes I’d rather be out there. At least, I’d try.”

“*You can see it from Log, you see it, you don’t...*” Tomaž began.

“And?” said Peter

“The answer is right there in the rhyme. We’re not going to get anywhere moving stones around.”

“Are you certain that *pisello* means pea?”

“That’s what the dictionary says.”

“Pea? It makes no sense. A pea is round, but if you think of the kind of pellets he had in mind you don’t think of peas. Maybe he meant peas in a pod or a tin or...”

“It has some other meanings,” muttered Tomaž uncertainly. “I think it also means something like fool...”

“Fool?”

“Well, that’s even less help than pea. Franko, have you any idea at all what your grandpa would want with *pisello*?”

“I haven’t got a clue,” replied Franko, “I’ve never even heard the word, except in grandpa’s rhyme.”

“Let’s forget peas for now...” Tomaž went to the window. It was still raining outside. “First of all we need to work out what is meant by *You can see it from Log*. How can you see it from Log?”

Franko went to the edge of the cave. The mist grazed beneath them, concealing the village. “If it wasn’t misty you’d see it from here... Log, and our house.”

“What did you say?”

“What? When?”

“Just then, something about Log.”

“That you’d be able to see it from here if it wasn’t raining.”

“Yes, that,” said Tomaž with urgency. “What if *You can see it from Log* doesn’t mean that you must look up here from down there, from the village, but from where the village can be seen? From the entrance to this hole? That you can see it from where you can also see Log, in other words from the entrance to the cave? From where you’re standing now. Would that be possible Franko? You know your grandpa and his way of talking, eh?”

“How would I know.”

Peter went over to Tomaž and they joined Franko where he was standing.

“What can you see from here?”

They turned towards the interior of the cave. The faint light of the rainy day outside barely reached to the nearest part of the rear wall. The visibility was so poor that they were not actually sure whether they were looking at the wall or just at darkness. If it had not been for the one prominent thing, a stalagmite that reached about a third of the way up the wall, then they really would have thought they were looking at darkness.

“So what now? All I can see is that stalagmite. And that...” he fell silent as he contemplated it for a moment, “reminds me more of a dog, if anything, than a pea.”

If you look more closely, thought Tomaž, yes, maybe... A dog, a small one, barking at the floor. Lit by the fleeting light of the head torch it seemed to be wagging its tail.

“Maybe the light isn’t strong enough,” he thought. “Maybe what we are supposed to see is visible only on sunny days.”

“*Loli*,” said Franko.

They did not reply.

“*Loli*,” he repeated.

“What are you on about?” asked Peter.

“*Loli* means something like your *pisello*.”

“Pea?”

“Who would call their dog pea?”

“What dog?”

“*Loli* is a bit like blockhead.”

“And?” said Tomaž. “Who would call their dog blockhead?”

“Not blockhead, *loli*. My grandpa. As far as I know he called every one of his dogs *Loli*.”

They looked at him, at each other, then rushed over to the barking stalagmite. From close up, illuminated by the light from two head torches, it no longer looked like a dog. From close up it was a normal kind of dripstone, which in the form of small veins appeared from out of the wall and on the floor flowered into some kind of inverted pot or cauldron. Peter returned to the rock window.

“A dog, from here it really is a dog.”

“So? From here it looks like... Like nothing in particular and there’s nothing here,” said Tomaž.

“It has to be!”

Peter bent over and felt the rock. The dripstone originated about a metre above the ground, where the dripping water had its source. From nothing, like a tiny vein, a little dog’s tail, it ran down towards the floor, became thicker and about half way down inflated and in a bell shape grew into the living rock. At the base it was about seventy centimetres wide, in contact with the floor across its whole width. Peter closely examined its contact with the rock, cleaning away the dust to see if there was any possibility, but there was nothing to see. There were no openings that anyone could push something into. The water calmly crawled across it, across this mushroom, this stone cauliflower, fused with the rest of the rock.

“Nothing,” said Tomaž. “Everything fits, but there’s still nothing. Maybe he did fling it into the gorge.”

Peter shook his head. “No, it has to be here somewhere.”

“But where?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know, I just know... I’m convinced it’s here somewhere.”

Franko knocked on the stalagmite. “*Pisello, loli*, I’m so pissed off with it all! Couldn’t he just simply tell where the bastard gold was, I mean me, his grandson. It’s there where in any case you won’t be able to get to it.”

Tomaž sat down next to the stalagmite. “We’ve got one bit,” he said. “Take it down and show it to grandpa. Maybe he’ll then tell you where the rest is. We can still get to it from above, somehow lower ourselves down on ropes, now that we know exactly where it is. When grandpa shows up, of course.”

“Yes,” agreed Franko, “when he shows up.”

