

I V A N P R E G E L J:
IZBRANI SPISI

Prvi zvezek:

Štefan Golja in njegovi
Tolminske novele

V L J U B L J A N I 1 9 2 8

ZALOŽILA JUGOSLOVANSKA KNJIGARNA

Za Jugoslovansko tiskarno v Ljubljani: Karel Čeč.

Ivan Pregelj (1883–1960)

A sickly man—he suffered a debilitating stroke in 1938—Pregelj lived apart from society, but managed to produce a substantial corpus of prose and dramatic texts nonetheless. He was of a mystical orientation, very much a part of Slovene Catholic expressionism in the 1920s, though his works were often criticized by the Church. He favored older literary models (from Classical Antiquity, the Baroque, Gothic literature). An oft-explored topic of his is the tension between the carnal and the spiritual. The Slovene text, entitled “Gospoda Matije zadnji gost” from the cycle “Tolminske novele,” is from Ivan Pregelj, *Izbrani spisi*, vol. 1 (Ljubljana: Jugoslovanska knjigarna, 1928); the translation is from *The Slavonic (and East European) Review* 13 (1934–35): 27–35.

Gospoda Matije zadnji gost

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Župnišče ob veliki dolinski cesti. Ves dan ima solnce. Zjutraj z leve, opoldne v ospredju, zvečer z desne. Pa razgled! Ti moj Bog! Privzdig-njeno je nad sadni vrt, ki je ob cesti, za deset stopnic; kar dovolj, da je moči videti na vrt, čez vrt na cesto, koder ob četrtkih vozijo hribovski vozniki, čez cesto na krčmarsko dvorišče, kjer pripravljajo in pijo in včasih celo ob harmoniki plešejo—“mu bom že dal potepu, da jim pusti noreti, mrcina krčmarska!”—, čez dvorišče v polje, kjer žene sirk in obrezujejo murvin poganek za sviloprejko, čez polje onstran v toplo zabrisano ozadje sosednje fare in brd nad njo vse gori do tihe romarske cerkve pri Mariji Snežnici. Prvi goriški pesnik se je zbudil v tem svetišču in najlepše, kar je pel, je bila “hvala vinski terti...”

Gospod vikar Matija ni bil pesnik, a je bil najdružabnejši človek tistih let. Genij njegove družabnosti je bil groteskno klasični humor, ki ga je, kakor ni prikrival, zajemal iz svoje lahke krvi in iz knjig “brata v hudiču” Samosačana Lukjana. “Brat v hudiču” mu je vodil v hišo trikrat toliko gostov, kakor so jih gostili njegovi duhovski tovariši. “Brat v hudiču” je bil kriv, da je vikar Matija potočil letno štirikrat več vina, kakor njegov duhovski sosed. Nekaj malega je bila seveda tudi cesta kriva, ki je bila blizu, morda tudi prijetnost hiše, neprisiljena gostoljubnost vikarja Matije in njegov izbrani okus glede vina. Tisto leto je imel stalnega gosta, novomašnika gospoda Lojza, ki je ves dan tičal v knjigah, se pripravljajal za težke doktorske izkušnje in bil prav resno oslabel. Vikar Matija ga je neki dan v mestu po kratkem prerekanju, “da to nobena sitnost ni, še dobrota ne”, pregovoril, da je sedel z njim v poštni voz in se odpeljal z njim v hribe, kjer bo dober zrak največ pomagal, nekaj pa tudi oče Matija in njegov “brat

Vicar Mathias' Last Guest

A presbytery on the main road in a valley. Sunshine the whole day long—early morning on the left, at noon in front, in the evening on the right. And the view! Superb! The house stood on the slope of the hill, ten feet or so higher than the orchard which fringed the Street. Through the fruit trees could be seen the road, where every Thursday a number of small carts coming down from the mountain stopped, and turned into the yard of the inn opposite to the presbytery for fresh relays of horses. Here also the drivers would drink and dance to the music of an accordion. Vicar Mathias, as he looked at them, would mutter: "I really must give that good-for-nothing innkeeper a talking to for allowing them to behave in this silly way."

Standing there he could see beyond the yard; green fields, and mulberry trees for feeding silkworms, and in the far distance the misty background of the neighboring presbytery with the hill which led to the peaceful chapel of "Our Lady of the Snows."

This was the country where the first Slovenian poet was born and the most beautiful song he ever sang was an ode in praise of wine.

Vicar Mathias was certainly no poet, but just as certainly he was the most sociable, kindhearted priest in the whole diocese.

The chief charm of his friendliness and sociability was the constant humor—classical humor it could be called—which he brought to bear on life, an attitude which came partly from his natural lightheartedness, and as he admitted, was also due to his constant study of *Frater in diabolo*, of Lucian of Samosata.

It was this *Frater in diabolo* which was responsible for bringing to the presbytery three times as many guests as his parson neighbors entertained.

Perhaps also the fact that his house was on the main road, that it had a pleasing exterior, a delightful host given to hospitality, and an exquisite taste in all questions concerning wine, was another reason.

The presbytery at this time housed a permanent guest, young Mr. Alois the Ordinand, who, with his eyes glued to his books the whole day long, was preparing for his final examination.

