

IVAN CANKAR

OB ZORI

**ŽIVLJENJE IN SMRT
PETRA NOVLJANA**

**HIŠA MARIJE
POMOČNICE**



**V LJUBLJANI 1927
ZALOŽILA NOVA ZALOŽBA**

Ivan Cankar (1876–1918)

Of the four major writers of the Slovene Moderna, Cankar was the most prolific, in poetry, theater and prose. Much of his life he spent in Vienna, chronicling the ills of the metropolis and sharing in them. His denunciations of middle class and clerical hypocrisy and his exploration of heretofore taboo themes caused him many problems: his first book of poetry, *Erotika* (1899), was, for example, bought up and burned by the bishop of Ljubljana, who thought it too racy. Cankar died just a few days after the proclamation of the "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes." Though he championed Slovene independence all his life, his intolerance of social injustice would no doubt have made him a renegade in the first Yugoslavia as well. Among his most moving novelas is *Hiša Marije Pomočnice* (1904, *The Ward of Our Lady of Mercy*), excerpted here from the translation by Henry Leeming (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1976) 50–64. The original text is from Ivan Cankar, *Zbrani spisi*, vol. 6 (Ljubljana: Nova založba, 1927).

Hiša Marije Pomočnice

IV

Dobile so kanarčka. Ves majhen je še bil in neumen in zmerom ga je bilo strah; tudi pel še ni nič.

“Babica je!” je menila Pavla.

“Kako bo babica!” je ugovarjala Lojzka. “Saj sem pogledala precej!”

“Kako pa se pozna, da ni babica?” je vprašala Malči. “Zadaj mu odpihnem perje, pa pogledam... Čakaj, ti pokažem!”

Kletka je bila na mizi, Lojzka je odprla vratica, toda kanarček je kričal, cvilil pretresljivo, kakor da bi prosil milosti.

“No, pusti ga! Pa naj bo babica!” se je vdala Pavla. “Ni ga treba dražiti, zbolel bo!”

Sestra Cecilija je obesila kletko na zid ob okno prav poleg Malčine postelje, tako da je škropilo Malči na posteljo in v obraz, kadar se je kanarček umival.

“Ej, ti, Hanzek, zakaj me škropiš?” se je smejala Malči in nevoščljive so ji bile, da je škropil nanjo in da se je pogovarjala z njim.

Hanzek je študiral; gledal je z živimi črnimi očmi po sobi, kakor da bi opazoval ter se čudil. In kolikor bolj je opazoval, tem manj ga je bilo strah. Če se je približala roka, Rezike ali Malči drobna roka, se je najprej umaknil ter gledal napeto. Nato je polagoma iztegal vrat, odpiral kljun in oči so zadobile nekako sovražno svetlobo. Zmerom bolj se je iztegoval vrat, perje na vratu in na glavi se je šopirilo, ježilo, perotnice so zamahovale, najprej nalahko, potem zmerom bolj hitro in srditohreščeč glas je prišel iz tankega grla, kakor da bi brusil britev ob pili.

“Zakaj pa se jeziš, Hanzek?” se je hudovala Malči. “Saj vidiš, da ti dajem vode! Kaj ne maraš vode?”

Hanzek se je malo ozrl, malo je pobrcal z nogo; videl je, da so mu res prinesli vode in polagoma se je umiril; samo časih je še malo poškilil, nezaupen je bil; ni se bil še privadil vseh peterih prstov in razjezilo ga je posebno, če se je zganil debeli palec, ki ni sodil k ostalim štirim. Ko se je potolažil, je poniknil glavo globoko v vodo, stresal se je ter škropil na vse

The Ward of Our Lady of Mercy (Excerpt)

Chapter IV

And now they had a canary. It was still just a tiny mite, silly and afraid of its own shadow. So far there hadn't been a cheep out of it.

"It's a she!" Paula said.

"Not on your life!" Lois insisted.

"After all I had a good look! How can you tell that it isn't a she?" asked Malchie.

"I blow up his back feathers, then I can see. Just a moment, I'll show you. See." The cage was on the table but when Lois opened the door the canary screeched and twittered frantically, as if begging for mercy.

"Never mind, leave him alone. It doesn't matter anyway," Paula said.

"You mustn't torment him, you'll hurt him!" Sister Cecilia hung the cage on the wall by the window right beside Malchie's bed, so that when the canary was washing himself he splashed Malchie's face and bedclothes too.

"Hey, Johnny, what are you splashing me like that for?" Malchie laughed and the others were jealous, seeing him splash her and hearing her talking to him.

Johnny began to get his bearings. He looked round the room with his bright black eyes, as if he was weighing things up and was astonished at what he saw.

But the more he saw, the bolder he became. If a hand approached him, Rezika's, say, or Malchie's tiny hand, he would first of all jump and then watch apprehensively. Then he slowly stretched out his neck, opened his beak and a hostile glint appeared in his eyes. He stretched his neck out even further and flapped his wings, while the feathers on his neck and head bristled and stood on end.

Slowly at first, then more and more quickly, an angry squaking sound came from the little throat, like someone sharpening a razor on a saw.

"Why are you so angry, Johnny?" Malchie complained. "Can't you see I've got some water for you? Don't you want your water?"

Johnny had a quick look round and kicked out with one leg. He saw that they had in fact brought him some water, so he gradually calmed down. But still he was not very confident and looked at them suspiciously from time to time. He was not yet used to seeing all five fingers at once and he was especially upset by the movement of a thumb, which in his opinion had nothing to do with the other four fingers. When he settled down again he plunged his head deep in the water, shook himself and splashed every-

strani. Skočil je potem na zgorenji klin, bil je kakor nepočesan, ves moker in skuštran,—smejale so se mu; on pa se je le stresal ter se ni ozrl nikamor.

