

## THREE SHORT STORIES BY PREŽIHOV VORANC

Translated by Irma M. Ožbalt\*

### THE FIRST LETTER

"Today we're going to write to Celovec," mother said one day, all of a sudden.

What she meant was that we'd have to write to my brother, the one who had left for Celovec a few weeks earlier in order to go to high school there. He had already written to us once, but we had not answered his letter yet.

The writing was delegated to me, of course; due to the fact that I had been going to school for a few years already, I was considered the most literate person in our household. It was unthinkable to expect that my father should write the letter. When he was young, he did not go to school; however, later on he learned how to read and write a little on his own. He read very slowly, stringing syllables one after another, but he read quite well; writing, however, was much more difficult for him. He would stop after each letter, twisting and turning the pen in his hand, figuring out how to shape a particular letter; when he finally began to put it down, he was breathing noisily, as if in the process of lifting a terribly heavy weight. Before he had put down a complete word, his forehead was bathed in sweat.

As for our mother, she was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, and when she was very young, she went to school. In those days there was no proper school in our part of the country, really; the little pupils were taught by the local parish clerk. He was, they say, a very strict teacher; he always paced the classroom with a stick in his hand. Every month, mother had to bring this teacher twenty kreutzers for her lessons. After a year or so of this schooling, my mother lost her mother, and that brought her education to an end. She had to take over all the housework, take the cows out to pasture, and generally worry about everything except her schooling. Whenever mother remembered her schooldays, she would sigh,

"Why oh why didn't they let me finish school? I certainly wouldn't have to work so hard now if I had finished school. . ."

In spite of that, my mother wrote with much greater ease than my father; and she was especially good at reading. On winter evenings she would read to the whole family from the books distributed by the St. Mohor Society, and she could read so well that the events in the stories came vividly to life in our imagination, so much so that we, the children especially, sometimes hardly dared to breathe while listening to her.

By that time I, of course, was already quite good at writing at school; yet, when confronted with my mother's order, I broke out into a sweat. I had never written any kind of letter in my life, and they did not teach us anything like that at school. I began frowning and making faces, trying to get myself out of the jam. But my mother cut all of this short by saying,

"You'll write, and I'll help you!"

It was on a Sunday afternoon that we undertook the chore of writing that first letter. In our house, Sunday afternoons were always filled with some kind of solemnity, some sort of all-embracing peace. When the sun shone on our house, this feeling was even more pronounced. This particular afternoon, when we were getting ready to write our first letter to the brother who lived in a far-away city, the atmosphere was solemnity itself. Full of anguish, I pompously took my position at the table, which mother had wiped clean for the

occasion. Father was lying on his back on the bed by the wall. In his hands he was holding his "Mir", a weekly magazine published in Celovec, pretending to be absorbed in reading. But he wasn't. He was so exhausted that he had dozed off the moment he lay down. My two younger brothers were sitting on the bench beside the stove and staring fearfully towards the table on which a page of white writing-paper gleamed. In the middle of the table squatted a bottle of ink with a pen stuck into it. Mother was sitting on a bench by the window, not too close to the table, with her arms crossed in front of her, as was her habit. This habit she had learned from her parents, who were prominent farmers and who always cradled their arms in this manner; although she was now the wife of an ordinary tenant farmer, she retained this habit. She was sitting there with her face bright, full of hope. Only one person was missing in the family room, and that was our grandmother, who had withdrawn into the kitchen; we could hear only the clatter she was making in there. Even though our Grandma was very much part of our family, she always withdrew from the family gathering when something particularly serious or important was being discussed; she thought she shouldn't intrude upon us on such occasions.

"Now get going, and see that you write neatly, so your brother will be happy when he reads it. . .," mother said after a while.

I had in the meantime dipped the pen into the ink three times already, waiting for instructions. Once already the ink had dripped from the pen, but to my great relief it did not drip on the paper but on the table beside it. Mother got up, wiped the table clean, and sighed:

"Watch out you don't mess up the letter," and then she added, "All right, now write." And she started to dictate:

"Dear Son, . . ."

I bent over and wrote these two words, but I was not very pleased with my accomplishment. My letters were clumsy, my writing much worse than usual. Mother got up and glanced at the paper. She, too, noticed my poor penmanship and she said reproachfully,

"Come on, try to write a little better, what will he think, over there in Celovec. . . ?"