The Vicar had made his acquaintance one day in the town, and finding him so ill and weak, had, after a little argument, persuaded him that "it would not be the least inconvenient, nor must he for a moment think he was being asked out of charity," but would he join him at the mail coach, and accompany him to the mountains, where the salubrious air, the company of the Vicar, and the society of *Frater in diabolo* would help him

v hudiču”. Mladi človek je s svojo učenjaško resnostjo in tiho skromnostjo, s katero je prenašal vikarjevo osebno svojstvo, prirastel svojemu gostitelju k srcu. Nevede kdaj, je postal starejšemu gospodu moder zaupnik, ki je znal “bogvedi, da ti, Matija, tega ne razumeš”, vikarja umeti prav tam, kjer je želel, a se ni znal zaupati, in ki je že prve ure zaslutil, da veselega gospoda vendarle nekaj venomer teži in vznemirja. Šele tri tedne je bival pri Matiji, pa mu je postalo jasno, da gre vikarju gospodarsko slabo. Takoj je stopil k njemu in rekel:

“Ne bodite jezni, gospod vikar. Toda Vašega gostoljubja res ne smem izrabljati.”

»Kakooo?« je zategnil Matija. »Izrabljati? Kako je ime hudiču, ki Vas je obsedel?«

»Vaš Lukjan,« je odvrnil z resnim nasmehom mladi. »Saj me razumete!«

Vikarju Matiji se je res oko zbledlo in je iskal kakor v zadregi besede. Potem pa se je razvnel:

»To se pravi, to se reče, norčavi ste. Vam je že kaj moja sestra na nos obesila. Seveda, baba mora čenčati. Pa Vi tega ne veste še, da so vse enake. Da! Vse enake. Skope kot Judež, pa nič obzirne. Seveda. Razumete? Ne privošči tujcu, ki slučajno v hišo stopi, kaplje vina, grižljaja kruha. Brezobzirna, taktlos, razumete, senza maniera e creanza, kakor da bi človek *mogel* vrata zapirati ali pa, če je že človek za mizo, navaliti predenj krompirja in oblic mesto žlice juhe in kar še pritiče.«

Mladi duhovnik je z mirnim nasmehom prikimal in rekel:

»Saj Vas razumem, gospod vikar. A neprijetno mi je, da si moram tudi sam očitati—«

Tedaj je planil vikar živahno in skoraj ježno:

»No da, Vi pa, Vi me boste na beraško palico spravili! Saj imate pamet! Pomislite! Saj nisem otrok, da ne bi vedel, kaj delam. To mi že lahko verujete, da mi nobene sile ni in ne bo. Ali naj prisežem?«

»Gospod vikar...«

Nobene besede več, gospod Lojze. In tudi to si izbijte iz glave, da bi kdaj le v sanjah mislili, da ste meni kakšno hvaležnost dolžni; razumete, prav nič, pa Bog Vam srečo daj in zdravje, kakor ga je meni.

to regain his strength. The young man's studious habits, and the quiet modesty with which he tolerated the Vicar's peculiarities, made the latter soon become very fond of him, and, without realizing it, Mr. Alois was fast becoming his intelligent confidant. "Oh," he would say, "Mathias dear, you really do not understand this"; though really he understood perfectly that the Vicar, where he needed understanding, could make no confidences himself.

It was not long—indeed, only a few hours after becoming acquainted—before the visitor suspected that the gay-hearted old gentleman was continually oppressed and troubled by some secret worry which he tried to conceal from those around him, and it was only three weeks later that he saw clearly that his kind host's financial position was in a very bad way.

Considering it his duty, Mr. Alois went to him at once and said: "Do not take it badly, your Reverence, if I speak to you quite frankly, but I really cannot abuse your hospitality any longer."

"What? How?" returned Mathias with faltering voice. "Abuse? What is the name of the devil that obsesses you?" "Your Lucian," answered the guest with smiling earnestness. "I know that you understand me."

The Vicar's gaze was troubled, as he vainly sought for words with which to reply, and finding none he burst out heatedly:

"I suppose this is a joke of yours. I expect my sister has been putting some ideas into your head. She must always be making use of her tongue. But you do not yet know that all women are the same. Yes, all of them. As miserly as Judas Iscariot, and with no regard for the feelings of others. Understand me, now, she does not grudge a stranger who happens to enter this house a drop of wine or a piece of bread. But she has no tact. You understand me? She's thoughtless, she hasn't a way with her. As if we could shut the door to visitors! Or sit at table and offer them nothing but potatoes in their skins! Not even a spoonful of soup and whatever else went with it!" The young priest assented to all this, and nodding his head he replied with a quiet smile: "I well understand you, reverend sir, but it is painful for me to have to reproach myself too—" Here the Vicar interrupted excitedly: "Yes, of course, you, you, first, you are the one to bring me to the verge of poverty and reduce me to beggary! You have got a brain in your head, haven't you? "Just think a moment! Am I a child who does not know what he is doing? You can believe me, I am in no trouble of that kind, and I hope I never shall be. I hope you do not expect me to take my oath on it?" "Reverend—" "Now not another word, if you please, Mr. Alois, and I beg of you to put these ideas out of your head at once, so that not even in your dreams it may occur to you that you are under any obligation to me and my sister. You understand? Not in the very least "and, after a short pause he added: "May the Lord grant you the same health and happiness that he has given to me."