“Ali te ni sram, Hanzek?” mu je zaklicala Malči. Poškilil je malo, nato pa se je sklonil, vtaknil je v kljun dolgi tenki krempelj ter si je čistil nogo in kljun, oboje hkrati, in nič ga ni bilo sram.

Polagoma je spoznaval, bistril se mu je razum. Uvidel je, da ni veliko nevarnosti na svetu. Kadar so mu odprle vratica, je poskočil najprvo na prag ter se je oziral naokoli. Nič tujega, neznanega se ni prikazalo, nič nenavadnega se ni zgenilo v sobi. Zafrfotal je in je sfrfotal Malči na glavo, na mehke plave lase. Malči je sklonila glavo, prijetno ji je bilo in smejala se je. Nato je vzdignila roko, pomigala je s prsti. Kanarček je skočil na roko in obšla ga je čudovita, nepoznana slast. Iztegnil je vrat, perje se je našopirilo, perotnice so frfotale in stopical je in plesal z drobnima nogama ter pel s čistim, veselja in hrepenenja polnim glasom.

Gledale so to lepo čudo s strmečimi očmi, ali v Lojzki se je vzbudila zavist.

“Daj ga z roke, Malči, poginil bo!”

Malči se je prestrašila, stresla je z roko in kanarček je odletel. Precej se je umiril, malo se je še stresel, pobrskal s kljunom po perju pod perotnicami in pod vratom, nato pa je zobal mirno, kakor da bi se nič ne bilo zgodilo.

Ali kakor se je privadil sobe, dvomov se ni otresel in tudi strahu ne. Zgenilo se je kdaj, oglasilo se čudno in ves se je preplašil. Temne nevarnosti so prežale iz vseh kotov in lahko bi se pripetilo, da bi poseglo nenadoma nekaj velikega in črnega od tod, od ondod, poseglo ter se približalo bliskoma; vztrepetal je, skočil je na strop svoje nizke kletke, držal se krčevito za mrzle žice ter gledal nizdol. Mirno je bilo, nič se ni prikazalo.

Lotevala se ga je otožnost, porojena iz nerazumljivega hrepenenja. In kadar ga je ovladala siloma, mu je privrelo iz prsi, sklonil se je globoko in je plesal na klinu ter pel. Malči je gledala nanj z velikimi očmi. Kaj mu je pri srcu? Gleda kakor človek, samo govoriti ne more. Zdelo se ji je, da tudi misli kakor človek in da vse sliši in vse razume.

Zletel je časih na plico pred oknom, sprehajal se je od kota do kota ter potrkaval na steklo. Tam zunaj je bil tudi svet. In časih je priletelo zunaj

one in the vicinity. Then he sprang on to his top perch. How bedraggled, damp and tousled he looked. The girls laughed at him but he just shook himself and ignored them.

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, Johnny?” Malchie cried.

He squinted at her, then he bent down, put a long thin claw in his beak, and began to clean his leg and his beak, both of them at once, obviously not in the least ashamed.

Slowly he found his bearings and he became more sensible. He realized that the world was not such a dangerous place. When they opened the door of his cage, he first of all jumped down and looked round about him.

Then, seeing nothing unfamiliar or strange, or any unusual movement in the room, he flapped his wings and fluttered down on to Malchie’s head, on to her soft fair hair. Malchie bowed her head and laughed—it was a funny feeling. Then she put up one hand and flicked her fingers. The canary jumped on to her hand and a marvellous new feeling of delight came over her. He stretched out his neck, shook his feathers, and fluttered his wings. Then, dancing and hopping from one leg to the other, he sang in a clear voice, full of happiness and hope.

The girls could not take their eyes off this wonderful sight, but Lois felt jealous.

“Put him down, Malchie, or he’ll fly away!” Frightened, Malchie shook her hand and the canary hopped off. Soon he calmed down, though he was still trembling a little. He dug among the feathers in his neck and under his wings and then pecked away calmly, as if nothing had happened.

However, even when he got used to the room he still had his fears and doubts. Whenever there was a movement or a strange sound he fell into a panic. Sinister perils lurked in all the corners and if he didn’t watch out some great big black monster could easily creep up on him from God knows where and take him unawares. He would shiver, hop up on to the roof of his low cage, clutch the cold wires and look down. But all was quiet and no danger materialized.

Sometimes he was overcome by melancholy, the fruit of some mysterious yearning. And when this happened and emotion stirred in his breast, he bowed low, danced on his perch and sang. Malchie would watch him with eyes wide open. What was going through his mind? He was just like a human being really, except that he could not talk. It struck her that perhaps he had a mind like a man’s and could hear and understand everything.

Sometimes he flew down on to the window sill, strutted along it from end to end, and tapped on the window pane.

mimo okna, frfotalo je in je izginilo. Ves se je prestrašil, zletel je s police; zunaj je bil pač čuden svet, poln neznanih strahot. Mnogokrat so prišle v samo sobo strahote, ki so bile zunaj. Zaprli so ga tedaj v kletko in gledal je plašno in sovražno, kako so hodili sem pa tja, od postelje do postelje in poslušal je njih grde globoke glasove. Kadar so odšli, si je upal komaj iz kletke. Morda je še ostalo kaj v tem, v onem kotu, morda je samo čakalo, da bi se takole nedolžno približal in tedaj bi seglo po njem, veliko in črno. Ali on je bil pameten, ni šel koj iz kletke, dasi so mu bila vratca na stežaj odprta. Nato je malo zletel, samo za pedenj po sobi in brž v kletko nazaj, zato da bi poskusil, da bi videl. Toda na posteljah, ob mizi je bilo vse kakor zmerom, nič ni ostalo v sobi od tistega odurnega in groznega življenja, ki je bilo prišumelo tako nenadoma. Smejali so se samo znani obrazi, znani glasovi; spet same majčkene roke, ki ne morejo storiti žalega, same majčkene roke, ki dajejo kruha in vode... In kakor so se vse zaničevaje smejale neokretnemu, velikemu, grdemu življenju, tako se je smejal tudi kanarček. Prav tako vesel je bil, kadar ni bilo tistega življenja v sobi in prav tako je čakal hrepeneče, da se poslovi ter odkobali.