Tomaž was still knocking on the tube-like formation growing from the roof. It gave a nice sound.

“I must admit I’m intrigued by it all.”

“Grandpa’s gone,” said Franko. “And I’ve already asked him, when he was still around, and all that I found out was the rhyme about the *pisello*. He kept repeating it like a madman. *You can see it from Log...* etcetera, etcetera.”

They sat on the ground and were silent for a moment.

“How quickly do these things grow?”

“Dripstones?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ve no idea,” said Tomaž. “It probably depends on the volume of water and god knows what else. But in any case, not fast enough to grow over the gold in that amount of time, sixty years, or whatever it is, if that’s what you’re wondering.”

“No that’s not it. Not grown...” He leaned over the depression on the stalagmite and lit it. Then he stroked its smooth surface, touched something, got his eyes up close to the formation on the ground, ran his fingers over it again... Then knocked on it. “Not grown, no,” he repeated, getting up and going over to his rucksack, where he had left his equipment and climbing harness, and took out a hammer. “But maybe closed up.” He went back to the

Stalagmite and pointed to the edge, to a bulge that went across the whole surface and disappeared into the ground. “Look at that. Doesn’t it remind you of a suture or something similar? As if someone split it open some time ago and it has then healed over. Recalcified, or whatever you’d call it.”

“Surely you’re not going to...” began Tomaž.

“Who’s to know?” And he struck the poor rock as hard as he could, before Tomaž could stop him. It broke. Again and a large part of the inverted pot broke off. He removed it and looked into the crack. Nothing, rock like any other rock, a new layer of limestone. He struck once more, but this time the hammer broke through the fragile interior of the cover and found hollow space. He put his hand inside, yelling excitedly, then gave the remains of the stalagmite two more violent blows so that it flew apart as if out of pasteboard. They leapt onto the remains, scattering rocks.

Peter rummaged around in the whole, trying to grab as much as possible.

“Oh come on!” shouted Tomaž. “Come on, let’s see what’s inside.”

And when he grabbed inside, pulled out his hand and opened it there shone, even in the weak torchlight, something yellow.

“We’re rich!” howled Franko. “Goodbye minibus, goodbye ski lift!”

Tomaž slapped him on the back and grinned along with him.

“You’ll save a bit for your friends, won’t you?”

“Goodbye chamois! Where there’s no envy, there’s enough for everyone,” yelled Franko. “We’re all going to be rich. Me. You. Pete, my grandpa when he wanders back home, mum, dad, grandpa’s dog... Loli the seventh, or whatever he is.”

Peter cast aside some more stones and drew out more gold. Franko stamped his feet in delight as he brought out more and more yellow nuggets.

“*Ole, ole ...*” yelled Franko. “*We are the champions...*”

Tomaž was suddenly calm and stared into the darkness. “Look,” he said to the other two, who were hugging beside the broken stalagmite and screaming with delight.

“*Ole, ole ...*”

He got up and tapped them on the shoulder...

“What’s up?” they shouted. “What do you want? *We are the champions of the world...*”

“Look!”

He prodded them hard and pointed behind their backs.

They turned their heads. On the other side of the cave, in the tunnel, three lights could be seen, at first floating in the dark, but then slowly moving towards them.

Chapter 28

They trembled between the floor and the roof like three turgid fireflies. Tomaž looked at Peter, who was wide-eyed. He turned to Franko, who was staring, ashen-faced.

The lights were stronger than their torches and when they were near enough to make out the shapes of the figures behind them it was clear they were not at head height. Hand-held torches. They were silent until they were two metres away.

“Hi, lads, what are you doing here?”

Tomaž recognised the voice, although he had only heard it once before. *Or was it twice?*

“Hi, Franko,” said one of them.

Franko shuffled awkwardly, staring at the ground.

“Well, well,” came from the middle light. “What have we here?”

It came closer, so that the face above it could be made out: sharp features and a bald patch surrounded by greying hair that had once been black. He shone his torch at the heap of gold at Peter’s feet.

Peter stepped in front of it and the bald guy stopped.

“What’s wrong, lad? You think that...”

“What do you want?” said Peter, gripping the hammer tightly in his hand.

“What?” He seemed genuinely surprised. “What did you say?”

“I asked you what you wanted?!”

“Listen to him...” replied the bald guy with a laugh.

“What do you want from us?” said Tomaž. He wanted to sound calm and in control but it came out kind of confused and almost tearful.

“What do you think?” came the reply. “Out of the way, kid, so that we can take what’s ours, and then we can talk about leaving you here, in this hole, without beating the shit out of you as well.”

“Tomaž, Pero ...” Franko’s voice was trembling. “Let them have it. There’s no point.”

“Let you have it, you mean, don’t you?” replied Peter.

“No, you don’t understand...”

