

THE CLUB OF *True* CREATORS

by Milan Trinković



a novel
shortlisted for the NIN award

The Club of True Creators

Milan Tripković



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THE TALE OF THE Club of True Creators begins in front of a mirror. No, not one of those magic mirrors that gaslights you about how pretty you are, but rather a large, ordinary looking glass hanging on a bedroom closet door which is currently reflecting a man in his late fifties. He has been playing a guitar for the past half-hour.

While there's nothing particularly notable about this, we do immediately observe that the man is wearing nothing but a pair of red clogs. More notable perhaps, is that a busty, scantily-clad woman is filming him with her phone from a low, surreptitious angle. Most notably of all, is that the man and woman seem to share a deeply serious approach to this whole encounter. In fact, we'd dare to say that the man looks irritated—he isn't, apparently, being framed properly by his camerawoman.

“Don't film from there, how many times do I have to tell you?! It'll *show!*” he whines.

“It won't. And you look taller this way.”

“Taller, yeah, but...”

He waves his hand vaguely and plays with the guitar's strap to adjust its height. He starts up again, and we realise that it was a grave mistake to call the man's activity “playing.” The notes we hear are so dull and

dissonant that anyone in possession of an undisturbed musical sense would cover their ears. And, as if that were not enough, he now begins to sing. No amount of ear-covering can save us now; his caterwauling voice, struggling in vain for a melody, pierces straight to our ear canals. There, it continues to resonate, inducing virtually clinical nausea and an acute sense of vertigo. We await the final notes in desperation, holding each other fast so that our knees won't give out. The believers among us urgently pray that God either silence the man, or strike them deaf.

“Where there’s fire, there’s smoke, I can feel it, the tide’s coming innnnn...”

He accentuates the end, stretching the last note to the point of absurdity.

“.....nnnnnnnnnnn!”

The négligéed camerawoman lowers her phone and applauds enthusiastically. This leads us to wonder, and take a closer look: Does this woman in fact have ears? (She does. The search for explanation continues.)

“It was all right, eh?” he asks, a gesture at humility.

“Perfect!” she assents.

“Really?”

“Absolutely! You’ll see.”

“Great. Send me the video.”

“Will do!”

“I’m going to get dressed; I’m freezing. My suit’s hanging on the bathtub, right?”

“Hold on, aren’t we going to...”

“What?”

“I mean...”

“Sorry babe, I really can’t now. Gotta go. I have an important meeting in fifteen minutes. How about tomorrow?”

“But you said...”

“Tomorrow.”

And so he leaves his camerawoman behind. Although she’s transparently disappointed by his premature departure, it seems unlikely to be the first time. Rising from the floor, she removes a pair of earplugs and sits on the edge of the bed. Perhaps there are some among us who would rather stay and console this scantily-clad woman but, since our protagonist has left the scene, we are duty-bound to follow. Probably, we’re about to learn something about the Club of True Creators in this meeting he mentioned.

He strolls down the street at a leisurely pace. A bowler hat rests squarely on his head, his eyes hidden behind glasses with thick, John Lennon-style lenses. His olive-green coat nearly touches the ground, rendering only a strip of his wide blue velvet pants visible above steel-toed, black cowboy boots. Between hairs of his greying beard nestle some pastry crumbs. He pauses by a chestnut tree in the park, touches its bark, and thoughtfully observes the canopy overhead. He bends to pick up a fallen chestnut, examines it from all angles, sniffs it a couple times, and pockets it. It would seem that our protagonist’s “meeting” was a nothing but a half-hearted fib to evade his previously agreed commitment. He sits down gingerly on a nearby bench. Crossing his left leg over his right, he rests a hand on his face and allows his gaze to drift into the middle distance.

Now is the perfect time to delve into the inner world of our hero.