Prišlo je časih prav do njegove kletke, skušalo je celó z veliko in grozno roko odpirati vratca; toda ni jih odprlo. Stisnil se je globoko v kot, strmел je z žarečimi, sovraštva in silnega strahu polnimi očmi; odpiral je kljun, iztisnil se je iz grla cvileč, obupen glas.

Takrat pa se je vzdignilo na postelji pod njim, prišle so od vseh strani, tenki glasovi, podobni cvilečemu glasu kanarčka, so govorili vsevprek.

“Stran! Stran!”

In pustilo je vratca, moralo je stran, kanarček pa se je oddahnil. Vse so čutile, kar je čutil sam. Ni se ga smela doteknuti tuja roka, ubila bi ga. Niti sladkorja mu ni smela podariti tuja roka. Grofica mu je bila prinesla nekoč sladkega zelenja, lepih kurjih čevc, ali ko je šla—”Bog poplašaj! Hvaljen bodi Jezus Kristus!”—so vzele iz kletke njen zeleni dar ter so ga razmetale po sobi.

“Naj jé sama, lakota lakomna!” se je razjezila Lojzka, sama ni vedela zakaj. Ali kanarček bi bil jedel, toliko je bil pač neumen. Malo bi se šopiril,

Yes, there was a world outside too. And now and then something would flash by outside the window, fluttering its wings. At this he would fly down from the windowsill in panic.

That world outside was strange and full of unknown terrors. Often those monsters from outside even came into the room. Then, shut up in his cage, he would listen to their deep, gruff voices and watch them in fear and hate as they moved around from bed to bed. Even after they had left he hardly dared to venture out of his cage. Maybe there was still some danger lurking in one corner or another, some big, black menace that would creep up on him and take him unawares. But he took good care, and for some time he did not leave his cage even if the door stood wide open. Then, just to try, just to see, he would circle the room and hurry back again.

But there was nothing unusual to be seen around the beds or on the table, and nothing remained of that horrible clumsy life of the outside world, which had made such a sudden noisy intrusion. There were only the same friendly smiling faces and the voices he knew so well. Once again he could see only those tiny hands that could do him no harm, those little hands that gave him bread and water. And the canary too joined in their mocking laughter at the harsh blundering monsters from the world outside. He was so happy when they had gone. In fact he always seemed to be waiting and hoping for those intruders to leave.

Sometimes danger would approach his cage and someone with an enormous hand would try to open the door. But they didn't open it. He withdrew deep into a corner and glared at the intruder with burning eyes full of hate and terror. He opened his beak and a panicstricken twitter came from his throat.

Then there was a movement on the bed below him, and from all sides came the sound of young voices not unlike the canary's own twittering, as they called across the room.

"Leave him alone! Leave him alone!" And then whoever it was would leave the door and the canary could relax.

All the girls shared his feelings. He couldn't stand the touch of a strange hand: it would kill him, and no strange hand had the right to give him sweets. The countess once brought him some nice green leaves, some chickweed it was, but when she left—"God reward you! Praised be Jesus Christ!"—they took the green gift she had brought out of the cage and scattered it all over the room.

"She can eat that stuff herself, the greedy-guts!" Lois exclaimed, angry for some reason.

But the canary would have eaten it, he was so silly really. He would have ruffled his feathers, sulked a while, till that strange hand was no longer

malo bi revskal, dokler bi bila tuja roka blizu, potem pa bi se potolažil ter bi okušal drobne zelene lističe. Malči je to vedela in očitala mu je v srcu, da je tako umazan in požrešen. Ona je pač lizala tuje bonbone, toda kanarček ne bi smel.

Veliko grozo je občutil kanarček, kadar je prišel Rezikin oče. To je bilo dvoje silnih, težkih, črnih rok, dvoje lopat, ki sta bili ustvarjeni pač za samo ubijanje, za mračna hudodelstva. In vse je bilo temno, strašno—vsa črna postava, dolgi brki v obrazu, globoki in raskavi glas. Dokler je bila v sobi ta strahota, ni pozobal kanarček niti zrnca. Rezika ni pustila, da bi stopil oče h kletki. Ali vendar ji je bilo malo sitno in prigovarjala je kanarčku.

“Zakaj pa se bojiš, Hanzek neumni? Saj je oče tako majhen, nič ti ne stori hudega!”

Kanarček pa je le gledal. Majhen! Malo bi samo pomignil s tisto črno lopato, malo stisnil!—In gledal je napeto in srepo, kako se je pomikalo po sobi, odvalilo se naposled, zaprlo duri.

“Bog poplačaj! Hvaljen bodi Jezus Kristus!”

Življenje je bilo zunaj, smeh je bil v sobi, bele postelje so se svetile...