Beseda mu je zvenela v mehkem ganotju, zdeti se je hotelo mlademu, da vidi celo solzo v njegovem očesu. Zato je molče stegnil roko, katero je vikar Matija z obema prijel in stresel.

»Tako je prav, gospod Lojze.«— Čez čas je dodal: »In od danes ste mi še ljubši. In mi boste vedno, in četudi boste še škof.«

Nekdo je potrkal. Vikar je zaklical, naj vstopi, in že so se odprla vrata na široko in v sobo so stopili trije gosti. Prvega je vikar poznal in ta mu je predstavim svoja tovariša. Dve uri pozneje so sedeli v vedrem pogovoru z vikarjem pri kosilu in se smejali njegovim šalam iz »brata v hudiču« in le gospod Lojze je bil zamišljen, tih in se ni smejal...

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Gospod Lojze, »naš prihodnji škof,« si je bil pri vikarju Matiji utrdil zdravje, se pripravil za skušnje in se prisrčno poslovil od svojega gostitelja, ki ga je vso tisto zimo bridko pogrešal. Ko mu je mladi duhovnik sporočil v šegavi latinščini, da je skušnje prestal in se pripravlja za učitelja bogoslovnih ved v bogoslovnici, je bil vikar Matija čudno vesel in je rekel svoji sestri:

»Zdaj vidiš, da sem prav sodil. Škof bo, meni verjemi! Poznam take ljudi. In tak je tudi, da se ne bo prevzel in ne bo pozabil hribovskega vikarja, ki mu je včasih dobro hotel.«

Vikar Matija se sicer ni bil navidezno nič izpremenil. Bil je še vedno isti vedri človek kot prej, vesel do objestnosti, ko je bil v družbi. Ko pa je bil sam, je bil bolj resen, neredko celo potr. Pa tudi iz njegove šale, iz besed, ki jih je govoril, iz tistega »brata v hudiču«, je hotela zadnje čase posili zveneti pikrost, trpkost, ki je tepla po možu samem. Tem krčeviteje se je zato trudil, da bi popolnoma prikri tujim očem svoje pravo občutje. Bil je v svojem gostoljubju naravnost usiljiv, neprikrito narejeno bahaški. Bal se je, da ne bi kdo zaslutil resnice za prozorno pajčevinastim zagrinjalom, tiste resnice, ki je govorila iz njegovih in sestrih oči, ko sta bila sama in je ona

His voice was gentle and loving, and seemed to the young priest so full of tears that the only reply he could make was to offer him his hand in silence. The Vicar took it in both his, and shaking it vigorously, said: "So that is all right, Mr. Alois," then added feelingly, "and you are nearer to my heart than ever, and will remain so even were you to become one day our Bishop."

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and, flinging it wide open, the Vicar found three guests waiting to enter. Only one of them was known to him personally, but this one evidently knew the Vicar's hospitality sufficiently well to bring with him two uninvited guests. Two hours later saw them all sitting at table chatting gaily and enjoying the jokes of Frater in diabolo—all, that is, except Mr. Alois, who, lost in thought, remained silent, and did not join in the laughter.

* * *

"Our future Bishop," as the Vicar now called him, having regained his health in the good mountain air, went up for his examinations, after taking leave of his friends with a heart full of gratitude.

During that winter the Vicar missed him greatly, but when he received a communication written in witty Latin informing him that his young friend had done brilliantly, and was proposing to become a theological lecturer, his delight knew no bounds, and he said to his sister with pride:

"Now, my dear, you see I was not mistaken, and you may be sure that he will one day be a Bishop. I have an eye for these kind of people. And let me tell you, my dear, the stuff of which he is made is such that whatever he may achieve in the future, nothing can ever make him proud or arrogant, and he will never forget the country vicar who was once privileged to be his friend."

No change was apparent in the Vicar's mode of life, and he was always the same cheerful, jovial companion. Sometimes, in society, he would be even excessive in his bursts of humor, but when alone he was often very, very quiet and sad. By-and-by there entered into his jokes and those from Frater in diabolo a tinge of bitterness which greatly tormented his kind soul, and made him try all the more to conceal the true state of his affairs. His hospitality, always generous, became positively ostentatious, so afraid was he that outsiders might penetrate the almost transparent veil which hid the truth crying out so loudly to his sister and him when alone: the truth, which she would whisper to him: "He needed a new coat, for his was so thin and worn—new boots, for these would not bear any more patching—new underclothing, for through much washing his present ones were no

