

TRANSLATIONS

PREŠCE

Ivan Cankar

Introduced and Translated by David Limon*

Introduction

The short story by Ivan Cankar entitled “O preščah” first appeared in the September issue of the *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1903. It was later included in the collection *Mimo življenja* (1920) with only minor orthographical changes. The translation which appears below is based on the text which appears in volume 11 of Cankar’s *Zbrano delo* published by Državna založba Slovenije (Ljubljana 1972).

Although a less polished and well-structured work than some of Cankar’s later writing, it is nevertheless an absorbing and evocative piece. The central motif is that of a journey, ostensibly in search of *prešce*, but in reality a hopeless quest which leads only, and inevitably, to disillusion. The children who make this journey are driven by a powerful longing or yearning for the unobtainable, by a desire to escape from the dreary, mundane reality to which they feel themselves condemned. But although their quest is not without its moments of hope, the reader can sense, in the narrator’s opening words and in his initial description of Lojze, that it is eventually doomed to failure—a perception confirmed by later glimpses into both Lojze’s and Hanca’s futures. And as the story progresses, the children’s goal takes on an increasingly “fairy-tale” quality, which reaches its apotheosis in the vision of the rainbow and the “great white city”. The children are given an enticing glimpse of their goal, but no more: they return to where they began, having found little solace in their journey—a hopeless circularity echoed in the shape of the narrative itself.

Changes in mood and atmosphere within the story are achieved through vivid descriptions (often through childlike eyes) of the Slovene countryside and the elements which play over it, as well as the children’s reactions to these things. Indeed, the Slovene landscape could be

**Editor’s Note:* Mr. Limon’s contribution inaugurates a new section in *Slovene Studies*, in which we plan to offer our readers English versions, prefaced by scholarly introductions, of classical works of Slovene poetry and prose.

seen as an additional central "character", whose "interplay" with the four children forms the axis around which the events of the story rotate. And on a symbolic level, one cannot but help connect the children's reactions to the changes they experience here with the way in which they must relate to the vicissitudes of everyday life.

The inhabitants of the countryside through which the children pass seem less important than (often a mere reflection of) their surroundings: they are mostly shadowy figures, sometimes benign (as in the beautiful green valley where the children enjoy their happiest moments), but usually hostile. The children's characters, however, though sketched in economically, have much greater depth.

The position of the narrator is less satisfactory: the narratorial voice veers somewhat uncomfortably at times between that of a participant in the events (seeing them either from a childhood or an adult viewpoint) and that of an omniscient author. In translating the text into English I have tried to make the narrative more consistent by making slight changes to the worst intrusions of the omniscient authorial voice (i.e. those which appear incongruous in some way). I have also taken the liberty of ironing out certain inconsistencies in the narrative which detract from the fluency of the piece. There is unfortunately insufficient space to go into these here, but they are for the most part insignificant.

The question of style is a difficult one, especially as it is a quality which has yet to be adequately described on a linguistic level. That leaves a more subjective level, on which only the reader familiar with both the Slovene original and the translation can judge. I hope that the style of the original has been retained wherever possible; this quality has, however, to be balanced against the need for the translation to be acceptable to the reader as an English text—that is, it should not obviously read like a "translation".

This is not the place for a detailed comparison of the translation with the original. It can be noted, though, that any linguistic examination of the differences between the original and translated texts would have to pay attention to the following factors:

—The paragraph and sentence divisions of the original cannot simply be "transferred" during translation; and Cankar's use of the semi-colon to separate strings of clauses, which is a frequent feature of the original, would often seem inappropriate if carried over to an English text, where the divisions would, at times, seem too arbitrary. So, there are fewer paragraphs in the translation than the original, but more sentences. And not only the semi-colon, but the exclamation mark appears much less frequently in the translation. These points are in addition to the differing use of the comma which one might expect in translating between Slovene and English.

—The Slovene text seems to tolerate more bridging assumption than an

equivalent English text would. The main result of this is that there are, of necessity, more linking and cohesive devices employed in the translation.