Slutil je kanarček nekaj temnega, zato je bil časih otožen. Vse gorjé pride od zunaj, ali kedaj pride in v kakšni podobi, ni znano nikomur. Skrivajo se tam zunaj strašna čuda, lahko se odpró duri nenadoma in prikaže se... Silne črne roké segajo po posteljah, segajo v kletko; niti glasú od nikoder; oči buljijo v mrzli grozi, ne morejo prositi...

“Ne boj se, Hanzek!” ga je tolažila Malči, kadar se je skrival, kadar je nenadoma zastokal od velike bojazni. “Nič se ne boj, saj sem jaz pri tebi!” Poletel ji je na glavo, igral se je z mehкими svetlimi lasmi in če je iztrgal las, ga je ponesel nemudoma v kletko. Napotil se je časih po sobi, od postelje do postelje je hodil, zabaval se je prijetno, jezil se malo, zapel za kratek čas, pozobal drobtino kruha, naposled je našel belo nitko, ali je izrval iz blazine mehko perce ter se je vrnil v kletko. Položil je nitko, perce v kot, pomislil je malo, toda ni se mogel domisliti. Poskočil je na najvišji klin, mencial nitko pod nogama ter zapel dolgo in lepo pesem.

Gledale so nanj z zadovoljnim in ljubeznipolnim pogledom, sami materinski obrazi.

“To je naš kanarček, takega ni nikjer in ga nikoli ni bilo!”

Na duri pa je trkalo življenje, ki je živelo zunaj v svoji strahoti.

near, then he would have calmed down and tasted those tiny green leaves. Malchie knew this and deep inside she felt resentful that he was so silly and so greedy. Of course she herself sometimes tasted the toffees the strangers brought but Johnny should have been ashamed of himself.

The canary felt terribly frightened when Rezika's father came. Those powerful heavy black hands like a couple of shovels were just made for murder and foul deeds. And he was all dark and horrible—a great black figure, with long furrows lining his face, with a coarse booming voice. While that scarecrow was in the room the canary would not even nibble a single grain. Rezika wouldn't let her father go near the cage. But she fit a little annoyed about it and chided the canary.

“Johnny, you are silly! What are you scared of? Daddy's such a little man, he won't do you any harm!” The canary just looked at her. A little man, indeed! Just a flash of that black shovel, just a little squeeze of those fingers! Tense and unhappy he watched the strangers moving around the room, then they all rushed out together, and the door closed behind them.

“God reward you! Praised be Jesus Christ!” Then that other life was outside again and laughter was heard in the room and the bedclothes shone, clean and white.

The canary had a sense of foreboding and so he was depressed at times. Misfortune always came in from the outside but you could never tell when or in what guise it would come. Horrible monsters lurked out there—the door could open suddenly and then who knows what would appear? Strong black hands groping over the beds and reaching up into the cage! Not a sound from anywhere as the canary's eyes stared in ice-cold panic, unable to beg for mercy “Don't be scared, Johnny!” Malchie tried to comfort him when he hid or suddenly croaked in sheer fright.

“Don't be so scared, Johnny! I'm here near you!” He flew down on to her head and played with her soft, fair hair. Sometimes he would pull one out and then he'd carry it straight back to his cage. Sometimes he would set off round the room, going from one bed to another, playing his games, flying into a tantrum, pecking at the breadcrumbs. Then he would find a white cotton thread or he would pull a soft feather out of a pillow and fly back to his cage. He put the thread or the feather in a corner, thought for a moment, then couldn't make up his mind. He jumped up on to his highest perch, trampled the thread under his feet and sang a long beautiful song.

The girls watched him with a happy, loving expression on their motherly faces.

“He's our canary, and there isn't and there never was a canary like him in the whole world!” But that life which thrived outside in all its horror came and knocked on his door.

Bila je žalostna nedelja, mrzel in meglen dan je bil zunaj, prišlo je malo ljudi in dolgočasni so bili še bolj nego drugače. Malči se je ozrla malomarno; prišla je mati in je malo posedela in je šla. Nekaj neizmerno težkega in otožnega je bilo v sobi, kakor megleno nebo tam zunaj, kakor vse življenje tam zunaj. Ni bilo še potrkalo in že je bil v sobi njegov bolni dih. Katica je čakala, nemirne so bile njene oči, matere ni bilo. In tedaj so se odprle duri na stežaj in prišlo je hrupoma.

Prikazal se je med durmi velik, širokopleč človek. Oblečen je bil slabo, ves je bil umazan in raztrgan. Mraz je bilo pač zunaj, ali imel je tenko črno suknjo s škrici, posvaljkano in obnošeno. Sive karirane hlače so bile spodaj čisto razcefrane in tudi čevlji so bili razhojeni, zevali so, da so se kazale mokre nogavice. Obraz je bil zabuhel, poraščen, sivobled, oči so gledale motno in so bile vse rdeče.

Postal je med durmi in se je ozrl po sobi.

“Kje je Katica?”

In Katica je vsa vztrepetala, vzdignila je malo roko, kakor da bi se hotela braniti, ali prišla je z bolno roko komaj do obraza.

Ni je videl, bila je poleg njega, na prvi postelji.

“No, glej, Katica, danes sem prišel jaz! Da te vidim! Kaj gledaš, ali ti ni prav?”

Katica je gledala, kakor da bi jo hotel oče udariti s pestjó in zmerom še je držala roko pred obrazom. Sestra Cecilija je bila prišla, stala je zraven duri, obraz rdeč od nemira; gledala sta oba enako, boječe in radovedno, sestra Cecilija in kanarček.