komaj šepetaje menila, da je vikar potreben nove suknje, novih čevljev, da je perilo preprano in posode vedno manj. Vikar je molčal. Računal je s svojimi prejemki, milo odšteval preračunjene izdatke in začel puščati neka pisma, »saj vem, kaj je notri«, neodprta za nedoločen čas. Bila pa je v njem čudna lahkomiselnost: upal je, da dobi lepega dne vsoto denarja, ki se je nikoli ne bi nadejal, in da bo potem čez noč vse lepo prešlo kot težek sen, ta sitnost, ki bi je niti »bratu v hudiču« ne privoščil. Res je bilo tako. Dedoval je nekaj stotnic, takoj odprl neodprta pisma, poravnal račune za olje, vino, knjige in drugo in se udobrovoljil in razmahnil sijajneje od prej. Za birmo se je obnesel bahaško. Potem je napravil čedno primico revnemu bogoslovcu. Potem je posodil dobesedno zadnjih petdeset goldinarjev tovarišu sosedu in bil vesel, da oni vsaj šestdeset ni prosil, ki bi mu jih ne bil mogel dati. Potem pa je udarilo kakor v žalostno smešni igri nadenj in ga oblilo z vso težo vsakdanjosti. Ko je bil kar brez novca, se mu je oglasil, »samo da gospoda vikarja pozdravi«, vinski kupec v hiši. S kruto odločnostjo je hlinil vikar živahnost in neprisiljenost, dasi je v njem vse vpilo od bridkosti: »Nič drugega ne kaže, kakor da stopim h krčmarju in ga povlečem na stran in povem, kako in kaj.«

Vikar se je do bridke šale razvnel:

»Zdaj poznaš, 'brata v hudiču', Matija! Krčmarju boš dolžan. Boš odslej lepo tiho in ne boš več mrmral, ko bo s harmoniko ljudi v greh klical, zlodjev galjot.«

Pridržal je s prisiljeno vljudnostjo trgovca, poslušal vdano njegovo zavaljeno govorico, ki mu je opletala, kakor blatne hlače ob petah, katere je nosil nevarno nizko in malomarno. Kdo bo gledal! Zdaj pa zdaj jih izgubi.

»Plačam te,« je mislil vikar o njem, »tvojega vina pa ne pijem nikoli več, nevljudna nadlega!«

Oprostil se je kratko za nekaj trenutkov in stopil v svojo pisarniško sobo. Napisal je list krčmarju in odprl vrata, da bi poslal po sestri. Tu je zagledal v veži staro ženico, vaško gostjo, ki so ji morali bogvedi kako in zakaj dajati Melanovi kot v hiši. Skrivnostno je prosila vikarja, naj ji spravi nekaj denarja, ki ga doma nima kje več skriti, ker ji Melanovi vse pretaknejo. Vikar je potegnil ženico v sobo, preštel njene prihranke in jo

protection against the cold. Then the house needed plates, and dishes—with so many guests.”

The brother made no reply. He counted his meagre income, and deducted the presumed expenses, then began not to open the letters which arrived, putting them on one side, “I know quite well what they contain, they will have to wait.”

His mind was confused. He had some idea that one day he would come in for a large sum of money, which he had never expected, and there would then be an end to all the troubles which were now weighing so heavily on his mind, worries that he would not wish even to the *Frater in diabolo*.

And it did happen that one day he unexpectedly inherited a few hundred florins! The neglected letters were immediately opened; bills for wine, oil, books, and various small articles were paid at once. Courage returned, generosity and lavish hospitality resumed their despotic sway; and during the time of Confirmation the Vicar's extravagance knew no bounds. A poor young priest was assisted, so that the feast on the day of his first Mass should be worthy of the occasion. Finally, a neighboring colleague asked for the loan of fifty florins, and the Vicar was only relieved that the sum was not sixty, which he could not have given. Nothing for himself! One day there came an end to this tragical comedy, and he stood penniless. It happened on the very day when the wine dealer “just called to pay the Vicar a visit.”

Mathias knew well what this meant, but with an appearance of easy hospitality he invited the man to dinner, listened to his empty speeches, looked with disgust at his soiled clothes, decided that never more would he drink his wine, but pay him he must.

He hated doing it, but he must borrow from the innkeeper in order to get rid of the dealer. And while he tried to look interested in the conversation he was saying to himself, “This is a grim joke, for here is *Frater in diabolo* having to be in debt to the innkeeper you will have to keep your mouth shut; you will have to look on while he seduces people with the music of his accordion, and never be able to reprove the old sinner,” and rising from his seat he went to his little office to write his begging letter.

When he opened the door to give his sister the letter to take over the way, he saw standing in the hall a little old woman who was a pensioner and lived as a permanent guest—nobody knew for what reason—in the house of the Melans.

She whispered to the Vicar that she wished him to take charge of some money she had brought with her, for there was no place in her house where she could hide it because the people were always searching her rooms. He

potolaženo odpustil, ko je bil ukazal sestri, naj ji da malo juhe in čašo vina. On sam pa je odštel od njenega denarja in nesel trgovcu.

Komaj pa je trgovec odšel po obedu, se je ženica vrnila in jokaje priznala, da niti povedati ne more, kako jo je sram. Vikar je takoj zaslutil, čemu se je vrnila, in zavpil nejevoljno:

»Kaj ne, segoltneži so takoj ugenili, da si denar nesla iz hiše. Pa si prišla spet ponj?«

»Ne bom imela miru,« je tarnala. »Zdaj hočejo na posodo. Kako naj naredim? O, saj vem, da bom ob denar.«

»Boš,« je rekel vikar in pristavil, naj njemu prepusti, da bo že sam govoril z Melanovimi. Odmajala je svojeglavo in se ni dala pregovoriti.