—A related point is the less frequent use of the most common coordinating conjunction: i.e. “and”, as compared to *in*. This is sometimes due to a more varied use of conjunctions in the translation, sometimes to the far greater frequency of non-finite and adverbial clauses, which are often used to translate what are, in the original, simple coordinate clauses.

—As one would expect, in particular semantic areas there is a decrease of lexical variety during the translation process, in others an increase. The aim here should be to try and maintain a broad balance, rather than any sort of crude one-to-one correspondence between lexical items—the latter being unacceptable because the semantic value of the lexical units cannot be divorced from their use in different contexts, even if these fall within the same text. However, I should acknowledge that my translation does employ the stylistic device of repetition of lexical items less frequently than the original. I see this not as a betrayal of the author’s style, but as a step which is sometimes necessary in order to make the translated text acceptable to the modern English reader. Similarly, a too literal translation of certain features of Cankar’s descriptive language—his use of adjectives, for instance—has been avoided. Without what might be described as this “toning down” during the translation process, the English text may, at times, strike the reader as “exaggerated” or “melodramatic” in places where this impression is probably not present in the Slovene reader’s response to the original.

The only footnote used in the translation refers to the titleword; otherwise, those items which may be regarded as culturally bound are dealt with by finding an as near as possible equivalent in English culture, or by some kind of paraphrase.

The basic question of whether the translation is successful as an English text and whether it is sufficiently “faithful” to the original is, of course, best answered by the readers themselves.

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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability in financial operations. This section also highlights the role of internal controls in preventing fraud and errors.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the implementation of robust risk management strategies. It outlines various risk assessment techniques and provides guidance on how to identify, evaluate, and mitigate potential risks. The text stresses the need for a proactive approach to risk management to protect the organization's assets and reputation.

3. The third part of the document addresses the importance of effective communication and reporting. It discusses the need for clear and concise communication channels and the role of regular reporting in keeping stakeholders informed. This section also touches upon the importance of maintaining accurate financial statements and providing timely updates to management and investors.

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PREŠCE*

In these moments of unconsoled and inconsolable longing, I remember an event from the distant past . . .

It was a fine morning when I awoke. The sun was shining and sparse, restless autumn clouds were racing across the sky, while shadows raced beneath them across the road, over the rooftops, onto the fields and over the mountain into the distance. I dressed quickly, hurriedly drank my coffee and then got ready for the road. I managed to find one of those large sacks they carry potatoes in, but I had to sew it up as it had come unstitched. Outside, Lojze called, so I threw the sack across my shoulder, took my stick in my hand and set off.

I was ten years old at the time, Lojze was even younger. I do not really know what I was like, but Lojze was very small and frail, his face was white and delicate, and he gazed at the world fixedly, through big eyes. He said he was going to be a painter—God knows what he was dreaming of. He is probably dead now, or is perhaps lost, somewhere in this world which is so vast.

We stopped in front of a neighbour's house and Tone appeared, also with a large sack across his shoulder. His sister Hanca was with him. She was smaller than the rest of us, she had a large shawl of her mother's on her head and from beneath the shawl peeped out a tiny, sickly face. I looked at her and thought that she was not up to such a long trek. Still, she came.

At first we did not stop anywhere, we walked quickly and cheerfully. It had rained during the night and the mud squelched beneath our bare feet. We rolled our trousers up to our knees and Hanca tucked up her skirt. Soon a slope rose before us and the path was smoother, cleaner. Tone hit his foot on a stone and sat down to wipe away the blood with some grass.

The village was already below us and further along the valley we could see the white houses of the market-town gleaming. Everything looked newly-washed, bathed clean, and the apple-shaped top of the parish church belltower was glittering festively. All around us was the solitary countryside.

We had agreed not to go for prešce to the village or the markettown. There were bands of children, beggars and ragged wanderers traipsing

**Prešce* were small loaves made from corn, buckwheat or other flour. It was the custom, on All Saints' or All Souls' Day, to give them to children and beggars so that they would pray for "all the souls in purgatory". In some parts of Slovenia they were also known as *dušice* or "little souls"

from house to house. The people who lived there were driving them away, and if they did give them bread they grumbled and slammed the door.

