

Blackberry Heaven: A Novel in Stories

The classroom¹

could have exploded: My name is Repko and I'm a little rabbit, brushing my teeth is my favorite habit, especially at night, after I've taken my last bite. I don't put cookies in my belly, my tail is kinda smelly, I live in a hole deep belooooow, my teeth are white-as-snoooow! Brushing Betka arrived for an unannounced classroom visit, and panic set in. Comrade Teacher said, get up, three, two, one, and together they began to yell-chant, brushing my teeth is my favorite habit, they let it rip and the helper of the week came to see where Comrade Teacher had gone, there was such a ruckus, I live in a hole deep belooooow, the helper turned around, oh, Brushing Betka, excuse me, my teeth are white-as-snoooow.

Brushing Betka was impressed by how well-behaved you are, all sound little pioneers, and Robi, who did not have a real mother, only a foster mom, yelled out, nuh-uh, not yet, and the teacher said, not yet what?, and he said, pioneers, we'll barely be pioneers by the end of the year. Brushing Betka smiled an awful lot, but since it's almost the end of the year, Comrade Teacher pulled herself together, oh, really, how quickly it flies by, and we have not even gotten to subtraction. Robi, who didn't have a real mother, just twelve half-brothers, grinned, Brushing Betka, we can't get ahead of ourselves, first Jesus must die and rise from the dead, and then there are name days, then there is May Day, Labor Day, then First Communion, and only after that will we become pioneers, in June, grinned Robi, who didn't have a real mother, only a foster mother and twelve half-brothers, come June everything will be over with. Comrade Teacher was uneasy, be quiet, brat, nothing will be over with, you say: it will be the end of the school year, and then we'll be on vacation.

Robi was not listening at all, he was sitting in the front row, staring at Brushing Betka, who hung two posters on the board. On one there were

¹ Kramberger (2020: 45–50).

Nebesa v robidah: Roman v zgodbah

Učilnica²

bi lahko eksplodirala: Sem Repko, zajček mlaaad, si zobke čistim raaad, posebno še zvečeer, po jedi venomeer. Mi za kolačke niiii, le repa mi dišiii, moj dom sta dol in breeeg, zobje kot-be-li-sneeeeeeeeg! Ščetka Betka je prišla na svoj nenapovedani obisk in v razredu je bila panika. Tovarišica je rekla, vstanite, tri štiri, in zdaj so recitirali, vsi skupaj, se drli, si zobke čistim raaad, tako so tulili, da je prišel šolski dežurni pogledat, kje je tovarišica, da je tak kraval, moj dom sta dol in breeeg, dežurni se je obrnil, ah, Ščetka Betka, oprostite, zobje kot-be-li-sneeeeeeeeg.

Ščetka Betka je bila navdušena, kako ste pridni, sami zdravi pionirčki, Robi, ki ni imel mame, samo rejnico, se je zadril, ni res, nismo še, kaj še niste?, pionirčki, komaj na koncu leta postanemo. Ščetka Betka se je na veliko nasmehnila, pa saj smo že skoraj na koncu leta, tovarišica se je prijela za glavo, joj, saj res, kako hitro mine, mi pa še sploh nismo vzeli odštevanja. Robi, ki ni imel mame, samo dvanajst polbratov, se je zarežal, Ščetka Betka, ne smemo prehitovati dogodkov, najprej mora še Jezus umret in od mrtvih vstat, potem pride žegnanje, potem prvi maj, praznik dela, potem prvo obhajilo in komaj potem postanemo pionirčki, junija, se je zarežal Robi, ki ni imel mame, samo rejnico in dvanajst polbratov, komaj junija bo vsega fertik. Tovarišici je bilo nerodno, boš tiho, froc, nič ne bo fertik, reče se, da bo konec, konec šolskega leta, in potem pridejo počitnice.

Robi je sploh ni poslušal, sedel je v prvi vrsti in gledal Ščetko Betko, ki je na tablo obesila dva plakata. Na enem so bila odprta usta z belimi zobmi,

² Kramberger (2007: 47–52).

open mouths with white teeth, and on the other there were cavities. The first one featured a toothbrush with pink toothpaste, bubble gum flavored, but two candies, cookies, and Kras animal kingdom chocolate bars were drawn in the worms' mouths. Robi raised his hand, Brushing Betka, the only thing more disgusting than chocolate is toothpaste! Comrade Teacher shook her head, be quiet, brat, toothpaste is not for eating, Robi said, if it's necessary, it's necessary, Brushing Betka didn't reply, just pulled a box with dental disclosing tablets from her bag.