“Že dobro vidim, Katica, že vidim čisto dobro! Kakšne reči pa ti je pravila? Zato sem prišel, da bi malo pogledal. Kaj res misliš, da sem tak pijanec? Da vse požrem, zapijem na žganju? Da ji še solda ne dam, da tepem otroke? Da so lačni? Da so goli?—Laž, Katica, laž! Sem vedel dobro, da ti vse to pripoveduje in da ti vse to verjameš, ti otrok neumni! Zadosti denarja ji dam, ampak ona—”

Govoril je zelo na glas, hitro in jezno; držal je Katico za roko, da jo je bolelo. Sestra Cecilija je videla Katice obraz, zasmilila se ji je in čudno strah jo je bilo. Okrenil se je nenadoma k nji.

“No, sestra milostiva, ne glejte me tako, nisem prišel krast!”

In hotel se je nasmehniti.

It was one of those gloomy Sundays when the weather outside was cold and foggy. Few people had come and they were more bored even than usual. Malchie looked round the room. Her mother had come, sat for a little while at her bedside, then gone. A heavy, gloomy atmosphere in the room seemed to reflect the murky sky and the horrible life of the outside world. It had not yet even knocked on the door, but its sick breathing could already be heard in the room. Katie's mother had not come and Katie was waiting with anxious eyes. And then the door was suddenly flung wide open and a loud crash announced a new arrival.

A tall, broad-shouldered man appeared in the doorway. He was poorly dressed, all in rags and tatters. Although it was freezing hard outside he was wearing only a thin black jacket, all crumpled and worn. The bottoms of his grey check trousers were badly torn, his shoes were worn out too, gaping open to show his wet socks. His face was livid, his eyes were all bloodshot and dull. He stood in the doorway and looked round the room.

"Where's our Katie?" He couldn't see her though there she was, right beside him, in the first bed.

Katie was shaking like a leaf. She raised her little hand as if she wanted to defend herself but she could hardly even reach her own face with that sick hand.

"Well, Katie, I've come along myself today! To see you! Here I am, as large as life. See for yourself!" Katie looked as if she would have liked to strike her father and kept her hand in front of her face at the time. Sister Cecilia had come and was standing by the door, her face flushed and anxious. Both Sister Cecilia and the canary were wearing the same worried and frightened expression.

"Now I see you, Katie, now I can really see you. What has she been saying, eh? That's why I had to come, to have a look for myself. Well, do you really think I'm such a drunkard? Waste our money stuffing my belly with brandy?. Don't give Mama any money?. Beat the kids? Do you believe they're hungry?

Have no clothes? It's lies, Katie, all lies. I knew she'd tell you all those lies and you'd believe it all, you silly kid! I give them plenty, only she's always." He was gabbling away at the top of his voice, hoarse with anger, and was holding Katie's arm so tight that it hurt. Sister Cecilia could see Katie's face. She felt alarmed and very sorry for the child. Suddenly he approached her.

"Now hang on, Sister dear, don't look at me like that. I've not me here to steal anything!" He tried to make a joke of it.

“Oprostite, jaz nisem, kakor si morda mislite, človek brez manir, pijanec in tako. Oprostite, jaz znam francoski. Comment vous portez-vous?—Nič?... Katica, no, še zmerom se me nisi privadila...”

Ustnice so se smehljale prijazno, ali v očeh njegovih se je bliskalo od tihe jeze.

“Ná, Katica, prinesel sem ti nekaj. Ali ti ona kaj prinese, &kadar pride?... Ná in jej, dobro je!”

Prinesel je piškotov in piškoti so dišali po žganju. Katici se je zagabilo, ko jih je ugledala, ali tresla se je od bojazni in jedla je.

Nato je pogledal po sobi. Drobni, prestrašeni obrazi so strmeli vanj, glasu ni bilo od nikoder. In zasmel se je široko.

“Kaj se me bojite, otroci? Kaj sem takšen? Čakaj, ti, čakaj!”

Obrnil se je k Lojzki. Lojzka je gledala predrzno, ali držala se je stola krčevito z obema rokama.

“Ej, otroci, jaz nisem takšen! Ko bi bil vedel, bi vam bil vsem kaj prinesel. Vsem! Bonbonov, jabolk, pomaranč! Kadar pridem vdrugič, vam prinesem vsem!”

Smejale se je, ali jeza se je razlila iz srca v oči, na čelo, na ves obraz; ustnice so se odpirale, kakor da bi se smejale, toda kazale so samó ostre hudobne zobé.

“Zakaj pa se me bojite? No, zakaj?”

Ozrl se je na Katico; ležala je na postelji, kakor umirajoč vrabec na dlani.

Ni mu bilo več prijetno, žal mu je bilo, da je bil prišel. Toda rad bi se poslovil prijazno—bilo mu je, kakor da bi bilo zaklicalo z lepim glasom od nekod, iz davnodavne preteklosti.

Pobožal je Katico po licih; roka je bila raskava in je smrdela.

“Nisem tako hudoben, Katica, kakor misliš! Vsak človek ima bolj črno senco, nego je sam. Blagor se tebi, Katica!”

In se je ozrl.

“Nisem tako hudoben, otroci, nič me tako ne glejte!” Začivkalo je, zastokalo.

“Ej, in kanarčka imate tudi, kako lepega kanarčka, ej!” Zaklicalo mu je v srcu in zapelo, sam ni vedel, kako se je zgodilo. In šel je preko sobe, silen in črn, od groze prepadli obrazi so gledali nanj.

Malči se je hotela vzdigniti, hotela je iztegniti roko, hotela je izpregovoriti... “Ne kanarčka, kanarčka nikar!” Toda ni se zgenila in glasu ni bilo iz grla...