Gassy, gassy, gassy! This pastry makes me so bloated. What the hell do they put in it? He pulls out a notebook and begins to write. A couple minutes later, feeling a chill, he thrusts his hands in his pockets, rises, and paces on, crossing the grass. Lost in thought, he remains ignorant of two girls walking a cocker spaniel a few paces behind him. And, in that ignorance, he lets out a loud fart. He notices them giggling, but tries his best to hide his embarrassment. He lowers his eyes, and continues forward with dignity. Leaving the park, he stops by a newsstand: cigarettes, Sudoku, and today's *Vječernje Novosti*.¹ Then, he ambles down the boulevard to the train station. He observes the platforms through the grimy glass walls of the waiting area. His expression is focussed, and he shifts his weight from left to right when his back starts to ache from standing. Patiently, our protagonist waits for inspiration to strike. It always does here. And then, indeed, there it is! The thoughtful scowl begins to soften into a smile, as he takes out his notebook...

“DO YOU WANT A BLOWJOB FOR TWO HUNDRED DINARS?” A woman with blunt features and sunken eyes materialises, an on-duty independent entrepreneur of the station. She's not especially attractive, but she is direct.

“I'm sorry?”

“Suck your cock? We can go to the loo if you want, or the park if you prefer to have an audience.”

“Ah, I see. No, thank you.”

1. “The Evening News,” the leading Serbian tabloid newspaper.

“All right then, one-fifty.”

“It’s not about the price, I’m afraid, it’s just...”

“One-twenty?”

“I’m not...”

“I’ll show you my pussy.”

“But...”

“You can touch my tits.”

“Stay away from me.”

“Fifty?”

“No! Are you deaf or just ugly?! Even if you paid *me* fifty thousand, I would never! Got it? Not if I was stuck with no other company for months on end!” He turns his back angrily and faces the platform, so doesn’t see her chin begin to quiver, or her eyes fill with tears. She just stands behind him, silent and still. A whole minute she stands there, perhaps even two, before walking away. At the ticket booth, there’s no one to pity her, no one to scowl at him in condemnation. We take the opportunity to do so ourselves, before the story pushes this sad encounter heartlessly into vague memory. Oblivious to our scowls, the man returns his gaze to his notebook for a long while, pencil in hand, frown on lips, and hesitates to write down the line that had so delighted him earlier—it no longer passes the “first line of a poem” test. He murmurs the line under his breath, hums the syllables to himself, and grips the pencil as if to squeeze the *mots justes* out of it, but still—nothing. It’s hopeless. He gives up for the time being and goes to the station pub to grab a coffee and read his newspaper, but is overwhelmed by an immediately if nebulously hostile atmosphere at the bar. So great is the discomfort that he immediately turns to leave.

“Vojo!”

He visibly flinches at hearing his name. Our protagonist hovers at the door and, for the next several seconds, tries to determine to whom the voice belongs. Nothing yet, but...

“Vojo, man!”

He contemplates whether to simply beat a hasty retreat—he’s near the exit, and could perhaps make a run for it. However, fatefully, his curiosity gets the better of him, and he turns around at the last moment. He can just make out a figure waving from a corner but not much else due to the smoke which fills the room. As he walks toward the table in the corner of the bar, our protagonist is acutely aware that he’s the centre of the entire pub’s attention. Except perhaps for one drunk who’s sprawled over a table; we think he’s asleep. He thinks of that moment in a Western when a stranger enters the saloon, instantly extinguishing the chatter of the local gunslingers. Only in this joint, the stranger is the only one wearing cowboy boots.

“What’s the matter, Vojo, you don’t remember me?” The figure, which has since resolved into a large man, stands up and warmly extends a hand.

“Er, Nikola?” he hazards, squinting at the still entirely unfamiliar face.

“Nikola who? It’s Pešut, man! Rajko Pešut, we served together in Ljubljana.”