It had occurred to Lojze first. Gazing into the distance, his eyes wide, he said: "It's different there, beyond the hills. We wouldn't come home with empty sacks. They'd give us apples and pears, baskets full of them; and those loaves of corn-bread they bake there—they're flat and golden, with a beautiful smell, and the crust is cracked and brown like it is on currant bread . . . Oh, if only we dared go that far! . . ."

The path went down somewhat into a quiet valley where there were long strips of farmland and the plain we had left behind us disappeared from view. We were alone—above us the sky, where the autumn clouds were racing. We had been talking, but at that moment when the hill finally separated us from the dreary plain which was our home, we fell silent. The whole of life was different now and we too were different. An obscure sense of fear stirred within me, telling me we should turn back; but though we stopped and looked at each other, we carried on.

It seemed as though we had been walking a long time. The path kept rising and falling, but nothing seemed to change: the hills and pastures were all the same, and so were the fields and the dark must-pears which grew beside the path. It was as if we were not moving at all and as if everything was quite still, enchanted. Except for the clouds, which were still hurrying by.

Tone leapt across the thorny hedge and rushed up the hill so that he could look around.

"There's a village! I can see a belltower shining!" he called. "I knew we'd get somewhere," said Lojze calmly and we went on. The village was very close, but we could not see it until we got there because it was hidden in the trees. Except for a small, sad church which stood on a low, rounded hill, like a mole-hill, lifting up its belltower with its gilded apple. But the belltower did not rise very high: it reached little higher than the tall walnut tree which stood in the graveyard.

We looked around us and went into the first house. We stayed just behind the door, keeping close to the wall. It was dark in the hallway and it smelt of freshly baked bread. We recited the Lord's prayer together, but the frail voice of Hanca was almost the only one to make itself heard. She was standing in front with her hands clasped, not at all afraid. The door opened and we became silent. A farmer's unshaven face peered out of the room from beneath a large dormouse-skin hat. He muttered something and the door closed.

"Let's wait," said Tone and he moved closer to the threshold. Soon, brisk female footsteps rang out deep in the darkness of the hallway, there was a creaking noise and a servant appeared. She brought us a basket of dried pears and four loaves of corn-bread, small and flat,

with a beautiful smell. The servant was a fat, dirty, unfriendly woman, who glanced at us and disappeared again without a word. We sat down on the floor of the hallway, counted the pears and shared them out, put everything together in our sacks and set off again.

The village was small, muddy and dreary. The houses were huddled together like hens. And all was quiet, as if there had been a death in each house. A boy appeared beside one of the gardens. He watched us silently for some time, but then he shouted out something in a long, funny sing-song voice, picked up a stone and flung it at us.

“Hungry beggars he called us!” said Tone angrily. He was ready to go for him, but immediately thought better of it and yelled back: “You just come down here, you . . . clodhopper!” Tone himself did not know how he had come up with “clodhopper”; we started to laugh and began to move on to another house.

As we prayed, a broad-shouldered youth stood before us, hands on hips. He listened and watched, without moving a muscle. But when we had finished, he turned slowly and took a hefty stick from out of the corner. We clutched our sacks and fled, our feet sinking ankle-deep into the mud.

We covered the whole village, not forgetting a single house. In the end, we had two farthings each and our bags were somewhat fuller. The farthings had been given to us by a little old woman, but not before we had recited the whole of the first part of the rosary. Tone, however, had noticed that the old woman was hard of hearing and so he left out quite a few Hail Mary’s. “We don’t really have all that much time!” he said.

We were scarcely on our way again before the village was lost in the trees; no sound came from it, not even a dog barking. The village lay there dead and above it, as on a grave, shone the cross on the low belltower.

Now the path fell steeply. It was wide here, badly rutted and so muddy that it splashed up to our coats as we walked. This was probably the way they drove cattle to the water. Below, in a strange, inhospitable, secluded spot, beneath steep rocks, was a hollow full of yellowish water. The path ran past it into a long narrow valley—a deep oval shape, like a kneading trough.