But mother did not have an easy time with her dictation, either. Only after a pause did she continue,

"I am taking the pen in my right hand and I am sending this message to you over hill and dale, to that far-away city of Celovec, hoping that this our letter finds you in good health and fortune, as your last letter found us here. . ."

My hand was shaking pretty badly while I was putting down mother's flowery words; this was due less to their warmth than to the fact that mother stood right by me and supervised my writing with a hawk's eye. For this reason it took me much longer to write down her sentence than it would have taken me at school. My hesitation did not escape my mother, so she prodded me,

"Have you done it yet?"

"I have!" I whispered.

"Go on, write," she said, and resumed,

"Here at home, everything is as usual, only we all miss you very much, especially me, your mother. Father also misses you. . ."

"I miss him, too," I offered. It was true: my brother's departure weighed heavily on me, even though we had argued and fought every day when he was at home.

"We miss him too," chimed in my two little brothers, who were sitting by the stove.

"Well, then, just put down what you said," mother suggested.

I was more than ready to write what I had said, but that was easier said than done. My heart was filled with some sort of uneasiness, and I just didn't know how to put down on paper either my own or my little brothers' feelings. Again my mother came to my rescue; she dictated,

"We, your brothers, miss you too. . ."

As soon as I had put these words down onto the paper, the anguish lifted from my heart and I felt warm and comfortable all over. Mother continued her dictation,

"It is still nice and sunny on our mountain. The winter wheat is still fresh and green, and Daisy's just had a fine calf. Too bad you're not home right now. . ."

I kept writing away eagerly, since the message was exactly what I had in my heart. Then, all of a sudden, father, who had been pretending to be asleep, burst out furiously,

"What are you writing all this garbage for? Couldn't you tell him that he should study hard, so we won't be throwing money down the drain. . .?"

Father glanced at all of us in the room, and from his eyes I could read that he was very serious about the whole business. Yearly tuition fees came to over two hundred crowns, money that father had to earn with his bare hands.

Father's words provoked a slight flush on my mother's face. His outburst seemed to have hurt her feelings. But the reaction passed in a minute, and father soon dozed off again, his face covered with his "Mir." Now we were really alone. Mother resumed her dictation,

"If you need anything, you must let us know. If you are hungry, we will send you some bread and apples. Have they started heating your place yet, since the nights are getting colder? Now, I must tell you also that you should study hard; your knowledge will be useful to you later on in your life, and you won't have to work as hard as we do for a living. This is why we've sent you off to school. Your father is telling you this, and I am too, and your brothers also. . ."

I was writing fast, and the letter was drawing to an end. Then suddenly the door opened, and our Grandma came into the room. She stopped in the middle of the room, looked first at my mother, then at my father, and finally at the two little boys by the stove, and said,

"Write also for me, tell him I send him my good wishes. . ."

When she said this, the expression on her face was one of quiet compassion, and when she was leaving the room she turned and said from the door,

"It's not easy for a young boy like that to live away from home. . ."

When she had closed the door, mother quickly told me,

"Write that Grandma sends him good wishes too. . ."

Grandma had waited till all of us, all the members of our family, had told our brother in Celovec what was on our minds, and only then did she take her turn. This was our Grandma's humility, the humility that warmed our hearth for nearly a quarter of a century.

After Grandma had gone back to the kitchen, mother said quickly,

"Put it down fast: Grandma, too, sends her love. . ."

When all this had been committed to paper, mother leaned against the wall as if catching her breath. I had already turned the page. While at the beginning I had had a lot of trouble, towards the end I was becoming quite speedy. Then mother asked,

"Is there anything else to write. . .?"

She looked around the room, and since no-one answered anything, she said,

"Well, then, finish it!"

I didn't know how to finish, so she finished it for me:

". . . now I entrust this letter to a little bird, and she will take it away in her little beak,

and she will carry it from our mountain to that far-away city, and she will lay it on your white pillow, on which your dear head is resting. . . Your mother and your family.”

I uttered a deep sigh of relief; the letter was finally finished. Then something horrible happened. While I was shaping the last few words, a huge drop of ink fell from my pen onto the white paper, and the stain spread until it covered half a line of my writing. I moaned in fear. Mother came running, but she could do nothing but stare at that huge stain on the paper.

“Oh, you miserable wretch, look what you have done!” she screamed at me.

I was so frightened that I stopped breathing, but I couldn't do a thing: the letter was spoiled.

“I'll write another letter,” I began to plead beseechingly.