“Oh, it’s you, Rajko...” He says, allowing himself to be pulled into Pešut’s hearty bear hug. It feels great, honestly. The embrace sends shivers down his spine, he could purr like a cat. He tries to recall the last person to hug him so warmly and is certain it was his mother,

who passed away twenty years ago. Unfortunately, there has been a mix-up. Our protagonist has never been to Ljubljana, nor has he served in the military. He'd been exempted from military service due to good fortune and poor eyesight. After briefly ruminating over the incredible coincidence that he should share the name Vojislav with Pešut's army buddy, he considers how best to extract himself from this mess.

"Who would've thought? I met crazy Muamer outside the German embassy in Belgrade two weeks ago, and we laughed about the time you shoved a gun into Žurić's mouth in the guardhouse. 'Shut it already, you Montenegrin chatterbox!'" Pešut laughs robustly as he recalls the incident and at last releases our protagonist from his embrace.

Vojislav tries to laugh along but can't quite manage. "Well..."

"That Žurić never did stop talking..."

"Rajko..."

"Come on, sit down. Why are you standing? Let's have a drink, catch up!"

"I have a meeting in fifteen minutes," he says, reheating his earlier excuse and composing a face of deepest regret. "I really should get going."

"Oh, come on, you can spare five minutes for your old comrade!"

Perhaps it's Pešut's commanding baritone or his even more commanding physique but, after a momentary wobble of indecision, Vojislav takes a seat. Pešut signals the waiter, orders drinks: a brandy, a caffè americano (no milk), and two seltzers. The drinks arrive promptly, and they toast. Pešut insists on the toast, although Vojislav himself is a teetotaler—the soldier's philosophy being that one toasts with a person, not the contents of one's glass.

Pešut's tales of shared military adventures and R&R in Ljubljana quickly become unbearable for our hero. A nagging pain pierces his temples as he smiles vacantly and nods in agreement with whatever is being said. Vojislav glances at his watch, fidgets in his seat, nervously alternates between coffee and seltzer. A vague itch strikes him just before noticing a face at the bar observing him sternly. The stranger's face remains myopically blurry to our protagonist...but he's positive that it's unknown to him. A fan maybe? someone who recognizes his face from a dust jacket or album cover, waiting for the right moment to approach and strike up a conversation. Eschewing false modesty, Vojislav concludes that he is, after all, one of Novi Sad's most distinguished writers. It wouldn't be a great surprise. As Pešut continues to ramble, our protagonist considers the possible intentions of the man at the bar, a knot forming in his stomach. He assesses the scene, reviews body language, and plumbs the inky darkness of the stranger's eyes. Maybe it's all in his head, who knows? As is so often the case, Vojislav's attempt at discretion has the opposite effect. As our protagonist twists his full head to a right angle, a schoolkid copying a neighbour's answer, would anyone actually be fooled?

His heart pounds when his eyes meet the stranger's. There's no longer any doubt that he's being watched, but the question remains: *why* is he being watched, and who is this guy at the bar working for? Vojislav ponders. It was only a matter of time until his literary ventures became a thorn in someone's side.

In the murky world of self-absorbed literati and towering authorial ego, Vojislav carries a heavy responsibility—to be the beacon, the creator of new realms, burdened with a genius comparable only to Pavić

in the Serbian canon.² He has long feared that his mediocre colleagues' envy would curdle into something more sinister, False Creators bereft of imagination. The only question is what form their attack might take. How far they'd go. Although a man of peace, our protagonist feels he can defend himself if need be. After mentally weighing his yellow belt in judo, however, he interrupts Pešut midway through his story about a certain Sgt Prostran. Since they have so much left to cover, Vojislav suggests that they take a walk; the ex-soldier enthusiastically agrees and continues his story as he pulls on his jacket. Awkwardness aside, Pešut's company would be a powerful deterrent to any would-be attacker.

"Hey, Vojo, don't mess around. My invitation, my treat," Pešut says, mildly irritated that his story was interrupted at the exact moment when Prostran, absolutely plastered, rolls into the guardhouse at two in the morning. He'd planned to sleep in the barracks, since his wife wouldn't let him in. But the checkpoint was empty, as the duty soldier had skipped town to fool around with a female soldier in Pinca.