Ali vratca so bila odprta, Bog je hotel in bila so odprta. Kanarček je gledal in se je tresel. Tam je prihajalo, bližalo se je kakor gora.

“Pardon me but you’re quite wrong if you’re thinking I’m a man without manners, a drunkard—and so forth. You’ll pardon me, but I can even talk French—*Comment vous portez-vous?*—Right?. Well, Katie, you still haven’t got used to me, have you?” His lips wore a pleasant smile, but there was a gleam of sullen anger in his eyes.

“Here you are, Katie, I’ve brought you something. Does she ever bring you anything, when she comes? Here you are, try some—they’re good!” He had brought some biscuits and they stank of brandy. Katie felt sick when she saw them but she trembled with fright and ate them.

Then he looked round the room. The small frightened faces stared at him but there wasn’t a sound out of any of them. He guffawed.

“Why are you scared of me, children? Am I such a bad fellow? Hang on, just wait a minute.” He turned towards Lois. Lois looked at him steadily but she gripped her chair tightly with both hands.

“Look here, kids, I’m not such a bad chap. Why, if I’d known, I’d have brought something for everybody. Everybody! Toffees, apples, oranges! Anyway, next time I come, I’ll bring something for everybody!” He was smiling but the anger beat up from his heart to his eyes, his forehead, his whole face. His lips half opened as he tried to smile, baring sharp cruel teeth.

“Why are you scared of me? Why?” He looked down at Katie. She was lying in her bed like a dying sparrow on someone’s palm.

He was feeling fed up now and sorry that he had come. But he would have liked to say goodbye pleasantly.

Perhaps he heard the call of some finer voice from the distant past.

“I’m not so bad as you think, Katie! No man’s as black as his own shadow. God bless, Katie!” He looked round again.

“I’m not so bad, children. Don’t look at me like that!” There was a twitter, a nervous squeak.

“Well, well, so you’ve got a canary here too. What a little beauty, eh!” Inside he felt some call, the echo of a song, without knowing why. A powerful, black, menacing figure, he walked across the room and the terrorstruck faces gazed at him.

Malchie wanted to get up, to stretch out her hands, to say something. “No, not the canary! No, no, not the canary!” But she couldn’t move a finger and no sound came from her throat.

And the door was open. Yes, it was God’s will—the door was open.

The canary watched and trembled. A movement, the mountainous bulk drew nearer.

V poslednjem trenutku—že se je bila iztegnila silna črna roka—je skočil na prag, neokretne, od groze odrevenele so mu bile noge, niso se hotele vzdigniti perotnice, bila je nezavedna, obupna moč. In takrat se mu je zasvetilo nekaj čudnega—tam je rešitev, tam zunaj! Z vso silo se je pognal proti oknu, udaril je ob steklo in je padel na polico. Rezika je bila tam, blede, trepetajoča. Vzela ga je v roko, varno, nalahko, nesla ga je k postelji, kjer je sedela Malči, roké uprte ob blazine, oči široko odprte, ustnice bledosinje.

Komaj je prišel Reziki šepetajoč glas iz grla.

“Malči, glej!”

Položila je kanarčka na vzglavje, malo se je še stresel in je umrl...

Tako je bilo prišlo življenje, ki je živelo tam zunaj v svoji grozi; prišlo je kakor volkodlak opolnoči—ostala je blede groza, ko je posijalo jutro in šele počasi, mukoma, se je izvil iz prsi glas, so se izvile solze iz oči in je dihalo srce...

Bližala se je zima, slišale so zvečer, kako je potrkavala na okno. Že je bila osmukala drevje zunaj; sonce ni gorelo več, sijalo je kakor v mrzli vodi, v veliki mirni reki tam gori, ki se je že pokrivala s svetlim ledom.

Ali tu notri ni bilo zime, ne mraza, ne burje; zima je prihajala kakor Božje dete, gorka in prijazna. Kakor Božje dete je prihajala in kakor sestra Cecilija, ki je napravljala jaslice ter se smehljala, smehljajoče oči polne lepih skrivnosti.

Prišla je zjutraj sestra Cecilija, skrivala je nekaj v rokah, ali gibalo se je in je brcalo.

“Otroci, glejte!”

Sklonila se je, izpustila je iz rok in skočilo je na tla—smešno, nerodno, črno.

Zasmejale so se na glas.

“Vravec! Vravec!”

Vravec se ni zmenil za nikogar. Zelo mlad je še bil, niti zobati še ni mogel in treba bi ga bilo pitati. Ves kuštrav je bil in grd; repa še imel ni, perje mu je viselo navzdol, nerodno in zmršeno—kakor premočen havelok. Kljun je bil zelo širok, oči se ni videlo. Poskakoval je, kakor da bi hotel pasti na glavo in tako je cepetalo, kakor da bi nosil copate. Vse so bile okoli njega, on pa si je našel pot—cepet, cepet—in že je bil pod posteljo.

“Kje pa ste ga dobili, sestra Cecilija?”

“Zmrzaval je na vrtu; padel je z drevesa, ker še ne more leteti, siromak!” Zaropotalo je pod posteljo, nekaj se je prevrnilo, copat ali kaj. In spet se je prikazal na drugi strani—cepet, cepet...

At the last moment, as that powerful menacing black hand reached out, he leapt down on to the threshold of his cage, his legs froze under him, his wings hung stiff, motionless. But then he had a sudden inspiration—out there, far away, he would find deliverance. With all his might he flung himself at the window, struck the glass and dropped onto the windowsill. Rezika was there in a moment pale and trembling. She picked him up in her hand carefully, and brought him to the bed where Malchie was sitting with her hands clutching the pillow, eyes wide open and lips blue with fright. Rezika's whisper could just be heard.