»Brez denarja ne smem nazaj.«

»Ti in tvoj denar,« je zavpil vikar nevljudno. »Tako ga dobiš.« Sunil je ženico v kuhinjo, sam pa je šel kar gologlav iz hiše in naravnost h krčmarju. Kako je bilo in kako se je vrnil, se vikar nikoli poslej ni mogel jasno domisliti. Že sama misel na tisto kratko, a strašno pot mu je še dolgo let potem srbežila kožo in gnala kri v glavo.

Nekaj dni pozneje se je zadolžil v mestu, plačal krčmarja, se poglobil z vso resnostjo v proučevanje svojih gospodarskih razmer in zaključil, da bo z gosti kratkomalo nevljuden.

»Pri moji veri, da bom!« je rekel. Ko pa je tri ure pozneje stregel petim dijakom in jim nosil kruha in vina na mizo, mu je bilo vendar nerodno, da ni sestra narezala vsaj malo sira h kruhu, če se ji že smili gnjat. Z očmi se je ogibal njihovih pogledov, ki so se mu hoteli kakor posmehovati:

»Kaj pa je to malo vina? Skopuh si, še malo mesa nisi narezal.«

Ko so odhajali, jih je vedel skozi vrt.

»O, breskve!« so se začudili zgodnjemu sadežu. Vikar je skoraj ljut stopil k drevesu in ga potresel, da se je žlahtni sad sesul na gredico. Napolnili so si žepe. Pobrli so vse do zadnjega in se poslovili. Vikar je videl skrit za zelenjem, kako so navidezno krenili po cesti naprej, a zavili nato naglo okoli hlevov v krčmo.

»Svojat,« mu je ušlo bridko, ki je do tedaj ves čas trpel v sebi, da jim ni stisnil v roko nekaj goldinarjev, kakor je bila tako do tedaj njegova navada...

Tri leta pozneje je vikar Matija oddal lastnoročno in osebno pri ordinariatu prošnjo za izpraznjeno gorsko faro pet ur od velike ceste.

took her to his office, counted and re-counted her savings, and having told his sister to give her a plate of soup and a glass of wine, sent her home happy. Then, to save time, he took part of her money and paid off the dealer.

Only a short time elapsed before the old woman was back again, and, with tears in her eyes, had begun to explain in faltering tones, when the Vicar interrupted her, "I know, I know, those harpies in your house have found out about the money, and want it back, isn't that it?" "Yes," she replied, weeping, "they give me no peace, they want to borrow it. What must I do? I shall certainly lose my bit of money."

"You certainly will," agreed Mathias grimly, as he tried to persuade her to let him deal with the Melans. But this she would not do, for "Without the money they refuse to let me enter the house," she said.

The poor Vicar, in desperation, cried out "You and your money, you shall have it back in a moment," and, pushing her into the kitchen, he burst out of the house without hat or coat and strode over to the inn.

He never forgot that short and terrible walk, and could never remember how he went nor how he returned. In after years the very thought of it sent the blood rushing to his head.

The day following he went to the bank, arranged for a loan, and paid the innkeeper. And now, looking carefully into his money affairs, he came to a solemn decision. He would have to be absolutely discourteous to any future guests. "I'll do it. Yes, I'll do it," he kept repeating to himself with emphasis. Three hours later five travelling students called at the presbytery, and were given only bread and wine. The Vicar dared not look at them, he felt so ashamed and pained that his sister had not given them at least cheese and ham.

He seemed to hear them say: "Not even a piece of meat! What a niggard you are!" He showed them out through the garden where they admired the peaches, and the Vicar, going up to the tree, shook it so vigorously that the ripe fruit fell in dozens on to the vegetable beds.

The students filled their pockets with the fruit, gathered up all that were on the ground, said good-bye to the Vicar, and left as if to continue their journey. Their host watched them through the bushes, and saw that they turned round by the stables and stealthily made their way back to the inn.

"Cowards," said he to himself bitterly, he, who had all the time been suffering at the thought of not being able to give each of them a florin to help them on their way, as was his custom.

Three years later Vicar Mathias went up to the Bishop's palace to present in person his petition to be given a remote mountain living which had fallen vacant. The official in the office looked at him wonderingly, but at that moment a hand was placed affectionately on his shoulder and a

Gospodje v pisarni so ga začudeno pogledali. Njemu samemu je tedaj nekdo položil roko na rame in rekel:

»Gospod vikar, pojdiva osebno k prevzvišenemu. Nadejam se, da Vam bo ustregel.«

»Gospod Lojze,« je dejal v hudi zadregi vikar Matija. »Glejte, Vi ste? A meni ni druge pomoči. Verujte mi. Govorite zame!«

Mladi dostojanstvenik ga je z ljubeznivo dvorljivostjo vedel s seboj...

Gorsko faro je vikar Matija dobil...