Had Pešut not insisted so forcefully on paying, Vojislav's own protests would almost certainly have been more muted. The man at the bar continues to stare, and our hero is on full alert. Fists clenched and already planning his first blow. As they pass the bar, however, the stranger comes into focus—as do his milky eyes, and the thin white can on which he is leaning. What a relief! Gratitude and joy wash over him like the Danube coursing through its channels. They exit the pub.

2. Milorad Pavić, best known for his experimental but popular novel, *Dictionary of the Khazars*.

Outside, dusk has settled. Pešut continues his monologue—we’re surprised that this guy ever retired to begin with, seeing as he had such a good time in the army. Suddenly, a commotion from within our ranks. The impatient among us demand that we first learn everything we can about the Club of True Creators. We’re almost a full chapter in and, since Vojislav’s meeting was a fabrication, none the wiser.

This demand for answers, mostly from the youth, becomes too loud to ignore, so we must momentarily leave our two pedestrians at № 6 Liberation Boulevard, just in front of the Intesa bank, and type into Google: c-l-u-b-o-f-t-r-u-e-c-r-e-a-t-o-r-s. The results are not encouraging. We see that there’s a domain *stvaraoci.rs* but, when we click it, there’s nothing but a logo with the notice: “Under construction.”



“Club of True Creators”

The second result is a Facebook group of the same name. There, below a brief description, several photos have been posted which feature Vojislav “Voja” Počuča with a hodgepodge of artists, critics, and academics. The description reads: “The Club of True Creators is an association of Novi Sad artists, formed in response to the scourge of political correctness, systemic mediocrity, and the moral turpitude

which threatens the motherland.” One sentence. We observe that the group has no members aside from Voja Počuča, the group administrator, despite being established over three years ago. It would seem that Voja’s criteria for membership are stringent indeed. The remaining search results mostly relate to the Krušedol Synod, specifically the “Krušedol Bells” held by the Krajina People’s Church Assembly on May 25, 2018.

According to Google, the guest of honour was a leading politician from Republika Srpska, and one of the “truest creators” and guardians of the region.³ Most of the photo results also relate to this event, and show the Right Reverend Bishop Vasilije of Srem, surrounded by various groups of people. There’s also a photo there from the premiere of Emir Kusturica’s film *On the Milky Road* at FEST 2017, taken from an article in *Nova srpska politička misao*.⁴ This leads us to an article by Nikola Tanasić which opines: “*Although an unmistakably excellent film, with impeccable direction, cinematography, music, and performances, it diverges from the familiar frames of Kusturica’s imagination. The audience reaction was muted.*”

Suddenly, a deafening screech of brakes, followed by a dull thud.

We are yanked back down to Liberation Boulevard in Novi Sad, where a pedestrian has just been struck at an intersection near the Jefinoće Tunnel. Voja Počuča, with hands in his pockets, stands above

3. One of two autonomous regions in the state of Bosnia & Herzegovina. Republika Srpska is majority Serb, while the other region (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) is Bosniak-majority with a sizable Croat minority.

4. “New Serbian Political Thought,” a quarterly magazine which covers policy and politics from a mostly pro-establishment perspective.

Pešut, the upper half of whose body is visible underneath a grey Punto. In the driver's seat, a woman grips the steering wheel with wide-eyed shock. Some witnesses hasten to call an ambulance, while a couple passersby rush to the injured man's aid. Voja, meanwhile, with legs of lead, stares blankly at the driver. A brief eternity passes before he realises that he is actually acquainted with the person behind the windshield. He springs to life and flees amidst the gathering post-accident chaos. The woman in the Punto slowly lowers her forehead to the steering wheel, and the horn lets out an unbroken plaintive wail. The sound renders functional thought impossible, so we decide to skip ahead slightly.

“**H**OW MUCH LONGER MUST we wait for justice?”