“Why don’t you just shut up?”

“What’s up, Franko,” asked the bald guy, “have you forgotten us?”

Franko said nothing.

Another light appeared next to the bald guy. Peter turned towards it and shone his head torch there. The light reflected off bleached hair.

“We meet again, eh?” he said in his piercing, squeaky voice. He came a step closer, scratching his nose.

“Remember me, arsehole?”

He raised the torch and shone it into Peter’s eyes.

“Cos I haven’t forgotten you, you know?”

He covered his eyes and took half a step back.

The blow came out of the dark straight into Peter’s face. He fell to the ground. His head torch flew off and tumbled among the rocks. Tomaž flew at the attacker, instinctively, like you wave away a mosquito that is bothering you, and gave him a shove, but not enough to shift him. Like banging into a wall. Peroxide merely swayed and took another swing, this time at Tomaž, hitting his head. From the side, not too powerfully or accurately. It didn’t hurt, which for a moment seemed strange. It should have done, but instead he just looked surprised and the blood rushed to his face. He grabbed the other guy’s throat, they fell and rolled around on the rocks. His hands

tried to get a grip on that thick neck, with its bull-like muscles and he squeezed and rolled with him in the dust and across rocks. He could no longer hear anything, no sound, as if the blow had driven it away. One moment, when he was on top, he thought, that maybe he could... but the mass beneath him reared up, twisted... Peroxide grabbed his arms, got on top of him, pressing him to the ground... From behind the second light a stone flew and shattered on the ground beside his head. There were sparks and the fragments of stone went in his eye. He desperately tried to free himself, a shadow appeared beside him and attacked, the second light from behind which the stone had flown fell on the rocks, but he was pushed downwards even more by the animal on top of him. It was not bothered by anything. As if they were alone in the cave. He wriggled with ever diminishing enthusiasm, expecting a blow, waiting for it to fall, on his head, in his face, but no... He felt a hand release his and go between his legs and squeeze... He screamed in pain and surprise... more squeezing... He tried to tear himself away, made a grab at the brush of hair, scratching at the head above him, his hearing returned with the pain and he could make out scuffling in the cave and the panting of the peroxide head just above his, but the hand did not loosen its grip but squeezed even more, crushing, breaking, his nails ripped some skin off the guy's head but it made no difference, the hand continued its butchery between his legs until he could no longer take it and he vomited bile from an empty stomach, retched some more and tried to get away, begging, squealing...

"No, no, no..." he gasped and stopped, stopped struggling, let go of everything and pleaded in his head that it would help, that it would stop, that it would be the end.

"What is it, girlie," he heard in the dark, "what is it, little girl?"

The pressure slowly eased, the hand rested between his legs... The face approached his.

"Are you going to be a good little..."

Something flew into Peroxide, someone knocked him off. He rolled on his side and curled into a ball with his hands below his stomach. He heard scuffling behind him. He couldn't help, he couldn't stand, he couldn't even look in that direction, nothing.

"Little fuck..."

And then there was an explosion and a flash, even through his closed eyes. He heard the bullet hit the wall, ricochet twice off the rocks and whistle out. The air was full of acrid smoke.

Behind him someone got to their feet and jumped. He didn't know who. From where he lay he could see two pairs of legs and when he bent his head he could see above them, to chest level. They were close and one of them was holding a pistol whose barrel glinted in the half-light, still smoking. A third figure was lying like him on the ground, motionless.

"Retard," he heard Peter behind him, the legs next to the one with the gun began to move, stepped over him and vanished. He heard blows, gasps, another body landed beside him, behind his back, and the person above him was beating or kicking it, at least that's what it sounded like,

because he couldn't see from the ground, with his head at his knees. Franko was crying and saying leave him alone, and then another voice said enough and the kicking stopped.

"You'll kill him," it said.

The other laughed.

"If you haven't already."

"Come on, he's tough, this one."

He laughed once more.

Then the voices retreated a step and began whispering.

The tears kept pouring from his closed eyes. It hurt, hurt, hurt...

"He took quite a blow," he heard. "Is he breathing?"

"Yeah."

"Did he get it in the head?"

"Yeah, in the head."

"Right in the head."

Someone leant over him and tried to drag him away.

He wanted to say *leave me alone* but it came out as something incomprehensible. He struggled to his knees. It hurt so much, so much that he couldn't open his eyes. He wanted to throw up but he was scared his testicles would come apart if he even opened his mouth. He crawled away from the voices and after about a metre banged into a rock over which water flowed. He rested his forehead on it and let the water run into his hair and down his neck. It ran beneath his t-shirt, down his back. He trembled and opened his eyes. He stayed leaning against the wall for a while and then shifted from his knees to his arse, and sat with his head between his knees.