The valley was beautiful, green and peaceful like a Sunday. Over on the far hillside, one could see the gleam of two or three small white villages, which seemed to be peeping down in a friendly sort of way, like doves. Along the centre of the valley, hidden among the willows, ran a small stream, gurgling softly. The path was lovely and smooth, strewn with fine white gravel. Beside it, in the middle of the valley, stood a new shrine to the Virgin Mary, at which we knelt. Everything seemed to us so friendly, and we felt content and at ease, as if God had smiled down upon us . . .

Things went well for us in that valley. The people were like the bright green meadows, the white villages and the new shrine beside the path: they did not drive us away from their doorsteps and our bags gradually became fuller. In one spacious hallway we sat on a bench at a table, eating wheaten bread and drinking cold sweet pear juice, while the plump farmer's wife stood before us and asked us many questions. I do not know if that valley still exists; to me, it feels as if it no longer does . . .

We were on our way once more, with the valley below us. One more tree, one more bend, and it was there no longer. Lonely countryside spread out before us. Then, for a second time, we stopped and looked at each other. But we went on, as if someone had tugged at our sleeves.

We had not been walking long when we noticed that there was no longer any clear sky above us. The clouds had become calmer: now they were creeping slowly along, tired and lazy, but still in the same direction, towards the north. They were joining hands and coming together; the blueness was disappearing, as if windows of light were being closed up above.

"It's going to rain," declared Tone.

Lojze and I did not reply. I'm not sure why, but at that moment I had the feeling that our thoughts were the same.

"Let's go on, it doesn't matter where," Lojze was thinking. "And if it rains, let it!"

Hanca was walking behind; she was bent over a little and was already breathing heavily, but we did not worry too much about her.

We had strayed into a strange landscape, infinitely sadder than I had ever seen before. The hills were covered with bushes and low trees; there was hardly any wind at all now and so nothing stirred; except on the highest hill, where a tall silhouette was swaying slowly and regularly, as if death were standing there, swinging his scythe. Cut between the hills were deep, narrow gullies full of white stones with yellowish rain-water pouring between them. There was no real path: we were following muddy tracks or cartracks, sometimes striking straight across a hill on a slope so steep that we had to crawl on all fours. But there was not a house anywhere, not a sound to be heard—the countryside was endless and unchanging.

"We're lost, aren't we?" said Hanca. Her face was damp with sweat and her lips were trembling as if she was about to cry.

We were on a high ridge, from which we could see for miles around. "How could we be lost? There's the Three Wise Men," said Tone, reassuring both Hanca and himself. We looked—there in the distance, high up against the grey sky, was a speck of white, the Church of the Three Wise Men.

"We should be in Holm soon, there'll be plenty for us there. There

are only three houses, with a forest of fruit trees all around them. All along the valleys and up the hillside, just apple trees—like spruce trees and beech trees . . .”

Lojze’s eyes lit up and my heart started to laugh, whilst Hanca’s step quickened. Apple trees like spruce trees and beech trees. Apples! We had enough of those in our bags. But there was something fine about it—hope was so sweet . . . It did not have to be apples, it could be anything . . .

Most of the time we had been walking, we had remained silent. Tone, who was always hungry at home, was probably thinking of corn-bread, of apples, of sweet pear juice. No doubt Hanca was having similar thoughts—she was always being beaten, had to carry the baby around all day and never got enough to eat. She could be dreaming of white bread, of a colorful shawl, perhaps even of silver earrings; and her eyes were very still, as if she were looking but seeing nothing. Both of them were entering a better land, where the houses were of cake and the roofs were of white sugar. They walked on in silence . . .

Lojze was also dreaming. But his dreams were probably more like fairy tales, strangely colorful, beautiful and unreal. And although he had never tasted white bread, I do not think he was dreaming of it. His cheeks were white and unhealthy, and his eyes were burning like two flames. It is because he was like this that I think he would become wretchedly lost . . .