Tako se je vikar Matija korenito izločil iz družbe, kjer je živel le še kot zgodovinska osebnost v grotesknosti besede »brata v hudiču« in zadnje »šale«, ki se mu je bila ponesrečila, kakor se je trdovratno ponavljalo pri vseh duhovniških sestankih in katera se je bila zadnjič ponovila v njegovi lastni hiši, dvajset let potem, ko se je preselil z velike ceste v odljudno samoto in je tu gostil svojega nekdanjega ljubega gosta gospoda Lojza, ki je bil zdaj njegov škof. Nekdo je vstal za mizo, med veselimi napitnicami nazdravil vikarju Matiji in povedal »šalo« še enkrat. Vikar Matija, zloglasni šaljivec »brata v hudiču«, je napisal prošnjo za slabšo faro, jo »lastnoročno in osebno« nesel na ordinariat, kjer so ga gospodje začudeno pogledali. Rajni prevzvišeni pa je prošnji ustregel in tako z bridkejšo šalo odgovoril šaljivcu. Staremu vikarju Matiji je ob tem pripovedovanju rahlo zardelo ostarelo lice, ozrl se je kakor v zadregi po navzočem prevzvišenem, »gospodu Lojzu«, ki je dejal nekam čudno slovesno:

»Ne delajte krivice nikomur! Gospod vikar se tedaj ni šalil. In prav ljubo nam je, da se ni šalil. Sicer pa—naj živi ta bajka! Ni slaba!«

S solznimi očmi in rahlo zmeden je vstal vikar in dejal preprosto:

»Prevzvišeni, saj ne boste hudi, da Vam rečem še enkrat, kakor svoj čas: gospod Lojze! Vi veste, kako je bilo tedaj z menoj. Hudo je bilo, a minilo je. Rekli ste, naj živi bajka. Modro ste rekli, kakor takrat, ko ste bili prvič moj gost. Gospod Lojze, prevzvišeni! Naj bo, kar veva sama, samo najno. Do moje smrti, prevzvišeni!«

Škof je vedro prikimal. Nato pa je vprašal:

»Kako pa je z 'bratom v hudiču', ali je še tako ljub prijatelj, ko takrat?«

»Zlodej ga vzemi,« je zinil vedro vikar. »Vrgel sem ga v peč. V spanju se mi je spovračal. Nadležen gost je bil, pil je moje vino in pri tem zabavljaj. V sanjah seveda! Nekoč je celo Boga klel ali tajil, ali kaj vem, kako. Seveda v

kind, quiet voice which he at once knew said: "Reverend Sir, let us go together to his Lordship, and whatever be your request I hope it will be granted."

"Mr. Alois," stammered Mathias in great embarrassment, "is it really you? I—I could not act otherwise. Do please believe me, and say a word in my favor."

With the utmost courtesy the young dignitary asked the Vicar to follow him, and in a short time, the pleasant presbytery with its fruitful orchard on the main road was exchanged for the lonely mountain parsonage far from the haunts of man. It was the only way in which the hospitable big-hearted Vicar was able to retire from a world that henceforth remembered him only as an historical figure given to making jokes. In fact, even his request for an exchange was said to have been the result of a mistaken joke. It was twenty years since he had moved to his forlorn parsonage, and his Mr. Alois was now "our Bishop" and his honored and much loved guest on a certain important occasion. Toasts were being proposed, and one of the priests present rose to drink the health of "Vicar Mathias, the renowned joker," adding for the benefit of the younger men the well-known story of how one day the Vicar had come to the late Bishop to proffer a request for a less important living than the one he then held. To embarrass them he had tendered his petition personally, and the Bishop had unexpectedly granted the petition, much to the Vicar's chagrin, thus capping his joke with a far more drastic one.

Mathias's worn old face flushed on hearing this tale, and with appealing eyes he turned to look at the Bishop, his dear Mr. Alois who said to the company:

"We must not wrong anyone. Our dear host did not intend a joke that day, but the tale is not a bad one, so let us stick to it. Never mind, your Reverence."

"Your Lordship will not be angry with me for calling you by the old name for the last time, Mr. Alois, but you are the only one who knows how it was with me at that time. It was a fearful fearful time, but it is over now. You said the tale was not a bad one and we should stick to it. Those are wise words, like those you spoke to me when you were my guest for the first time. Mr. Alois! Your Lordship! Might the truth we both know remain just between us two until my death?" The Bishop nodded understandingly, and then said: "But what about the Frater in diabolo Is he still as dear a friend as he was in former days?" "Oh, the devil took him," the Vicar cheerfully replied. "I put him in the oven, the best place for him. He tormented me in my sleep, and was a most troublesome guest. He drank my wine, and yet scolded me! Of course, only in my dreams, you understand. Once he even

sanjah, razumete! Pa morda so bile od Boga sanje. Zato sem ga odtrgal iz svojega srca in je gorel, da je bilo veselje.«

»Ubogi Lukjan,« se je nasmehnil škof. »Ali pa veste, da je bil mož sicer prav pameten gospodar in si je celó bogastvo nabral?«

Vikar je povesil oči, a jih zopet dvignil in odvrnil vedro:

»Jaz si ga nisem, prečastiti.«

»Kako neki bi ga?« je dejal slovesno škof. »Saj ste vendar katoliški duhovnik.«

»O,« se je razgrel vikar, »a tudi za katoliškega duhovnika je bridko, če bi rad postregel gostom, a nima toliko, da bi mogel.«

Čez trenutek je vprašal škof:

»Pa kaj berete, odkar ste Lukjana sežgali?«

»Pisma svetega Pavla,« je odvrnil vikar in dodal šegavo: »Pa še levite svoji sestri in kmetom, ker so se žganja navadili.«

»Ne sodite jih prestrogo,« je rekel škof vsej družbi. »Slišal sem od pametnega zdravnika, da ga pijejo, ker imajo kruha premalo.«

Nato se je dvignil in vsi so vstali z njim.