This was the last tweet from @naca.zaca before, about two hours later, she was arrested for causing a traffic accident in which one person likely lost their life. “Likely,” simply because emergency services have yet to formally update Novi Sad PD of the patient’s condition. “How much longer must we wait for justice?”

Although the woman driving the grey Punto hasn’t said a word due to shock, the officer inspecting her bag found documents identifying her as “Nataša Žarković,” a well-known activist based in Novi Sad with an interest in human rights, particularly those of women, ethnic minorities, and animals, as well as climate change.

“How much longer must we wait for justice?”

The tweet echoes a third time in the head of the inspector on duty as he opens Nataša’s file. It is, due to her often creative forms of protest, a hefty folder; photographs and floppy disks threaten to spill out along with numerous criminal charges for public disturbances and official statements she has signed.

STATEMENT

I hereby state that on June 5, 2011, during a protest against the Korona circus, visiting at the intersection of Liberation and Tsar Lazar Boulevards, I did strike the circus owner on the head and back with a wooden placard, thereby causing him minor physical injuries. My intention was to demonstrate the animals' emotional state when their trainers apply physical discipline in the course of training.

Nataša Žarković

Office of the Basic Public Prosecutor
of Novi Sad

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

Complainant: The People of Novi Sad

Defendant: Nataša Žarković, Executive Director of the Women's Bureau, NGO

Offence Description: Disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, and obstruction of law enforcement.

Explanation: On May 8, 2013, at a public gathering in front of Novi Sad's Basic Court supporting female victims of sexual violence, Ms. Nataša Žarković removed her upper garments in protest against Mr. Petar Salatić, assistant director of City Greenery, accused of sexually harassing six colleagues. Holding garden shears, she led chants demanding Salati's castration. When police tried to intervene, she insulted them and threatened to remove their fingers if touched. An unidentified individual persuaded her to dress and she left for Radnička Street. The incident was captured both on private mobiles and by Radio-television Vojvodina. The RTV report from that evening is attached to this complaint.

Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs

Novi Sad Police Department

“How much longer must we wait...”

The door to the inspector’s office swings open, and an older uniformed officer storms in, shouting:

“Milonja, it’s no use, damn it—she just sits there, staring off into space! I’ve yelled at her, threatened her, and still nothing. I guess I could try smacking her a few times...”

“No, no!” the inspector interjects before adding, “Let’s, ah, wait a bit, and then I’ll give the smacking a shot.”

The uniformed cop nods. “Do we have the vic’s identity?”

“Nope.”

“You waiting for word?”

“Not really.”

“They say there are no skid marks.”

“That’s right.”

“I knew this madwoman would end up killing someone sooner or later.”

“Really?” The inspector raises an eyebrow.

“One hundred percent! I bet you that guy was an investor or a politician, or, like, some corrupt official skimming off the top of public contracts”

“That would make sense. Sure.”

The older officer tries to say something more, but his radio cuts him off. After a brief crackle of static, the walkie-talkie whispers fuzzily: “Ković, she’s crying.”

“Crying?” Ković looks befuddled.

“Crying,” the interrogating officer replies. “I don’t...know what to do. I feel sorry for her.”

Ković slaps his forehead in disbelief, comments on how they’ll let anyone into the police force these days, and mutters a curse.

“I’m on my way,” he snaps, before flinging himself out of the room as thunderously as he had entered. The inspector continues to flip silently through Nataša’s file. Now seems as good a time as any to leave him to it and to learn more about him from the chatter around the police station.

They say Milonja Šoškić might be the finest detective the Novi Sad PD has ever had. He’s been married four times, not because he’s a great charmer or playboy, but simply because the marriages were, by nature, bigamous—he was already married to the job. In his younger days, he would sleep in his office for nights on end, and come home only to wash, if at all. From the early ’90s forward, he’d arrested several of Novi Sad’s most prominent—and corrupt—business leaders, often paying the price. Despite penalties and reprimands from his superiors, and resentment from his peers, Inspector Šoškić stuck to his principles and uncompromising pursuit of justice.

Until recently.