That was easier said than done, because mother had brought from the store only one piece of writing paper and one envelope. We didn't have any other stationery in the house. I panicked; but my mother didn't.

“Where's your blotting paper?” I did, indeed, possess a blotter; it was in my school-bag, and I jumped to get it, and then pressed it over the page. But I could not get rid of the stain; the blotter only made the mess worse, spreading it more before it started to absorb the ink. Now there was a huge black seal on the letter, and it spoiled everything. The ink had splashed right over the spot where it said,

“. . .and she will lay it on your white pillow. . .”

I was really ashamed, and I am sure a tear of shame dropped from my eye, even though now I don't remember exactly. Mother was sad too. Three times she took the letter in her hands and lifted it to read against the light of the window. Finally, she said with resignation,

“Well, one can read it all right, but I'd have never believed you were such a messy scribbler. You'll never write books, that's for sure. . .”

Now it was time to tackle the envelope and the address. Mother told me over and over to be careful not to spoil the address, because the post office would surely not accept a letter like that, and besides, my brother in Celovec would be embarrassed if the others saw him receive such a letter.

The address was in my brother's letter, and it only had to be copied. This wasn't such a big deal. So I very cautiously dipped the pen into the ink and began writing as neatly as I could with my clumsy hand. Mother was bending over me during this process, dictating a pretty tricky address. There were some numbers, of some rooms or maybe some departments. When I had all this down on paper quite nicely, there came the last word, *Klagenfurt*. This was the German name for our Celovec, and my brother had been most likely ordered to put down the German name. I was just about to start the capital K, when my father suddenly made a noise from his bed,

“Nope, you're not going to write any German name. Write 'Celovec'. . .!”

I held my pen in the air and looked at my mother. At first she was a little startled, but then she said,

“What does it matter whether it's Celovec or Klagenfurt! The main thing is that the boy gets the letter. He'd surely have a reason for sending us the German name. . .”

My father was a determined Slovene, and even though he was a very poor man he never gave in to the Germans and their pressure. Mother, on the other hand, was born in a home where they had always been able to conduct their affairs in such a manner that nobody was offended. She was a wonderful mother, but in these things she was easy-going and apathetic.

Father, however, persisted stubbornly,

“If it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter, and it will be all right if you write ‘Celovec.’ Aren’t we all equal? If we’re not, why are we paying the same taxes? No, definitely not, you are not going to write ‘Klagenfurt’ . . .”

He got so heated-up with his own speech that he sat up on the bed and started throwing threatening glances towards the table.

“And if the boy doesn’t get the letter. . .?” mother protested mildly.

“You are never going to write ‘Klagenfurt’, even if your brother never gets a letter from us. He will finish school in spite of that.”

That the was the end of our dispute. Father said,

“Write now: ‘Celovec’ . . .”

Since he stared at me without blinking, I had to start writing at once. The letter had a Slovene address.

Mother’s caution was very well justified. In those days, it often happened that the post office wouldn’t deliver letters with Slovene addresses. But our father couldn’t care less.

“If only it gets there. . . ?” Mother expressed her doubts once again. But father couldn’t hear her any more: he had already flopped back onto his bed and was already snoring.

After that she took the letter in her hands and read it over. While reading, she kept blushing like a child. I stared at her with apprehension, afraid that she was going to find another error. She didn’t find anything, but she was not pleased with the letter: not only was it stained with ink, it was also covered with my dirty finger-prints. Finally she folded the letter in half and placed it inside the envelope with as much respect as if she were putting a big treasure into it.

The following morning I took to the post office the very letter with which our father began his battle for our Celovec.

## SQUISHED CREEPO

In our part of the country we have this bad habit of giving people nicknames. Mocking, humiliating, abusive, and sometimes quite stupid nicknames. Occasionally nicknames like these can be quite witty, but sometimes they are stupid and make no sense.

We started giving each other nicknames at school, when we were still very young. Who knows why we did it. People were then stuck with those nicknames until their dying day. The real name was forgotten, and only the nickname was known and recognized.

I remember a little boy; he was my age, and we were schoolmates all those years. He was an orphan and he lived with his foster parents, who were rich farmers. He looked like a little tiny ball, and was all white. His hair was white, his eyebrows were white, his skin was white; and since he was also dressed in homespun linen clothes, which were white when freshly laundered, he looked like a snowball. The image of this white boy forms a vivid part of my childhood memories. And part of these memories is his strange, meaningless nickname. We called him ‘Squished Creepo’. In spite of the fact

that this name had no meaning, we all called him that. The only thing we knew was that the name contained something scornful and offensive. The stress was on 'Creepo': it meant something strange, something wicked, something that could be connected with some evil spirit. The first part, 'Squished', probably referred to his tiny, hunchbacked figure.