* * *

In še dvajset let je minilo in gospod Matija je bil osivel ko ovca in obnemogel v topi samozadovoljnosti starčka za pečjo v sestriini oskrbi. In če je srknil kozarec vina, je postal zgovoren in omočen in zadnje čase celo siten, da je karal sestro:

»Goste mi odvrčaš. To ti rečem, grde ste ženske in ti si še posebnih ena. Lej in se ne šalim. Ti bi še svetemu Petru in Pavlu in še Gospodu Kristusu žlice štela, če bi se lepo zglasili v hiši. Taka si.«

»Taka je,« je ponavljal, ko je ostal sam, rahlo dremal sam vase v toplém somraku luči in miru.

Sestra pa je skrbno pazila večer za večerom pri priprtih vratih na njegove vedno jasneje otroške besede in nenavadne kretnje; vedela je že vse kakor na pamet: »Kadar misli, da je sam, glej ga, ali ne gre v omaro po steklenko škofovega vina? Ali ne pogrne mize kakor za goste? Ali ne postavi kozarcev? Ali ne sede na najnižji prostor in govori verno v praznino proti stolu, ki je odločen za častne goste?«

spoke evil of our dear Lord, and of other holy things. Of course, only in my dreams, you understand. But perhaps, I thought, these dreams have been sent by our Lord Himself, as a warning. So I tore the book out of my heart and burnt it. It was quite a pleasure to watch it burn."

"Poor Lucian," said the Bishop, with a smile. "But, my dear Vicar, do you not know that the writer of that book was a very good business man, and made a big fortune with his books?" The Vicar looked down for a moment, then gaily retorted: "But I made no fortune, your Lordship."

"No," said the Bishop solemnly, "being a Catholic priest, you could not."

"But," replied the Vicar, warming to his subject, "even a Catholic priest feels it hard when he wishes to offer his guest hospitality and finds that he has not the means to do so."

"And now that you have burnt Lucian, what do you read?" asked the Bishop.

"The Epistles of St. Paul; and sometimes I read sermons to my sister and to the peasants who are too much given to drink."

"Do not judge them too severely," warned his Lordship, and addressing the whole assembly, he added: "I was told by a very clever doctor that most of these poor peasants drink because they have not enough bread to eat."

* * *

It is twenty years later. The Vicar, a whiteheaded feeble old man sits near the stove, nursed by his sister. He lives in the past. When he is given merely a drop of wine he staggers, and reproaches her. "You have driven away all my guests; all women are disagreeable, but you are the worst. I am not joking. Were the Apostle Paul or St. Peter, or even our Lord Jesus Christ to come to the door, you would count every morsel they would eat, so you would." He would repeat such things to himself as he sat drowsy and alone in the quiet hours of the fading day, and his sister would watch him unnoticed, and listen to him as he became more and more childish. She knew his speeches by heart.

When he thought he was alone he would go to the sideboard, take a bottle of the best wine, lay the table as if for guests, put out the wine glasses, and from the lowest place would speak confidentially to the emptiness in the seats of honor.

Ko je vikarjeva sestra prvokrat vse to videla, jo je stresla groza. Potem pa se je privadila in je rekla ljubeče:

»Naj ima svoje otročje veselje.«

Za njegov god pa je sklenila, da ga bo celo prijetno iznenadila...

Vse lepo je pogrnila in postavila sama vina na mizo med tri svetle čaše. In poleg je položila belega kruha in mehke gnjati. In zdaj je čakala, da pride iz sobice, kjer je bil zadremal. Stala je v kuhinji ob vratih in poslušala in solze ganotja so ji posili vrele iz oči. Ves ljubi dan je bil tako prijetno veder in živahen in teknilo mu je in voščilna pisma mu je brala in je brbljal veselo o apostolu Pavlu in njega potih, o njegovi poti v Damask, v Atene in Rim.

»Kakšen pridigar, pomisli! Kaj mi hribovski vikarji, on, on. Vsem učenim starega ajdovstva je sapo zaprl. Pa kako ti piše o vinu. Po pameti ga pij, Timotej, ker si star. Lej, kakor bi vikarju Matiji pisal. Lej, saj bi se še na eno čašo povabil k meni, če bi se tebe ne bal.«

Vikarjeva sestra je sapo vase povlekla za vrati. Notri so se bila odprla vrata in je vstopil starček. In žena je videla, kakor da vodi na desni in levi nekatere nevidne s seboj. In zdaj je rekel nevidemu na desni:

»Ti si večji in višji od nas vseh, sedel boš više.« In potem je rekel nekemu drugemu nevidnemu na levi:

»Tebe sicer ne poznam, a ker si ž njim, dobiš mesto nad menoj.«

In ju je vedel k mizi in sedel z njima in nalil čaše do vrha in nazdravil vedro:

»Bog blagoslovi!«

Sestra vikarjeva za vrati je otrpnila. Čuj, saj so bile čaše res zazvene. Stari vikar pa je govoril vedro.