The horror. You had to put the red tablet in your mouth and chew on it for a long time, until it completely dissolved, you had to use your tongue to rub it all over your teeth, up, down, left, right, so that your mouth was full of a sweet and bitter and cough syrupy taste, and if you hadn't brushed your teeth in a long time, the red color stuck everywhere. They turned to each other and showed off their tongues: red, teeth, white, pink, red, lips squeezed shut: red, come on, what are you ashamed of, show us how much stuck to you!

Brushing Betka walked up and down and opened mouths, plus, plus, minus, plus, oh goodness, when did you last brush your teeth, a black mark for you. They all turned to Robi, who smirked widely and was stained red from ear to ear, and his ears protruded from his head like a monkey's: what can I do if we run out of toothpaste at home. Brushing Betka pulled a brand-new toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste, raspberry flavored, from her bag. There was also a polishing paste with fluoride, twice a month for pearly whites. Robi immediately opened it and smelled it, Comrade Teacher, but this one really is not for eating, it smells like a billy goat.

There was another knock, and the photographer burst in, everybody in front of the school so we can get a picture. Comrade Teacher was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, what about subtraction, again we're going to get nothing done all day! Brushing Betka took her two posters off the board and stuck a paper with pluses, minuses, and Robi's black mark; the sheet hung next to the small printout of alphabet and the numbers up to one hundred until the end of the year, once someone crossed out all the names with a green marker, but Robi said it wasn't him, and no one else came forward.

Everyone in front of the school, on the grass, Comrade Teacher in the middle. But Comrade Teacher wasn't there because she was touching up her lipstick in the bathroom, tallest in the back, please. She sat with Natalija and Simona in the second row, beside Andreja and Tomaž. Comrade Teacher ended up standing right in the back, between the boys, and her lipstick glowed red. Robi also glowed red. He had not rinsed after taking the tablet from Brushing Betka, and when they got the photo back three days later, he was front and center, with a new polishing paste in his hand a red smile from ear to ear, and his ears protruded like a monkey's. Awesome!, he grinned proudly when he saw himself:

—Comrade Teacher and I both have swollen red lips! Like we kissed!

na drugem pa s samimi črvivimi. Na prvem je bila poleg zobna ščetka z roza zobno pasto, okus hubabuba, pri črvivih ustih pa sta bila narisana dva bombona, keksi in čokolada Životinsko carstvo. Robi je dvignil roko, Ščetka Betka, samo zobna pasta je bolj ogabna kot čokolada! Tovarišica ga je tresnila po nosu, boš tiho, froc, saj zobna pasta ni za jest, Robi je rekel, če je sila, je sila, Ščetka Betka pa ni rekla nič, samo iz torbe je privlekla škatlico s tabletkami.

Groza. Rdečo tabletko si moral dati v usta in jo gristi tako dolgo, da se je povsem raztopila, z jezikom si jo moral raznesti po vseh zobeh, gor, dol, levo, desno, da je bilo povsod polno okusa po sladkem in grenkem in sirupu proti kašlju, če si zob že dolgo nisi umil, se je rdeča barva prijela vsepovsod. Obračali so se drug proti drugemu in si kazali jezike: rdeče, zobe: bele, roza, rdeče, stisnjene ustnice: rdeče, daj, kaj te je sram, pokaži, koliko se ti je prijelo!

Ščetka Betka je hodila gor in dol in odpirala usta, plus, plus, minus, plus, ojoj, kdaj si jih pa ti nazadnje umil, črna pika. Vsi so se obrnili proti Robiju, ki se je na veliko rečal in bil poleg rdeč do uh, ki so mu štrlele kot opici: kaj naj, če pa nam je doma zmanjkalo paste. Ščetka Betka je iz torbe privlekla paket s čisto novo zobno ščetko in zobno pasto, okus malina. Poleg je bila tudi pasta za poliranje – dvakrat mesečno, za biserne zobe. Robi jo je takoj odprl in povohal, tovarišica, ta pa res ni za jest, smrdi ko pok.