We stopped. On a far hillside, we could see a white path winding its way in fine curves past beautiful trees. We went on a little more hopefully. But when we came to the path it was no longer as good, or as white, as it had seemed—perhaps the sky had shone from behind the clouds for a moment. The surface of the mud was dry, but our feet broke through it as we walked. The grass was still wet and sometimes one of the branches above us trembled, showering us with drops of water.

A large farmhouse stood in the midst of the trees. The lower part of its walls were of brick, the upper part of wood, and its roof was thatched. Its small windows were watching us menacingly, as fixedly and cunningly as if they had observed us from afar and were now glinting at us in malicious greeting. We were already quite close, yet there was not a soul to be seen. We were not sure why, but fear lay on our hearts.

“Well come on then, in God’s name,” ventured Tone hesitantly, and he went slowly forward.

Just then, a black form sprang out from somewhere, from the stable or the cart-shed, and headed straight for us. It was a large dog, but it was not barking: it leapt silently, like a cat. It took just a single leap, for the rope it was fastened to jerked it back so forcefully that it turned over on its back. Then it began to bark hoarsely and it rushed forward once

more. Tone had grabbed Hanca by the hand and she had fallen, but still he ran, dragging her with him across grass and stone and mud. Her bag came open and apples came tumbling out. Her loaf of cornbread also fell in the mud. In the midst of his flight Lojze stopped, turned, picked up the loaf and ran on. We fled until we could no longer see the house. We were out of breath and damp with sweat when we stopped. Hanca was covered in mud and her face and hands were scratched, but she did not cry. We did not want to look each other in the eye, nor to speak. Silent and sad, we carried on.

But the way was more and more dreary. Now the path led downwards, but was so steep and slippery that we kept falling. Once, when Lojze fell, he started to laugh, but became silent almost immediately, frightened at the sound of his own voice. The plain which stretched out below had seemed very close, just a few paces away; yet though we kept walking and falling, we never seemed to get any nearer, as if the plain were sinking lower and lower. Once, Tone turned and saw that Hanca was sitting behind in the mud. She was sitting there, gazing quietly in front of her.

“Well, Hanca?”

She stood up and we went on, always downwards. We were covered in mud to our knees, as if we were wearing thick grey stockings. It was all so wearying and sad, yet Lojze showed no sign of sadness. The way may be long and unpleasant, but there is an end to it somewhere . . . that beautiful land . . . We were scarcely thinking of prešce then, and it seems to me now that we had never really been thinking of them, not even from the beginning. There was something else within us and now, with sorrow, I can feel what it was . . .

The path descended into the valley in a wide curve and turned to the left, climbing onto the hills and falling, becoming lost behind a distant hill. To the right was a large open plain, quite deserted. It was covered with tall grass, criss-crossed by ditches and dotted with trees. We set off across it. We followed a narrow, muddy track, which was sometimes overgrown with grass, sometimes covered with deep puddles. We had not been walking long when we noticed that large pools like fish-ponds kept appearing, now on one side of the track, now the other. The water in the pools was clear and still, clumps of tall grass were growing from it and we could see grass growing beneath the surface, too . . .

“I’m afraid,” said Hanca from behind. And something stirred within me—the plain was so vast and so still. But no-one suggested that we turn back, nor did anyone think it . . .

Suddenly, we came to a point where the track was flooded, which we had not noticed before. Some planks had been laid across, but the water covered them and little wavelets were playing over them, making bubbles and causing the grass to quiver gently.

Lojze stepped onto one of the planks, but he dared not go further, because it immediately sank several inches beneath his weight. Tone turned, his face serious.

“Let’s go round it.”

He began to, but the ground gave way beneath him, the soft, slimy mud licking almost to his knees.

Lojze went further along the plank.

“If there are planks here, then this is the track. Why else would they have been put here?”

We all followed him, Tone glancing at Hanca and going last, right behind her. The planks sagged further, the water was splashing above our knees. When we were in the middle, I stumbled, because it suddenly seemed as if the whole plain was full of water and that the water was heaving and coming at us from all sides. But after the swaying and trembling, it was just a pool of water and we were already close to the other side.