»Lej no, lej, apostol Pavel, tak si torej. Sem si mislil, da si bil pravi hrust, pa si komaj za tršastega Tolminca. A le zamere nič. Vikar Matija ne pozna poklonov. Kar je res, je pa res. Tako nisem bil vesel še gospoda Lojza, prevzvišenega svojega pastirja, razumeš, kakor sem tebe, trikrat Veliki. In to še za svoj god. Salve, salve!«

Vikarjeva sestra za vrati je krčevito tajila svojo razburjenost. Tedaj je začel vikar nekam nestrpno: »Star sem, glej, in naglušen in tudi vidim že slabo. Saj si mi ga predstavil, saj vem, svojega tovariša. Pa saj razumeš, kakšni smo starci... Reci no še enkrat, kdo je, da še njega počastim.«

Sestra za vrati je pritisnila roko na usta, da ne bi zavpila. Skozi špranjo v vratih je videla, kako je brat nagnil glavo čez mizo, kakor da je napeto posluhnil, in kako je nato krčevito zaklical:

The first time that his sister saw him do this she was overcome with horror, but as she became accustomed to his ways she smiled indulgently. "Let him have his childish pleasure," she would say, and she even made him a surprise birthday treat.

She laid the table beautifully, put out three polished glasses, wine, white bread, and nice fresh ham, then waited for him to come out of the little room where he had fallen asleep.

He had been so serene and lively all day, so kind and affectionate. He had liked his breakfast, and she had read to him the letters of congratulation his many friends had written him. He had spoken to her about the journeys of St. Paul to Damascus, Athens and Rome, saying: "What a preacher! Just think of him. What are we poor priests of the mountains compared with him? He could put to shame even the greatest scholars of pagan times! And how he writes of wine! Use a little wine, Timothy, for thou art old and infirm—just as if he had been writing to Vicar Mathias. I think he would call on me, and drink a glass of wine with me if he were not afraid of you!" The sister could not keep back her tears, thinking of his quaint tenderness as she stood waiting there, hidden by the kitchen door.

The door of his room opened, and the old man seemed to be leading two invisible persons, one on his right and another on his left.

Addressing the one on the right, he said: "You are higher and greater than all of us, so you must have the best place," and, turning to the other, "I do not know you, but as you are with him, you must sit above me." Thus speaking he led them to the table, filled the glasses, and said gaily: "May God bless it to you." The sister trembled with awe, for she heard a distinct sound of clinking glasses. The old man continued, "Now, Apostle Paul, so this is what you are like! always fancied you like a giant, and you turn out to be just like one of those dumpy little men from Tolmin, but never mind. Old Mathias is not a good hand at paying compliments. But to tell the truth, I was never so happy as today, no not even when Mr. Alois, my gracious superior, visited me; for you, who are three times as great, have condescended to visit the poor country priest. And on my birthday, too! Salve, salve!" The sister had difficulty in keeping silence as he continued, "I am old, you see, and hard of hearing, and my sight is not of the best. You did introduce your companion to me, I know. But you understand how we old people are. Tell me once more who he is, so that I may give him due honor, too."

In her hiding place the sister pressed her hand to her mouth so as not to scream aloud, for she saw through the chink in the door her brother bend forward as if trying to catch the words, and then heard him call out.

»Pa mi to šele zdaj poveš, ko sem te više posadil, apostol Gospodov? Umakni se Mu!«

Sestra vikarjeva je še videla, kako je vikar zdrknil pred nevidnim gostom na kolena, kako je razširil roke in jih proseče dvignil. Brezkončna sreča in pokorščina je pela iz njegove zmedene, vedno bolj pojemajoče besede:

»Gospod Jezus, moj dobri Učenik. Saj sem v zmedi delal. Saj gre le Tebi prvo mesto pri moji mizi. Saj vidiš, saj veš, da je ni reči v moji hiši, da Ti je ne bi dal. Ti si gospod, zapovej, vzemi, vzemi, moj sladki, sladki gost...«

Sestra vikarjeva je vso silo zbrala, zadržala utrip srca. In čuj! Notri je odgovorilo, odgovorilo s sladko ljubeznijo:

»Matija, moj verni hlapec!«

In tam, kjer je sedel apostol, je jeknilo:

»Amen!«

Sestra je planila k bratu. Ležal je kleče z obličjem na tleh. Bil je mrtev...

“And is it only now that you tell me, now that I have put you in the place of honor? Yield place to him, oh, Apostle of the Lord.”

She saw him fall to his knees before the invisible Guest, saw him stretch out his arms, fold his hands, and with an infinite glad devotion say in faltering tones:

“Lord Jesus, my kind Master, I did it in my confusion. The place of honor at my table belongs to You before all others. There is nothing in my poor house that is not Yours. You are the Lord. Take. Order. Take, my sweet beloved Guest.”

Her heart seemed to stop, as she heard in the room a voice saying in sweet clear tones: “Mathias, my faithful servant,” and from the seat of the apostle came a whispered Amen.

She rushed into the room. Her brother knelt with arms outstretched, his face calm and peaceful. Dead.

Baroness Zmajić