

# **Murder in the Garden**

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## Murder in the Garden

Pavel Havránek was a former police officer. He had some conflicts with his superiors at his original workplace. One of the reasons was reportedly that he drank a lot, so he decided to take early retirement by mutual agreement. He set up his own detective agency. He

earned some extra money this way, but mainly he did it to keep himself busy so he wouldn't get too bored. He used his many years of experience and the contacts he still had in Bartolomějská, the well-known Prague police headquarters.

He tried to solve cases primarily through intuition and logical reasoning. In his youth, he had enjoyed mathematics and played competitive chess, so he retained the habit of thinking several moves ahead. However, he did not shy away from modern investigative methods. He believed that solving complex cases was usually the simplest thing to do; the more complicated it became, the more difficult it was. When solving cases, he liked to stick to three principles: simplicity, intuition, and common sense.

He mainly met with clients in pubs. He loved Prague pubs and beer, especially Pilsner and Budvar. He liked going to Medvídci or Dvě kočky, which were also close to his friends from Bartolomějská. He also lived nearby, where he had a certain space in his apartment reserved for clients, but he preferred to go out in company, where he could also enjoy some good food. He liked sauces such as tomato, svíčková, goulash, and various dark sauces. The darker, the better, especially with game. He also liked pork knuckle, whether smoked or unsmoked, with lots of mustard and horseradish. Sometimes, however, he would happily eat only pickled sausages and brawn. Whenever possible, he preferred smoking areas, as he was convinced that a cigarette was the perfect way to end a pleasant gathering.

He definitely didn't like pizza, hamburgers, and similar imported foods. He also didn't like standing in line for these foods, then looking for a place at a table with his tray, and finally eating them with plastic cutlery from a paper wrapper, while paying a higher price than in a restaurant where a waiter runs around him. He refused to drink various Sprints, Fantas, Colas, and Mirindas. He tried them a few times when he was driving, remembering an acquaintance who always ordered them because he was a passionate driver. But Havránek didn't like it at all, so in such cases he preferred non-alcoholic beer, which was sometimes more expensive than Pilsner, but unfortunately he had to put up with it.

One day, his cell phone rang with an offer to meet and collaborate on an unsolved case. He recommended meeting in a café, but Havránek rejected that, preferring a pub. They finally agreed on Šumava, where it is not usually very crowded in the afternoon and they can talk in peace. Apparently, it was not a case of infidelity, which was usually relatively easy to solve, but something more serious.

They met in a fairly relaxed atmosphere. The client introduced himself as Slavík, a middle-aged man with an athletic appearance. He got Havránek's contact information from someone at Bartolomějská, who told him that Havránek had solved some big cases.

"Yes, something like that. I'm glad they praised me there. Today, everything is very specialized, computers, DNA, everyone solves

some narrow, partial problem, which is fine, but I like complexity and logic. I'm quite conservative."

Slavík came up with the idea that it was a mysterious death, most likely murder. The police investigated it, but apparently found nothing concrete. They thought it might have been poisoning, but they couldn't confirm whether it was accidental or intentional.

This intrigued Havránek, and he asked Slavík to tell him the whole story. He asked permission to use a voice recorder, because he was sure he would forget some details from an oral conversation, or that something important might slip his mind.

Slavík explained that every year he organizes a party for his friends at his cottage on the outskirts of Prague. At noon, they go to a pub for lunch, then to a swimming pool, and end up at Slavík's garden. There, they can play soccer, outdoor ping pong, petanque, cricket, badminton, or swim in a small garden pool. Some even like to dance.

"At that time, besides me and my wife, there were also Klíma, Vilda, Moravec, Jiřina, and Půlkrábková. Klíma had a pain attack, was taken away by ambulance, and then died. As I said, it was probably some kind of poisoning," Slavík reported.

"And why do you think it was poisoning? Did he show any symptoms?"

"I don't know, I'm not an expert. But he was clearly staggering and seemed heavily intoxicated, even though he didn't drink alcohol. He

had diabetes and took good care of himself; you could say he was teetotal."