“Look, Malchie!” She laid the canary on the pillow. He trembled a little, then died.

That was how that horrible life of the outside world intruded on them. It came like a werewolf at midnight and when the day dawned only the bloodless victim remained. Slowly and laboriously the fading voice spoke, the last tears ran, the poor heart gasped for breath.

Winter was approaching. In the evenings they could already hear her tapping at the windows. Outside the trees were by now stripped of leaves. The sun gave no warmth, just glimmered out of the chill waters of the great icecovered river that slowly flowed across the sky.

But inside their room there was no sign of winter or frost or storm. Winter came like God's child bringing warmth and friendship; like God's child or like Sister Cecilia, setting up the crib and smiling, with laughing eyes full of happy secrets.

In the morning when Sister Cecilia came she was hiding something in her hands, something that was moving about and kicking.

“Look, children!” She bent down, and opened her hands. Something dark, clumsy, ridiculous, jumped out on to the floor.

They all burst out laughing.

“It's a sparrow! A sparrow!” The little bird paid no attention to any of them. It was still very small. It had not yet learned to peck and they had to feed it. How ugly it was with all its feathers ruffled. It had no tail, and its feathers hung down, so awkward, so dishevelled, just like a soaking wet cape. Its beak was very wide and you could not yet see its eyes. It hopped around in such a funny way you would have thought it was going to land on its head, and it tripped over itself as if it had an old pair of slippers on. All the girls gathered round but it found a way through them and tripped across and hid under one of the beds.

“Where did you get him, Sister Cecilia?”

“He was out in the garden, frozen stiff. He'd fallen off a tree because he can't fly yet, poor little fellow.” There was a rustling sound from under the bed and something, a slipper maybe, toppled over. And the sparrow now came into view on the other side—still stumbling along...

Sestra Cecilija je gledala nanj in ko je bil tako črn in potuhnjen v mokrem haveloku, se je nasmejala.

“Anarhist!”

In anarhist se ni udomačil, ni maral lepe, bele, zakurjene sobe. Tudi ljubezni ni maral. Hotele so ga pitati. Malči ga je vzela k sebi v posteljo, da bi ga ogrela. Ni maral jesti in tudi ogreti se ni maral. Komaj se je Malči zavedla, že je štrbunknilo na tla in—cepeta, cepeta...

“Kaj pa je temu vrabcu?” je prašala Malči nejevoljno; razžaljena je bila, ker se ni zmenil zanjo in ker ni maral njene ljubezni.

“Ne znaš ga pitati!” je dejala Lojzka in se je vozila po sobi za njim; cepetala je naokoli in se je umikal, Lojzka pa je bila trudna.

“Čemu pa nam je prinesla to grdo žival? Če mu tukaj ni povšeč, pa naj bi bil zmrznil!”

Anarhist je iskal, Bog vedi česa; stikal je po kotih, vso sobo je že preromal in vsevprek; če je počival, se je stisnil v tem? in takrat se je zdelo, kakor da se sveti dvoje svojeglavnih, upornih oči.

Izpustile bi ga bile, ali sestra Cecilija ni hotela.

“Si že poišče drobtin pod mizo; ni treba, da bi zmrznil.” Prišel je blizu Lojzke, pahnila ga je z roko in smejale so se, ko se je prevalil ter zibaje se in cepetaje odkobacal. Pod okno je prišel in ozrl se je navzgor in je poskakoval. Peroti so bile preslabe, mučil se je in je padal; komaj dve pedi visoko je mogel poskočiti, niti roba nizke postelje ni dosegel. Tekal je pred oknom, kakor je bilo široko, poskočil je tu, poskočil je tam, ali nikjer ni bilo nižje.

Reziki se je zasmilil, vzdignila ga je na polico. In takoj je poskočil, butnil je ob okno z glavo, z vsem majhnim neokretnim životom. Butnil je, ali sunilo ga je nazaj, padel je na polico. Vzdignil se je precej, šel je po polici malo dalje, poskočil je in je butnil znova. In spet ga je sunilo nazaj, spet se je zvrnil ter se precej pobral. Vstopil se je sredi police, videl je ven—tam je bilo nebo, črne hiše so bile, videl se je vršiček golega drevesa. In anarhist je pozabil, da ga je bilo sunilo nazaj—saj je bilo tam zunaj nebo in črne hiše so bile in videlo se je golo drevje in vse je bilo tako blizu...

Spet je udarilo zamolklo in spet je padlo. Hotel se je hitro vzdigniti, ali prevrnilo ga je, nato pa se je le vzdignil in je tekal dalje po polici. Nič več ni

Sister Cecilia looked down at him. He was so black and so sinister in his wet cloak she could not help laughing.

“He’s a real anarchist!” And the anarchist would not be tamed. He cared nothing for their beautiful warm, white room. He cared nothing for their love. They wanted to feed him. Malchie even took him into her bed to keep him warm. He did not want to be fed and he did not want to be warmed either. The first Malchie knew of this was when he flopped down on the floor and started stumbling about again...

“What’s wrong with that sparrow?” asked Malchie, really puzzled. She felt very sad that he took no notice of her and did not want her love.

“You don’t know how to feed him!” said Lois and shuffled round the room after him. He went on hobbling and dodging her, till she had had enough of it.

“Why did she bring us this ugly creature? If he doesn’t like it here, he should have stayed out there and frozen!” What on earth was the anarchist searching for? He had poked around in all the corners and explored the whole room from end to end. When he wanted a rest he squeezed himself into some dark hiding place and then all that could be seen of him was a pair of stubborn rebellious eyes shining out of the gloom.