Za povrh je potrkalo še enkrat in vletel je fotograf, vsi pred šolo, da se slikamo. Tovarišica je bila na robu živčnega zloma, kaj bo z odštevanjem, spet nam gre cel dan v nič! Ščetka Betka je s table vzela svoja dva plakata in na steno nalepila papir s plusi, minusi in Robijevo črno piko, do konca šolskega leta je list visel poleg male tiskane abecede in številčk do sto, enkrat je nekdo vsa imena prečrtal z zelenim flomastrom, ampak Robi je rekel, da ni bil on, od drugih pa se tudi nihče ni javil.

Vsi pred šolo, na zelenico, tovarišica v sredino. Tovarišice ni, ker se šminka na stranišču, kdor je največji, gre nazaj. Ona je z Natalijo in Simono sedela v drugi vrsti, poleg sta bila Andreja in Tomaž. Tovarišica je na koncu stala čisto zadaj, med samimi dečki, in šminka se ji je svetila rdeče. Tudi Robi se je svetil rdeče. Ni si splaknil tabletko Ščetke Betke, in ko so čez tri dni dobili fotografijo, je bil na njej spredaj v sredini, z novo pasto za poliranje v roki in z rdečim nasmehom do uh, ki so mu štrlele kot opici. Luksuz!, je ponosno vzkliknil, ko se je zagledal:

—Tovarišica in jaz z rdečimi tñablami! Ko da bi se kušovala!

In the photo

the class was unkempt and smiling, the boys laughing like Tom Sawyer in checkered terry cloth shirts, and the girls had painted their eyelashes with mascara and wore skirts or jeans with belts.

—You heard, right, that Zoki’s father said that the ladies look so young and fine in the photo that you can’t even tell which one is the teacher.

—You can tell that Zoki’s father hasn’t gone to parent-teacher conferences in a while.

—Only if you truly think, Comrade Teacher, you really are young.

No one was sitting in their seat, and everyone was talking too much, she was trying to think straight, but she ended up laughing out of exhaustion at the miserable pranks and with joy, now that her first class was coming to an end, she entered the class time in her gradebook and sat at her desk, enough, enough for now, doing things differently would not change anything.

Still no one sat in their seats, unknown objects were flying through the air, geraniums bloomed on the windowsills, and all of a sudden everyone looked at her too respectfully. She seized the moment, the youth work campaign to collect scrap metal is almost in place, but there is still a rusty trailer near Žvajkar, who will take care of it. Hren nodded, and Žmavc said he would stop by. I hope that will really happen sometime this week. Everyone looked at her too respectfully, completely peacefully, what was it, what was it again, flop, flop in an explosion of laughter.

Black and white photos of Slovenian writers hung on the walls of the classroom, Ingolič, Voranc, Cankar, Zofka Kveder, the only woman. She turned around, someone had pinned a mustache on Prešeren, a hideous, slimy mustache of indeterminate color, something between pink and diarrhea, flop, flop, an explosion of laughter, whiskers flying piece by piece on the ground, along Prešeren’s collar, over his shirt, over the laminate floor. For lunch, there was bread and fish because it was Good Friday and on Good Friday one must fast, Prešeren grew a beard, Zoki, how could you help, hideous, slimy and all over the wall, enough, enough now, let the helper clean it up immediately! What are we going to do with you, you are not serious, take a hike; and the helper wiped the fishy grease on the board with a rag, and it ended up spread out everywhere, a huge fish oil stain shone on the laminate floor, and Prešeren was nowhere to be seen. Prešeren’s facial hair, gloomy classroom air, yelled Žmavc, a perfect rhyme.

What are we going to do with you, you’re not serious, take a hike, no wonder the principal is keeping an eye on me, I don’t keep you on a short enough leash. What are we going to do to fix this, Žmavc, Hren, if you two want to fix biology, leave the stick-bugs in peace.

Razred

na fotografiji je bil skuštran in nasmejan, dečki so se režali kakor Tom Sawyer, v karirastih srajcah iz frotirja, dekleta so si namazala trepalnice in imela so krila ali kavbojke in pas.

—Ste čuli, Zokijev ata je rekel, da so na sliki vse deklince tako mlade in tako fejšt, da se sploh ne vidi, katera je učiteljica.

—Se vidi, da Zokijev ata že dolgo ni bil na govorilnih urah.