"Those are usually the worst," Havránek remarked. "A person who is used to drinking can usually control themselves and knows when they've had enough. But for a teetotaler, it's a new experience, they don't know when to stop and what effect it will have on them."

"It's true that he drank a little that day, and we thought he might be under the influence of alcohol, but there were too many strange symptoms. On the one hand, he showed increased mobility and aggression, but on the other hand, he was dizzy, seemed sleepwalking, sweated profusely, behaved confusedly, and spoke incomprehensibly. Then he was completely limp."

"Well, it could be poisoning," agreed Havránek. "I need to have some kind of system to make it clear. So, if he was poisoned, let's make a list of participants and therefore suspects, except for the deceased, of course." He reached into his pocket, took out a pen and paper, and began to write:

1. Klíma
2. Slavík
3. Slavíková
4. Půlkrábková
5. Jiřina
6. Vilda
7. Moravec

"That's right, isn't it? What about any children, weren't they there?"

"I have two boys, and Půlkrábková does too. They always came to these meetings and really enjoyed them. We went to a pub, where they had lunch and cola. They shouldn't drink it, but sometimes I don't have the energy to argue with them about it. On the other hand, I'm glad when they enjoy going out with me sometimes, and I want them to have fond memories of it. Půlkrábková scolded me for ordering it for them, saying that her children would want Coke too. Then the kids had fun at the swimming pool, and there was plenty of sandwiches and other goodies in the garden, and they played various games, especially soccer, which was the most popular. They made their lineup well in advance. I was glad that was the case because it was a change from computers. This time, however, it didn't work out. It was always a problem to choose a date that suited everyone. Půlkrábková took them on various vacations, and their father often had them too, because they were divorced. My children, on the other hand, went to various scout events and camps, even those that were not planned in advance.

Vilda always negotiated the date, as he was happy to have an excuse to call Půlkrábková, while I didn't have the nerve to call her. It was always a big problem. She said she didn't have a landline at work, so I should call her cell phone, but it was usually turned off, out of battery, or she was talking to someone, and when I finally managed to reach her, she said she didn't have time now and to call back in fifteen minutes. It's similarly difficult to call Moravec, as you probably know, who owns several phones and always has a different one with him than the one you're calling. But Vilda is no better. When

I'm at home, he calls me on my cell phone, and when I'm out and about, he calls my landline, and then he's surprised that he can't reach me. And when we agree to meet somewhere and call each other, he has his phone turned off or forgets it at home.

Vilda called me back in May to say that Půlkrábková was only available on July 17, if that suited us. I said I had no idea that far in advance. Then he called me again a week later to ask if I knew yet whether July 17 suited us. At the end of June, I told him that it was about 80% likely, but he kept saying he didn't understand. He doesn't have a wife, mother-in-law, or children, so he has no problem with the date. But even though he's a technical engineer, he sometimes has trouble with percentages. For example, when they say on TV soccer that it's a 100 percent chance, he argues that it's nonsense, that there can't be a 100 percent chance, that they should say 99 percent, and I told him to write that to the TV station.

"But it's always suspicious," Havránek objected, "when all the regular participants aren't there. You know how it is in Columbo, he always asks where the maid or housekeeper was, and when he finds out that she had a day off, he finds it extremely suspicious and it usually points him to the murderer."

"Well, in this case, I don't think it was intentional to send the children away, at least not on my part."

"Okay, so we have six suspects so far. Of course, the poisoning could have happened earlier, for example, at a pub or swimming pool or even at home. Did Klíma live with anyone?"

"He lived in a nice house in Michle, a district on the outskirts of Prague, with his sister, her husband, and their son. I was there once when I was still single with a few female friends. He had a separate apartment with its own entrance. It was ideal for a single man. He had various messages written in lipstick on the bathroom mirror. Apparently, he had some disputes with his brother-in-law, but he got along with his sister. I didn't know him that well. I didn't come into contact with him professionally. I know him from some parties and from Půlkrábková, who always talked about him. I don't even know where he worked or what he did. He said he was a deputy in some company, but I have no idea what it did. Apparently, he got into some kind of trouble, I don't know what, and so they had to dismiss him. He repaired televisions and radios for friends when needed, once even for me. So he probably did something related to communications. He was single, liked to dance and ski. He also worked as an assistant in some dance classes.