Franko was bending over Peter, who was crouching, trying to stop the flow of blood from his nose and mouth. Peter pushed his hand away. Peroxide and the other, Italian-looking guy were busy with the gold. Blondie was taking it from the hole, while the Italian shone the light and kept hold of the pistol. The third one had gone... In fact, he was lying on the ground behind them like a stone. They were no longer paying him any attention.

Tomaž tried to get up, but couldn't at first. He got into a crouching position. When his head stopped spinning he got to his feet and waited by the wall to see what would happen. He leant against the rock behind him, waiting for the floor and roof to change places again and his gorge to rise once more.

Peter got to his feet and came over to him. His face was bloody, his nose streaming. He asked something.

Tomaž shook his head. If he spoke it would kill him, his own voice would finish him off.

Peroxide and the Italian had removed all the gold from the hole. They felt around inside a few more times, shining the light in from every angle, and then the blond spat into the hole and said "You've been good". The Italian picked up their rucksacks, shook out all the equipment, clothes and food, and began to cram the stolen gold into them. *They don't even have their own*, thought Tomaž. They stuffed it all in, the heap barely fitting into the two small rucksacks. Then the Italian leant over the figure on the ground and turned him onto his back. They knelt and looked at the wound on his head.

"He's still breathing," he said.

"He took quite a blow"

"What are we going to do with him?" asked the Italian. "We can't carry him down."

"I'm certainly not." He got up. "Fuck him."

"Do you think they will?"

"They're not going anywhere."

"You mean..."

They moved to one side, about four metres towards the cave entrance. Watching them closely, Peter carefully bent over and picked up a stone. Tomaž watched him numbly. He could see he was straining to hear. He also, without even trying or wanting to, could hear snippets of the conversation and see their silhouettes against the fading daylight coming from outside. Peroxide took the pistol from the Italian's hand. He spoke, the Italian listened.

"Just a little... five minutes..."

The Italian said something but he couldn't hear what.

"...five minutes..."

He said something else in reply and reached for his hand. Peroxide froze as if electrified.

"...get your hands off the gun..."

The taller shadow removed his hand.

"...five minutes, I said, and then we're off...such an opportunity..."

Laughter.

"...shine the light..."

“...look away...”

Peroxide grinned, stroked the gun and moved towards them. The Italian remained at the exit from the cave. Franko shuddered, Tomaž too. He was already at the figure lying on the floor, stopping across with the gun in front of him...

Just a dream, all this must be just a bad dream... Peroxide came closer. Blink and everything will be okay...

“Boys,” he said, “girlie, now you’ve got to be good...”

... he’ll stop talking and disappear...because this is a nightmare, it can’t be happening...it’ll vanish...

“Come this way a bit, girl...”

Peter and Franko stood to one side, even more to one side, it seemed to him, than before. They looked towards him and Peroxide almost with relief, almost as if they were not involved.

“Come here!” he ordered him.

He shut his eyes.

“Come here, if you know what’s good for you!”

He took his arm.

“Girlie...”

He opened his eyes and caught a glimpse of Peter, waving his arms, crossing them and swaying in a strange way, trying to get his balance. At almost the same moment Peroxide jerked the gun towards him, but he also seemed to be drunk, let go of it and staggered away. In the bowels of the mountain there was a rumbling, furtive, sly, ever louder and stronger and very near, as if a massive machine was trying to drill through Bricelj, the cave shook, his feet slipped from beneath him, Franko fell beside him, Peroxide was flung to the floor. Peter vanished. From the roof of the cave large clumps of rock fell, the floor twisted and cracked, in one place the roof of the cave gave way and thundered towards the floor, the wall behind him burst, from nowhere appeared a fissure that in the light of the trembling torches spread across the floor of the cave, reached the rucksacks full of gold beside the stalagmite, swerved past as if it was alive, like some great snake and, in the middle of the worst rumbling, as Tomaž tried to cover his head as best as possible and to get out of the way of the falling rocks, in the midst of all this confusion and thunder, laughter could be heard, an inhuman laugh from the fissure that was growing in front of them. And he would have sworn that there emerged from it a shadow, the outline of the man who had laid so long on the floor of this cave, that stopped for a moment, laughed even more loudly and then rushed through the collapsing tunnel into the next cave and from there outside, leaving behind him the booming and rolling rocks.

He rubbed his eyes, trying to get the dust out, but it only made things worse. He kneeled and coughed, next to him Franko was getting up, spitting dust, and someone else was kneeling in the cloud about a metre away, scrabbling on the floor, in the dust and finding, finding what he was looking for, lifting it into the thick, black air.

Peter? Pero?

The figure got up, took a step back, next to Tomaž another figure was struggling to get up, still wearing a climbing harness.

“Well done lads, well done,” said Peroxide, with the pistol in his hands.