

Ciril Kosmač

POMLADNI DAN



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Ciril Kosmač (1910–80)

A social realist along the lines of Prežihov Voranc, Kosmač often drew for material on his childhood memories of life in Italian-dominated Slovenia or his experiences from World War II. He was most at home in the short story and novella. His writing is clear and colorful, with occasional profundities. Many consider his finest works to be the novel *Pomladni dan* (1953, *A Spring Day*) and the novela *Balada o trobenti in oblaku* (1968, *Ballad of the Trumpet and the Cloud*). The translation below is excerpted from Ciril Kosmač, *A Day in Spring*, tr. F.S. Copeland (London: Lincolns Prager; New York: London House & Maxwell, 1959): 167–72.

Pomladni dan

III, 2

V mojem spominu je tako jasno zaživela podoba iskrih vrancev in svetlega zapravlživčka z bronasto krsto, gospo v črnini in plavolaso nevesto, da sem se nehote ozrl skozi okno in pogledal po Modrijanovem travniku. Še isti hip se mi je pamet posmehnila, češ glej ga no, bedaka, četrto stoletja bo, odkar je krsta krenila na pot, ta pa jo še zdaj s pogledom lovi. Priznal sem pameti, da je čustvo včasih presneto nepreračunljivo in čez mero zanesenjaško, a da ji ne bi dal vselej in v vsem veljati, sem se kljub temu trmasto zamaknil po travniku. Ves je bil lepo pregrnjen z zeleno odejo bujne majske trave, samo—joj, joj!—bil je neverjetno ožji in krajši, desetkrat manjši, kakor je bil v mojih otroških letih. Ali ta rjuha ravnega sveta sploh zasluži ime travnik? Ravninski ljudje bi ga še v poštev ne vzeli. Za nas, hribovce, posebno za tiste, ki nikdar ne gredo daleč iz naše gorate dežele, pa je Modrijanov travnik že kar travnik in pol, prava pravcata planjava. Tudi zame je, čeprav sem prepotoval dokaj širokega sveta in videl nekaj širokih travnikov. In nemara je moje domotožje prav ob pogledu na te resnične travnike razširilo Modrijanovega, podeseterilo njegove topole in jih pognalo v vis, ga obrobilo s svetlo sivimi vrbami... skratka, dobro se spominjam, kako mi je v mrkih, trpkih urah vablljivo razgrinjalo pred očmi čudovito, domačo zeleno ravan, ki se je na njej v rahlem vetru prelivala bujna, domača trava. No, in če je domotožje pretiravalo, vsekakor z dobrim namenom, da bi mi krepilo telo in bodrilo duha, čemu naj bi zdaj trezna pamet z mrzlo presojo zbrisala to lepo podobo in travnik spet skrčila na njegovo stvarno mero in suho zemljepisno nepomembnost. Domotožje je čustveni privid domovine. V njem je nekaj sanjskega, pretresujoče lepega in vabljivega. Na tujem me je ta privid zvesto spremljal ter me pretresal; zadramil je v meni marsikaj, verjetno celo slo po pisanju. Zato pa v moj pisateljski svet, ki je naposled spet le svet čustvenih prividov resničnega sveta, sodi tudi Modrijanov travnik—in bo v njem živel kot eden najlepših travnikov, pa čeprav bi se kdaj pojavil tako goreč bojevnik realizma, ki bi v svojem prevestnem pretresu moje pokrajine poslal »na lice mesta« ne samo zamljepisca, temveč kar zemljemerca. Tako! Da, zdi se mi, da mali narodi bolj ali vsaj drugače ljubimo svojo domovino, kakor jo ljubijo veliki. Majhna je..., in ker ne moremo opevati njene isprostranosti, opevamo in

A Day in Spring (Excerpt)