—Samo, če dobro pomislite, tovarišica, ste res mladi. Nihče ni sedel na svojem mestu in vsi so preveč govorili, skušala je dobro pomisliti, pa ji je šlo na smeh, od utrujenosti, od bednih štosov, od veselja, njena prva generacija, tik pred koncem, v redovalnico je vpisala razredno uro in sedla na kateder, zadosti, zdaj pa zadosti, drugače se ne bomo nič zmenili.

Še vedno nihče ni sedel na svojem mestu, po zraku so leteli neznani predmeti, na okenskih policah so cvetele pelargonije in naenkrat so jo vsi gledali preveč spoštljivo. Izkoristila je moment, akcija zbiranja starega železa je že skoraj na kraju, pri Žvajkarju pa še vedno stoji zarjavela prikolica, kdo bo to zrihtal. Hren je pokimal in Žmavc bo šel poleg. Upam, da res, še ta teden. Vsi so jo gledali preveč spoštljivo, čisto pri miru, čisto tiho, kaj je, kaj je že spet, flop, flop in salva smeha.

Na stenah učilnice so visele črno-bele fotografije slovenskih književnikov, Ingolič, Voranc, Cankar, Zofka Kvedrova, edina ženska. Obrnila se je, Prešernu je nekdo pripopal brke, ogabne zdrizaste brke nedoločljive barve, nekaj med roza in drisko, flop, flop, salva smeha, brki so kos za kosom leteli na tla, po Prešernovem ovratniku, po srajci, po steni, po laminatu. Za malico je bil kruh z ribjim namazom, ker je bil velikonočni petek in na velikonočni petek je post, Prešernu je zrasla brada, vidiš, Zoki, kako si lahko pomagaš, ogabno, zdrizasto in po celi steni, zadosti, zdaj pa zadosti, naj dežurni počisti, takoj!

Kaj naj z vami, saj niste resni, idite se solit, dežurni je s krpo za brisanje table čistil ribji namaz, da se je vse samo še bolj razmazalo, na laminatu se je zasvetil ogromen flek ribje maščobe in pol Prešerna se sploh ni več videlo. Prešernov brk, razredni mrk, se je zadril Žmavc, popolna rima.

Kaj naj z vami, saj niste resni, idite se solit, ni čudno, da me ravnatelj postrani gleda, ker vas ne držim zadosti na kratko. Kaj bomo naredili s popravnicami, Žmavc, Hren, če hočeta popraviti biologijo, pustita paličnjake pri miru.

—Comrade Teacher, oh come on, we were doing an experiment, three stick-bugs versus a red-eared turtle in its natural habitat.

—All right, that's it. Its natural habitat. And what is a stick-bug's natural habitat, Hren?

Zoki's father said that the ladies look so young and fine in the photo that you can't even tell which one is the teacher, you can see that Zoki's father hasn't gone to parent-teacher conferences in a while, only, if you really think about it, Comrade Teacher...

—Blackberries! The natural habitat of stickbugs is blackberries!

Two pretty bushes and nothing was clear to the turtle at all.

Still no one sat in their seats, unknown objects flew through the air, geraniums bloomed on the windowsills, and all of a sudden everyone looked at her too respectfully.

—Blackberries! But since... Hren, can you be so kind as to explain to your ignorant teacher why in God's name you two drew blackberries?!

—Oh, Comrade Teacher, that's no problem at all! The most beautiful blackberries are in your garden!

—Tovarišica, lepo vas prosim, če pa sva delala eksperiment, trije paličnjaki proti želvi rdečevratki v svojem naravnem okolju.

—A, to je to. Naravno okolje. Kaj pa je naravno okolje paličnjakov, Hren?

Zokijev ata je rekel, da so na sliki vse deklina tako mlade in tako fejšt, da se sploh ne vidi, katera je učiteljica, se vidi, da Zokijev ata že dolgo ni bil na govorilnih, samo, če dobro pomislite, tovarišica ...

—Robide! Naravno okolje paličnjakov so robide! Dva lepa grma in želvi ni bilo nič jasno.

Še vedno nihče ni sedel na svojem mestu, po zraku so leteli neznani predmeti, na okenskih policah so cvetele pelargonije in vsi so jo gledali preveč spoštljivo.

—Robide! Pa saj ... Hren, bodi tako dober in pojasni svoji nevedni razredničarki, od kod pri bogu sta potegnila robide?!

—Ah, tovarišica, to pa je res najmanjši problem! Na vašem vrtu so najlepše!