The boy got very angry when called by his nickname. And strangely, in spite of his insignificance, the boy could get so threateningly mad that even much bigger and stronger-boys were afraid of him. I was the only one in our class of whom he himself was afraid; he could handle all the others. Whenever he heard someone call him by his nickname, he shuddered as if he had just swallowed a bone. He never protested in public, aloud; but woe to the one who had called him by that name! He would lie in wait for days, and when he finally caught the culprit, he would give him a thrashing.

Whenever we played 'hawk-and-chickens', he was always the hawk. If a chicken provoked him with his nickname, he would chase it as long as it took to catch it, and then he would pummel it so hard that it would often start screaming for help. And exactly because his schoolmates knew how sensitive he was about his nickname, they kept provoking him even more.

One day, he was again playing the hawk. I was a chicken, and he was chasing me along a brook that flowed among some alders. In our chase we gradually got further and further away from the other children. I had long legs, and it was no problem for me to jump over the stream; he, on the other hand, could not do that. Whenever he propelled himself across the water, he usually fell right in with a splash. Each time I roared with laughter, which made him all the more furious.

"Yeah-yeah, yeah-yeah, yeah-yeah!" I chanted on the other side of the brook. This childish taunting hurt him a lot.

Then, suddenly, the white boy threw himself angrily across the water, crawled up the bank on my side, and would have caught me if at the last moment I had not jumped aside and sprung to the other side of the brook again. His speed and agility had given me quite a fright. Now I yelled towards him,

"Squished Creepo, jump to this side if you can!" and I repeated it a few more times, "Squished Creepo, Squished Creepo!"

At that point, my words must have conveyed more ill-will than playful roguishness. The white ball on the other side of the brook felt it too. Suddenly it came to a standstill behind an alder and stopped chasing me. The white sleeves of his homespun shirt stopped flapping in the air.

"Jump, Squished Creepo!" I called once more across the water.

But the white ball wouldn't budge. It collapsed behind an alder, the white face hidden by some bushes, so that I couldn't quite distinguish it. It looked as if he might have sprained his ankle or stepped on a nail. I became worried.

"What's wrong?" I called to the other bank, my voice full of compassion.

There was no answer from the other side.

I couldn't stand it any longer; I jumped across the brook, and when I came up to the white ball I said,

"What's happened to you, Cencilj?"—I called him by his real name.

The shouting of our playmates down the stream was getting further and further away, and we were quite alone.

The the white boy lifted his face and looked at me. I saw that his eyes were brimming with pale tears, and that those eyes were filled with pain. I caught his barely audible words,

“Why do you call me ‘Squished Creepo’, too?”

His voice was bitter, such as I had never heard coming from his mouth before. It was a voice neither of pleading, nor of prayer, nor of cursing. I could hear another strain in that voice. It seemed to me that he had been saying,

“Why you, too? Why are you calling me names, why ‘Squished Creepo’? It’s surely just because I am a poor orphan, and because nobody cares for me. . .”

He was squatting there behind those bushes, a small, helpless ball. His homespun attire was covered in big patches, sown there not by a mother’s hand, but by a stranger’s.

Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by a great compassion for him. Something tore in my heart, and only now was I able to squeeze his hand and declare feverishly,

“Cencilj, I’ll never ever call you that name again.”

My words must have sounded like an oath.

The little white boy looked at me, his eyes filled with disbelief. He kept examining my face. I must have convinced him that I was telling the truth, that I was speaking from my heart, because after a while he touched my hand and whispered in such a low voice that I could barely hear him,

“Are you sure you’ll never call me that again?”

“Never again, Cencilj!” I told him once more, and now I felt much better. Then I quickly added: “And if anyone else calls you by that name I’ll beat him up, you can bet on it.”

Holding hands, we left the lonely spot together, and after a while joined our friends who were playing by the brook lower downstream. There was not a shadow between the two of us any more.

Quite a few of our schoolmates felt my fists after that day, every time they came up with the nickname ‘Squished Creepo.’