He seemed a bit like a con artist to me, a bit of a charlatan. He talked a lot, but little of it was probably true. He had female visitors now and then, but probably not too many; he didn't want to be tied down," Slavík continued.

"You see, there could have been a motive here too," Havránek thought aloud. "Tell me something about your wife's relationship with Klíma."

"My wife, or Slavíková as you have written, saw him for the first time in her life and knows nothing about him. I would definitely rule her out as a suspect."

"I don't want to offend your wife. But you know how it is in detective stories. The murderer is usually the least suspicious person, and connections emerge that no one could have anticipated. I'm sure she didn't do it, but we have to include her in the investigation. You said you organize this gathering every year, so she must have known him."

"No, it was his first time there."

"And why did you invite him?"

"I didn't invite him. Půlkrábková invited him, and we all agreed. He could have come to the previous meeting, but he didn't like traveling outside Prague; he considered the countryside to be boring.

He had been dating Půlkrábková for about three years, and it was apparently an Italian-style relationship, where they kept breaking up and making up again. He probably initiated the breakups because Půlkrábková was about twenty years younger and too active, and he wanted his peace and quiet. She allegedly wanted to make love all the time, as he said, it had to be from morning to night and from night to morning, and she also loved to dance. She also attended various nudist events and went on nudist vacations. She longed to run around the garden naked, wearing only sneakers. Like in *Midsomer Murders*, if you remember, there was a doctor in one episode who ran naked through the woods with his housekeeper. So she was a similar type. And Klíma had diabetes, so he probably didn't feel like it. But apparently he was well-endowed. The breakup really got to her. She also walked around with bruises on her face for

some time because he beat her up. But why, I don't know. Půlkrábková, even though she has had other partners since then and was married, still talks about him. But it is certain that their breakup was a big blow to her. On the other hand, I think he was glad to be rid of her. Půlkrábková often said that she was Klíma's widow. Vilda still couldn't understand how that was possible when Klíma was still alive."

"Well, that could be a motive. Revenge and unrequited love are very common motives," Havránek took a sip of beer and continued: "Okay, so that was the basic, initial information about Klíma. But now let's look at the garden. What was going on there?"

"Well, traditionally, people ate and drank, and without children, no sports were played. And there was dancing too."

"The dancing is interesting. It divided society and allowed various things to happen unnoticed, such as adding poison to food or drink. Who danced with whom?"

"Well, Moravec danced with Jiřina and Půlkrábková danced with Vilda, but also with Klíma.

"And no one else with anyone else?"

"As far as I remember, that was all. My wife and I prepared the food and drinks."

"So when Klíma was dancing, someone could have easily put the poison in his food or drink, except for Půlkrábková, because he didn't

dance with anyone else, right?"

Slavík nodded.

"Did they bring any gifts?" Havránek asked further.

"Moravec had Fernet and chocolate, Vilda had mead, and Půlkrábková had Lambrusco and a basket of peaches, but they were pretty rotten, so we threw most of them away. She probably bought them on sale; she's quite thrifty."

"And no one brought any food?"

"Oh, I almost forgot, Půlkrábková baked something like pizza, it wasn't sweet, probably because of Klíma, she gave it to him at the swimming pool. She didn't offer me any. Then she brought it with her to the garden, but she kept it with her, I don't think she offered it to anyone except Klíma."

"Well, you see, there could be poison in it, but it would be very risky because someone else could take a piece.

And what did Klíma have for lunch? Could someone have swapped meals with him?"

"I think he had some salad and soup; as a diabetic, his choices are somewhat limited. When Pulkrabková saw him having salad, she had some too. I think there was some pasta in it as well."

"And no one else had salad?"