We were walking wearily, with heads bowed; we did not notice the sky getting darker and darker. From east to west the clouds hung there, quite still, and when we reached the middle of the plain, it started to drizzle, making it seem even more dreary and gloomy—a funereal landscape. I could almost see the funeral procession moving across the plain, past the solitary trees, across the large, still pools of water, beneath the grey sky. It was moving silently, the black-clad mourners with heads bowed, the cross swaying to and fro before them . . .

We had been thinking that we could cross the plain, go round the hill which lay in the distance as if in a mist, and return by the big road which ran beyond it. But now everything had changed: the countryside was completely different and so were our thoughts. Lojze was staring straight ahead, his eyes rimmed with red. For now, in the midst of this funereal landscape, we felt as if we would never reach the end, as if we had strayed into an eternity where there was neither sound nor light. And the hill slumbering in the mist was definitely not the one beside the big road. The hill had been our hope, however slight and obscure; but now it was watching us sullenly from the distance. And the big road was nowhere to be found . . .

The plain had embraced and devoured us—like the pools of water and the muddy, slippery track; like the solitary tree which had lost its leaves so early; and like the rain, which was falling thinly and evenly from the grey sky.

We saw an oak tree which was still bushy green, the earth beneath it slightly raised. We went over to it and sat down in the wet grass. There was a deep, weary despondency within us. We did not speak, we did not look each other in the eye, for fear of crying. We sat for a long time, tiredness creeping upwards from our feet until it lay upon our whole

being and our eyes wanted to close. From above us came the soft rustling noise of tiny drops of water hitting the leaves . . .

We turned in surprise when Hanca got to her feet. She seemed strangely small and was bent over like an old woman, her mother's large shawl also making her look old.

"Aren't we going then?" she said, putting her bag on her shoulder.

In that moment she was bigger than us all and we placed our trust in her. We picked ourselves up and carried on, though our feet were clumsy and wooden.

The sky was coming lower and getting darker; it seemed to be glowering at us with big, dark eyes and we were afraid. The rain was falling more heavily, in thin straight lines. The pools of water were becoming larger and the ground was giving way more and more.

"We should have stayed where we were!" said Tone suddenly, looking at the ground.

Hanca almost shrieked:

"No! No! No!"

It was strange—she seemed to have understood the thought which he himself had scarcely understood. I saw that same thought in Lojze's eyes and felt how it had awoken in me, too . . .

There was a hollow rumbling, as if carts were rolling across a wooden bridge somewhere beyond the hill. We all knew what it was, but no-one said a word, only looked at the ground. Soon after, a burning white line appeared against the sky. It stood there quite still for a moment, then vanished, and behind the mountain there was more rumbling. Hanca crossed herself.

The hill we had been able to see to our right had disappeared. The sky had come very close, sinking almost to the tops of the solitary trees, and it was gathering all around us like the sea. Now there was nothing in the world but this silent plain.

We were walking in a different order now, with Hanca in front. She was walking with short, cautious steps, bent to the waist, holding her bag with both hands . . . She would probably walk this way forever, Hanca . . .

Then something strange passed through me. Tone, who was last, had stopped suddenly, his sack had fallen from his shoulder, and he had begun to cry out loud. His voice was strange, it seemed to spread across the plain; it sounded like a dog whimpering in the night. We all stopped; Lojze looked away and his lips moved as if he was about to speak. Hanca picked up Tone's sack and put it on her shoulder, beside her own. The load was now bigger than Hanca, yet she only needed to hold onto it with one hand—it rested easily on her bent back, it seemed to be sitting there laughing at us. She took Tone by the hand and we went on . . .

I do not know where Hanca is now. But the other day, I saw a

woman in patched and threadbare clothes, her still eyes looking out from a thin, consumptive face. She held a baby in her arms and two children were clinging to her skirt. Her body was bent as she went across the road with short, weary steps. She stopped on the corner, gazing somewhere into the distance . . . I thought it was Hanca . . .