Until one Thursday morning, almost a year ago now, when Milonja Šoškić looked at the case file on his desk and decided not to open it. He placed it in his drawer, had a leisurely breakfast, and then played computer solitaire for the remainder of his shift. The cause for this new attitude was much debated in the corridors of the Novi Sad PD central administration building. Was he simply fed up, or had some

syndicate found Šoškić's weak spot and turned him at last? The rookies all assumed the latter, but the more seasoned officers, those who had known him since the early days, didn't seriously entertain the notion. "The flame can't burn forever" they would offer sagely, "and Milonja burned brighter and longer than most.."

Inspector Šoškić closes Nataša's file with a sigh. His face wears the unmistakable expression of someone about to do the exact opposite of his heart's desire.

For, in his mind's eye, Milonja Šoškić sees an enormous basket overflowing with a freshly baked loaf of bread, Banja Luka kebabs, chopped onions, and a saucer of homemade yoghurt on the side. In the background glows an inviting hearth. But, instead of an accordion and singing, he hears Nataša cry out:

"How much longer must we wait for justice?"

It's hopeless to throw this file in the drawer, hopeless to cover his ears—the sentence blares inside his skull, a mantra with a life of its own... "How much longer must we wait for justice?"

Šoškić closes his eyes...

"How much longer must we wait—"

He grimaces...

"How much longer—"

The inspector stands, opens his office window, and sticks his head all the way outside. He yearns for the spring air to jolt him awake, for the sounds of the city to drown out the corrupted audio file playing on repeat inside his head.

But it doesn't stop, not until he says aloud:

"How much longer must we wait for justice."

WE'VE ALREADY MET POLICE Sergeant Ković. Here he is again in the interview room, scowling silently at a tearful woman from across a table. The young colleague who'd radioed him earlier stands dejected in the corner, avoiding eye contact with either of them. Despite the building's no-smoking policy, the room smells like two decades of cigarette smoke—likely the last time the walls had been painted. The furniture is dilapidated, foam sticking out from the chair cushions. The bleak setting perfectly reflects the expression on Nataša's face.

“Aargh, stop it already!” Ković breaks the silence and admonishes his suspect, but to no avail. Nataša weeps, burying her face in the crook of her elbow. The pose of a hungover barfly before her morning elixir kicks in.

“Don't—” he tries again, speaking more softly. No effect. He spreads his arms, looks helplessly at the ceiling.

“Nataša, cut it out! You haven't killed anyone! I'm. Trying. To. Tell. You...” he says with all the authority he can muster, emphasising each word.

But it's hopeless; the suspect continues to sob inconsolably into her elbow. Ković grabs the sides of his head, clearly driven to the edge of

sanity. A parent traumatised by a newborn's endless sleepless nights. He jiggles his right leg and whistles nervously through his teeth. He steels himself for another attempt.

Glancing at his young colleague, Ković realises that this next gambit might tarnish the rookie's image of him...and rookies are known to talk. But he has no other option. He places his hand on her shoulder and, mustering as much gentleness as possible, says:

“Don't cry, Nataša. Everything will be okay.”

...

...

To Ković's surprise, she begins to calm down. Her sobs soften into deep breaths, although her head remains on the table. The older cop wipes some sweat performatively from his brow. The gambit worked. Or, it seems to have worked.. Just as a comforting silence settles, however, and Nataša begins to raise her face, “From Ovčar and Kablar” starts blaring tinnily from the rookie's pocket.¹ He scrambles for his phone but—what a klutz!—drops it with a clatter. Nataša bursts back into tears. Ković seethes in exasperation. He fights and then surmounts the powerful urge to administer his colleague a disciplinary slap.

“Sorry, mom, I can't talk right now, bye,” the young officer says quickly, and then disconnects the call.

“God *damn* it, rookie! Just when I...!”