## GOOD MORNING

In our village we had a *utraquistic*<sup>1</sup> school, that is, a bilingual school in which the language of instruction was Slovene in Grade One, while from Grade Two it was German. Slovene remained one of the subjects, but it was given only if enough students registered for it. If the number was not sufficient, our school remained bilingual only on paper. Most of the teachers at our school were servile, pro-German toadies, and so they made sure that they never had enough students for the Slovene class. Schooldays usually ended at four in the afternoon, but the Slovene class was scheduled from four to five. By then the children were already tired; besides, many of them had to hurry home and either take the cows out to pasture, or do some other chores around the farm, and so they never stayed for the Slovene period.

In addition to all of this, the teachers had other ways of making the study of Slovene repugnant. They took every opportunity of telling the children that they should work hard at learning German, a language that would open all doors for them when they grew up. They would find easier and better jobs. Slovene got you nowhere. If you couldn’t speak anything but Slovene, you would never be more than a farmhand or a laborer. Such continuous propaganda was, of course, bound to leave imprints on the children’s minds. However, the children were not the only ones to be affected; in many cases the propaganda influenced their parents as well. And, to tell the truth, our everyday existence was a living

proof that the teachers were right. The Slovene language really did not get you anywhere in those days, when they were trying to suppress it wherever they could.

And so it often happened that I was the only student at my Slovene class. My father gave me strict orders to attend the Slovene hour, no matter what. If I hadn't obeyed him, he would have given me a licking. The teacher, though, was not prepared to bother with a single student. In this way, the bilingualism of our school ceased on its own, and the authorities achieved their goal.

One day we got a new teacher, who didn't know or pretended not to know Slovene, even though he had a Slovene name. Until that time, the children in our school had been saying their prayers and greeting people in Slovene, but the arrival of the new teacher put an end to all that. First, we had to learn how to pray in German, before and after classes. We learned that in a few days. After that, we started to practise German greetings. We had long drills:

“Dobro jutro—Guten Morgen!”

“Dober dan—Guten Tag!”

“Dober večer—Guten Abend!”

We walked past the teacher in single file, greeting him in German. When we became good at it, he praised us and said,

“Well, now you've finally become human beings.”

But on the street the German greetings did not come as easily as inside the classroom. We, of course, immediately began greeting all the teachers in German. But it was quite another matter when we met people that we knew, our fellow villagers. In such situations the German words just wouldn't come. We were sort of embarrassed to greet our own people in German. As time went by, however, we became slowly accustomed to the German salutations. As for me, I was in an extremely difficult position. At home, father ordered me to greet anyone on the street in Slovene and never in German. He threatened me with the whip if I should disobey him.

“The teacher has no right to boss you around on the street!” he yelled at me. “You obey him in school, but on the street you don't have to!” At school, on the other hand, I constantly got into trouble with the teacher, who always found out immediately if one of his charges disobeyed his orders outside school. Sad to say, he had his spies among the young students themselves, who fawned on him and informed on their peers. In a word, the schooling had reached its aim. In about half a year all the students in our school were greeting people left and right in German, in spite of the fact that our community was entirely Slovene, with only two German families living among us. If a stranger came to our village, he surely got the impression that the place was entirely German.

I, too, finally became infected by the new things I had learned at school, and that in spite of the fact that at home father roared against them as loudly as ever. By that time, I was already smart enough to figure out which of our fellow villagers sided with the Germans and which with the Slovenes. If I met a Slovene, I greeted him in Slovene, and if I came upon someone pro-German, I regularly saluted him in German.

This shows how I, too, became a human being, and the Carinthian school could now claim an absolute victory.



One morning I was taking our cattle out to pasture. At that time I was impregnated with the new spirit and the progressive thinking of our school. It was probably only about four o'clock in the morning, and the valleys below were still covered with a layer of thick fog. The ground was saturated with dew, and since I was barefoot, I was shivering. Every morning it was my job to see that the cattle had eaten their fill before I left for school. These early hours were very hard on me, and this morning I trudged behind the beasts half asleep and in a bad mood. Luckily, the animals were drowsy as well; they did not pay much attention to their surroundings, docilely sticking to their accustomed route. Slowly they made their way towards the pasture land, some eight head of them, I believe. Apart from the heavy footfall of the animals' hooves, no other sound could be heard, only some roosters crowing somewhere in the distance.