We were cold, and wet through from the rain. A chill was rising from the flooded plain and pouring from the grey sky, filling our despondent hearts. And we were so afraid that we dared not look round. The idea of lying down in the mud, in a pool of water, and resting was becoming more and more attractive to me. Lojze and I looked at each other. At that moment, a strange sound made itself heard, as if a frail bell had begun to ring in the midst of the countryside. Hanca was saying her rosary. In an instant, we felt more at ease, our fears were somewhat calmed and our sense of sadness diminished. It was as if the countryside were saying a long, sad prayer.

We were silent when we came to the ditch. This was surely the end. The ditch was wide, and because of the rain it was full to the brim with muddy water, which was flowing quickly and throwing up large waves. A thick tree trunk, hardly shaped at all, had been placed across it; although it was round and slippery, there was nothing to hold on to. As we stood there, a sense of fear grew within us; it rose in our throats as if it would throttle us. I was trembling when Hanca stepped onto the trunk. She stepped onto it cautiously and went forward slowly, leaning slightly, placing her small, muddy feet as if she were pretending to walk on a tight-rope. Lojze went next and I followed him. We reached the other bank, though we were tired and our legs were shaking as if we had been trudging endlessly on a long, steep and terrible path. But Tone remained on the far side. He was looking at us vacantly, his arms hanging at his side as if they had died.

“Come on!” called Hanca.

Tone said something in reply and started forward, stepping onto the trunk so heavily that the water splashed across it. In two leaps he was on our side, but then he stumbled and fell.

“Let’s go on,” pleaded Hanca.

“Can’t you see there’s no end to it?” screamed Tone. “No end! No end!”

Nor was there. We had already been walking for so long, but were still in the same place. However much of the dreary plain closed behind us, the same amount opened up before us. Yes, it was strange: the land was walking with us. On every side, a large grey curtain had descended from the sky—it was confusing us, and we may have been walking in circles . . . Wherever we cast our eyes and however far our weary, timorous thoughts could go was only the dreary, silent plain; all the earth was a dreary plain and all of life. And we were walking in circles to

which there was no end . . . The track widened suddenly into a muddy, rutted cart-track.

“There’s the hill!” exclaimed Hanca.

A hill really had risen up on our right and on its summit we could see something white shining out from behind the trees. We quickened our step, our feet moving more easily, and Hanca straightened up a little. But from tiredness and sadness we were still timid and scared—our hearts were like captured sparrows, trembling because the hand which is to wring their necks is drawing near. When we caught sight of a ragged tramp coming along the cart track, we ran off across the meadow, past pools of water and over ditches . . .

But then it happened, like a miracle. A wide white road appeared before us and at the same moment the east was lit up by a rainbow, which rose from the earth to the sky like a triumphal arch. And beyond it, we could see something glowing—like a great white city, bathed in the rainbow’s clear light . . .

Our hearts expanded with a powerful yearning. Lojze’s eyes flashed as he yelled:

“Over there?”

For there was our goal. Now we recognized where our hearts wished to go when they were full of sadness. There was deliverance and a new life, the whole future was there . . .

We tried to walk but no, our feet would not move—they were fastened to a long rope which was drawing them back to the endless, dreary plain, where death was. We all stopped, even Hanca. Tone sat down on a milestone beside the road and lay his bag on the grass. Tone stood in the middle of the road, gazing with wide open eyes towards the great white city shining within the rainbow’s arc. But the rainbow was fading, the city too. Lojze hung his head . . . Back, back to the dreary plain!

We were so weary we could not go a step further. A sad ringing came from the hill, as if tolling for one who was dying. Lojze wanted to sit in the grass at the wayside to rest, but he knelt and then fell forward, face down. And I felt as if I were standing on a swing: the road and the hill were swaying, to and fro . . .

The rainbow had gone, and in the east the clouds had come together once more and it was raining. It seemed to me then that we were still in the middle of an endless, dreary plain and that we were walking . . . walking, but never reaching the end . . . And as we rode home on a rattling farm cart and we slept, I dreamt that we were still walking . . . walking across an endless, deathly landscape, but never reaching the end . . .

This is the event I remember in these moments of unconsolated and inconsolable longing.