Ković's colleague may be new to the force, but knows when to keep his mouth shut. A flustered Ković shakes his head, and prepares to try

1. Patriotic song referencing two mountains in Serbia, and the bravery of soldiers defending the motherland. Dates from the Partisan resistance against Nazis and collaborators.

the gentle approach again. He reaches out for Nataša's shoulder but, just a hair's breadth away, "From Ooovčar..." blares out again. Ković stares at his hand for a moment, before slamming it down on the table and cursing as he thunders out the door. The younger officer touches the designation stitched on his navy-blue shirt—"PC 122586"—and retrieves his phone to return the call. He's furious. He shouts at his mother, tells her repeatedly that he cannot talk when he's at work. He'll call her back at 6pm!

The rookie's mother seems to have limited sympathy for his situation, however, and PC 122586 can't bring himself to end the call. He does, however, roll his eyes prodigiously. Although we can't make out her individual words, the message is unmistakable. *So, everyone else is more important than me. You never have time for your mother. I don't ask for a lot, son, just a few words. Is that too much?* After a few minutes of lecturing and unsolicited advice, our rookie feels like a piece of literal shit, and a rather sloppy one at that. He wonders what he could have done to deserve such a miserable day; perhaps some offence against nature in a previous life. Suddenly, Inspector Šoškić materialises at the door. *Great, a third person to disappoint*, thinks the young police constable. Instead though, Milonja pats him benevolently on the shoulder, and gestures to continue his conversation.

The inspector approaches Nataša and whispers something in her ear. This puts an end to her sobbing, which is replaced by a look of baffled alarm. She raises her eyes, her gaze blurry with tears but hearing him clear as a bell.

"Nataša, I believe you're in grave danger. We need to leave, immediately."

“I’m...I’m sorry? What are you talking about, leave? And go where?”

“I don’t know.”

For the next twenty seconds, not much happens. Nataša and Milonja look at each other. In the background, our PC paces and resignedly accepts his mother’s tirade.

If it weren’t for the wall clock relentlessly ticking away the seconds, one might think time had stopped. A good film director would surely freeze this frame, we think, scoring it with dramatic strings. The pair seem acutely aware that they are on the cusp of a momentous decision. The minute hand clicks to twelve, and now it’s 11pm.

As if waiting for the hour, Milonja grabs Nataša abruptly by the upper arm. He leads her out of the interview room, an officer on his thousandth perp walk. Their pace is hurried, and our PC waves his phone unnoticed as they glide through the door.

“Yes, Mom, I can hear you. I’m here... I’m listening, Mom...”

...the story continues!

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Milan Tripković was born in 1977 in Belgrade.

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pronouncing serbian

BELow IS A ROUGH guide to pronouncing the people and place names in Serbian.

The following letters are pronounced similarly to English: A, B, D, E, F, G, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, R, S, T, U, Z.

These letters are pronounced differently from (or don't exist in) English: C, H, J, Lj, Nj, Š, Ž.

And these ones represent sounds that don't exist in English: Ć, Č, Đ, Dž, V

A - *fa*ther

B - *bo*y

C - *ca*ts

Ć - *ch*in (Eng), but a bit further back in the mouth, or Mandarin *qi*

Č - *chin* (Eng), but “retroflex” with the tongue curled back, or Mandarin *cha*

D - *dog*

Ð - *joy* (Eng), but a bit further back in the mouth, or Mandarin Beijing

Dž - *joy* (Eng), but “retroflex” with the tongue curled back, or Mandarin *zhang*

E - *pet*

F - *fun*

G - *go*

H - *loch* (Scots) or *doch* (Ger.)

I - *eat*

J - *you*

K - *kite*

L - *feel*

Lj - *million*

M - *man*

N - *now*

Nj - *canyon*

O - *ought*

P - *pen*

R - quickly rolled, like Spanish *pero* or US Eng *butter*

S - *so*

Š - *sby*

T - *tip*

U - *loom*

V - Dutch *wat*, or a cross between *vow* and *wow* (Eng)

Z - *zoo*

Ž - leisure

the balkans of the club of true creators



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