Then, suddenly, on the path in front of me, I caught sight of an apparition that did not fill me with joy at all. The apparition was nothing but a smartly dressed man with a raincoat draped over his shoulders, and he was slowly marching towards me. To meet a well-dressed, distinguished-looking man at such an early hour was more than unusual. What on earth was he doing here? Was he perhaps on his way to our house? I tried in vain to figure out what could have brought this fine gentleman onto my lonely path.

I wasn't through figuring out this problem yet, when something else hit me. I would have to greet this man. There was no way out, I would have to greet him! But how—in Slovene or in German? I was caught in the vice between my training at school and my training at home. The stranger looked unmistakably German. Perhaps he was from the nearby summer resort and was taking an early walk. Everyone knew that these holiday-makers didn't have all their marbles. But what if the stranger happened to be Slovene? What was I to do? I couldn't make up my mind; in spite of all the school training I had had, I was still embarrassed to greet anyone in German.

The distance between me and the stranger was growing shorter. The closer he came, the more confused I was. Why oh why hadn't I jumped into the bushes below the road as soon as I had noticed him? Reproaching myself didn't help me, and it was too late to do anything. It wouldn't be terribly polite to take off now. I had only one hope left: maybe at the last moment the stranger would move away from the road in order to avoid the cattle; but this hope, too, went down the drain. The stranger stayed put, while the beasts gave him a wide berth as they continued on their way. Now we were already quite close. Waves of fever shot through me. On top of that, I was terribly conscious of my inferiority; the stranger was so nicely dressed, and I was a poor little boy, and barefoot at that. I must have been blushing to the roots of my hair when we met. And then I uttered, mechanically,

“Guten Morgen. . . !”

My voice was solemn, servile, my greeting accompanied by the heavy pounding of my heart. The stranger would be very pleased, I thought, and a warm feeling made me feel good all over.

But suddenly the whole world collapsed around me. The stranger turned his head and looked me straight in the eyes. His eyes piled humiliation and condemnation on me. In a strong, distinct voice he returned my greeting in Slovene:

“Good morning, young man!”

I had the feeling I had been hit on the head. I nearly fainted on the spot with shame. I felt so totally humiliated that I wanted to sink into the ground, all the way down to hell. I gasped for breath like a man on the verge of drowning.

The stranger continued on his way, but I didn't dare follow him with my eyes. I could hardly wait for the echo of his footsteps to die down on the slope leading towards our house.

Immediately I began to worry that the stranger might be going to our house on some sort of business and that he might tell my father that I had greeted him in German. This would cost me a few lashes with the whip. But the shame that I had brought on myself gnawed at me more than the fear of my father. I admitted to myself that I had merited all the punishment that might be meted out to me.

The humiliation which I had just experienced was a radical and immediate lesson to me; it taught me how very right my father was when he thundered against the German greetings perpetrated by our school. I realized that I, too, had fallen for the new fashion, whose aim was to alienate me from my heritage. I knew now that in an important moment I had betrayed myself, my origin, and my home. If I hadn't done it, if I had obeyed my father, I would never have experienced this great shame. My behavior was despicable. I had been taught a lesson by a stranger, who was not a stranger at all, but a man of our stock, a man who was not ashamed to say a greeting in Slovene even when dressed in his Sunday best.

After I had clearly figured all this out, I sighed deeply, and inside me something heavy and disgusting peeled off and floated away from me. Now I was able to breathe much easier. I squeezed the last traces of anguish out of my heart, I clenched my fists, and swore to myself,

“My nation, my people, never again in my life will I betray you. . . !”

My oath was accompanied by the dawn of a bright new morning in the eastern skies, a morning which for me, in spite of the enormous shame I had just suffered through, was a hundred times brighter, a hundred times more magnificent than any morning of my life till then.

PSC Language Training, Montreal, Quebec

### Editor's note:

\*Irma Ožbalt is the translator of Prežihov Voranc's *Samorastniki*: Prežihov Voranc, *The Self-Sown: Bilingual Edition of a Slovene Classic* (New Orleans: Prometej, 1983). Her translations of six of his stories from *Solzice* were published in *The Voice of Youth* 1980/6, 1981/1, 1982/5, 1983/Oct.-Dec., 1984/May, and *Prosveta*, May 28, 1985. The present translations are from Prežihov Voranc, *Solzice* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1968): “Prvo pismo” (105-112), “Potolčeni kramoh” (77-80) and “Dobro jutro” (69-74).

### Translator's note:

1. For details of the utraquistic school system, which lasted (in some form) from 1872 to 1959, see Thomas M. Barker, *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 73-74 and the notes referred to there.