They would have let him go, but Sister Cecilia refused.

“He’ll hop under the table and help himself to some crumbs. We don’t want him to freeze to death.” The sparrow approached Lois. She nudged him with her hand and they all laughed when he fell over and dragged himself off, tripping and staggering as usual. He went towards the window, looked up and tried to hop on to the windowsill. But his wings were too weak and he kept falling back in spite of his efforts. He could hardly lift himself a foot from the ground, so that he could not even reach the edge of the lowest bed. He ran about below the windowsill and tried to fly up on to the sill but could not find anywhere low enough.

Rezika felt sorry for him and lifted him up. As soon as he was on the windowsill he rushed head first at the window and flung all his clumsy little body at it. He bounced back on to the sill. He picked himself up straight away, moved a little further along, then shot up and flung himself at the window a second time. Once more he bounced back, again he fell over but picked himself up at once. From the middle of the windowsill he looked out at the sky, at the black hocuses, at a bare tree-top. And the anarchist forgot that he had been flung back by the windowpane. There was the sky, the black houses, the bare trees, all in view, all so near.

There was a dull thud as he fell again. He wanted to get up quickly but fell over. When he picked himself up he ran further along the window-sill. He would not realize that there was some barrier; all he knew was that out

vedel, da ga je bilo sunilo nazaj, samo to je vedel, da je zunaj nebo in da je drevje zunaj. Tako je butalo zamolklo, neprestano, kakor da bi bil s pestjo ob okno.

“Pa skoči ven! No, pa skoči ven! Skoči! Skoči! Hop!”

Lojzka se je smejala hudobno, vse so bile poleg in so gledale, kako je poskakoval in padal.

“Skoči ven, če ti ni povšeči pri nas! Skoči, anarhist!”

Butilo je in se je prevalilo in je padlo na tla, kakor težek črn klopčič.

“Poginil je!”

Gledale so, nobena se ni genila. Ali vrabec se je stresel, pobrcal je z rumenimi nogami, vstal je.

“Ej, vrabec!” se je razjezila Lojzka. “Kakor od lesá je.” Komaj se je vzdignil, je poskočil znova proti oknu, ali zdaj komaj za ped visoko; padal je bolj težko, bolj že na prsa in na glavo kakor na noge. Toda ni se utrudil, tako dobro je vedel, da poskoči naposled dovolj visoko in da poleti ven, kjer je nebo in kjer je drevje. Ves čas ni bilo glasu iz njega, nikogar ni bilo, da bi govoril z njim, ali da bi se jezil, ali da bi prosil.

In poskakovalo je neprestano, tekalo ob oknu, poskakovalo in padalo.

A ko se je oziral navzgor, mu je temnelo zmerom bolj pred očmi, ginilo je nebo, ginilo je drevje, noč temnih poslopij se je širila in širila, zagrnila je vse.

Komaj za palec visoko je še poskočil—ali glej, že ni bilo ničesar več, niti okna ne...

Niso se več zmenile zanj, luč je že gorela, napravljale so se spat. Nehalo je padati, tudi cepetalo ni več, anarhist se je bil skrtil, Bog vedi kam. Nič se ni več zgenilo, zaspale so...

Ko si je Lojzka zjutraj obuvala copate, se je prestrašila in je zavpila. Črn klopčič se je izvalil iz copata, skrit je bil globoko na dnu.

Pahnila ga je stran z nogo, gnusil se ji je anarhist. Kremplji so bili čudno zviti, sključeni, glava je bila vsa ranjena, komaj še se je poznalo, kjer so oči in kje je kljun, vse je bilo krvavo in zmršeno. Z metlo so ga pomedle skozi duri, na mostovž.

Tako je poginil; ne žalosti ne spomina ni bilo po njem.

there were the trees and the sky. The dull thuds were repeated again and again, as if someone was beating a fist against the window.

“Go on then! Let’s see you jump out! Go on! Jump! Jump!” Lois sneered while the others gathered round and watched him jumping and falling.

“Go on! Hop it, if you don’t like it in here! Go on, jump, you anarchist!” Another rush—then he toppled over once more, and dropped to the floor like a heavy black ball.

“He’s dead!” The girls looked at him but not one of them moved. However, the sparrow trembled, kicked out his yellow legs and stood up.

“Good heavens!” Lois was amazed. “That sparrow must be made of wood.” As soon as he got up he made for the window again but now he could hardly raise himself six inches from the ground. And now he began to fall more heavily, landing on his head or breast, no longer on his feet. But he did not give in because he knew that he would soon leap high enough to fly out there, to the trees and the sky. All this time there was not a sound from him. There was no one for him to talk to, no one to argue with or beg for help.

There he stayed by the window, jumping and running, jumping and falling.

When he looked up now the darkness was spreading. The sky and the trees had disappeared while the dark mass of gloomy buildings seemed to grow and grow, engulfing all else.

He could hardly jump a finger’s length now but he still tried, though now nothing could be seen, not even the window.

The girls had forgotten about him. The light was still on and they were getting ready for bed. The sound of him falling and stumbling had stopped and Heaven only knew where the anarchist was hiding. Now all was still and the girls were soon asleep.

When Lois was putting her slippers on next morning she suddenly screamed with fright. A black ball toppled out of her slipper. It had been hidden deep at the end.

She pushed it away with her foot—she never could stand the anarchist. His claws were strangely twisted and crooked, his head was so badly damaged that you could hardly tell where the eyes or the beak had been. It was just a dishevelled mass of bloody feathers.

And so he perished, unmourned and soon forgotten.

Henry Leeming