Part III, chapter 2

The vision of the mettlesome black horses, the light-colored cart with the bronze coffin, the lady in mourning and the fair-haired fiancée was so vivid in my memory that I involuntarily looked through the window towards Wiseacre's meadow. At once common sense recalled me to my senses with a smile of ridicule: "What a fool it is! It's a quarter of a century ago since that coffin passed that way and you are still looking for it!" I agreed with common sense, emotion is sometimes devilish unpredictable and excessively confiding and not always and everywhere trustworthy, but all the same my eyes remained obstinately fixed on that meadow. It was beautifully decked out in a lush green carpet of young grass, only—oh dear, oh dear!—it had grown narrower and shorter, ten times smaller than it had been in the days of my childhood. Does that patch of level ground really deserve the name of meadow? Dwellers in the plains would not even consider it. But for us mountaineers, especially for such as never stray far from our hill country Wiseacre's meadow was a veritable meadow-and-a-half, a real regular plain. And thus it remains for me, although I have traveled fairly far abroad and seen sundry broad meadows. Perhaps it was my homesickness that magnified Wiseacre's meadow, multiplied its poplars by ten and added to their height, framed it in grey-green willows—in short, I remember perfectly how in dark and bitter moments that marvelous green plain of home, with the lush grass on it softly rippling in the breeze would unfold before the eyes of memory. Well, and if nostalgia did exaggerate, surely with good intent to strengthen my body and encourage my soul, why should sober common sense now with its chilly judgment efface this lovely image and reduce my meadow to its actual proportions and prosaic geographical insignificance? Nostalgia is the emotional vision of home. It partakes of the quality of dreams, breath-taking in beauty and appeal. This vision was my faithful companion abroad, rousing hidden faculties in me, perhaps even desire to write. And therefore Wiseacre's meadow forms part of my literary world, which is in itself the fruit of emotional visions of the real world, and will persist in it as one of the most beautiful meadows that ever were, even if some fanatical protagonist of realism should come along and in hyperconscientious research into my landscape send "to the spot" not only a geographer but a surveyor as well. There you are! Yes, it seems to me that we small nations love our land more dearly than great ones do or at least in a manner different from theirs. Our native land is small, and as we

poveličujemo njene koticke, ki pa so polni lepote, kajti lepota je podobna resnici; resnica ne potrebuje debele knjige, da se nam razjasni, lepota ne širnega, brezmejnega prostora, da se razmahne, razbohoti in razcvete. Naj prostranost bobni in poje svojo mogočno pesem, resnična lepota tiho žari. Svojo domovino poznamo, kakor poznamo obraz svoje matere: domače so nam vse njene gube in gubice, poteze veselja in sreče, brazde bridkosti in skrbi. Nenehno čutimo objem njenih kmečko raskavih, a srčno dobrih in toplih rok, stiskamo se k njej in jo branimo že tisoč let, branimo jo največkrat preprosto, kar z golimi rokami, toda branimo jo uspešno, kajti prvi porok zmage je besna zaljubljenost, ki ne presoja in se zato tudi ne umika pred sovražnikovo premočjo. Da, najprej je potrebna ljubezen, ki je vsako uro pripravljena dvigniti roko v bran, nato šele prideta do veljave razsodna misel in orožje.

Sam bog ve, v kakšne misli bi se bil še izgubil, če me ne bi zdramilo vriskanje in petje. Takoj sem dvignil oči na cesto. Izza Ustinarjevega roba se je prikazala precejšnja gruča ljudi. Priostril sem pogled in kmalu sem po hoji spoznal, da so sami domačini. Pred vsemi se je zibala znana orjaška postava.

»Pa vendar ni Podzemljíč še živ?« sem se začudil. »Saj je bil star že takrat, ko je našemu dedu zbil krsto.«

Gruča se je naglo pomikala po cesti, pela, vriskala in mahala s klobuki.

»Komu, vruga, le mahajo?« sem se vprašal. »Eh, najbriž v svoji srečni prešernosti pozdravljajo našo hišo... saj hiša je vendar namestnik družine, kadar te ni doma.«

Odtrgal sem se od okna in naglo šel iz sobe.

Teta je stala pred hišo in si z dlanjo ščitila oči pred poševnim jutranjim soncem.

—Kam pa gredo? sem vprašal.

—V Dominov rob.

—Po kaj pa?

—Cesto, ki so jo partizani razstrelili, bodo popravili.

—Kar sami?

—Sami! je prikimala teta in celo z vidnim ponosom. To je bila Podzemljíčeva misel. Ni in ni odnehal, čeprav jih ima že nad osemdeset.

—No, no, sem jo prekinil z rahlo zbadljivim smehom. Ti bi lahko do ure natančno povedala, koliko je star.

—Enajstega oktobra jih bo petinosemdeset, če me že moraš zbadati s pratiko! je zadrdrala z rahlo nejevoljo in takoj nadaljevala s prejšnim

cannot sing of its greatness, we celebrate and sing of its details which are full of beauty. Because beauty is like truth. Truth does not require bulky tomes to make herself plain, nor does Beauty need a wide, boundless space herein to unfold herself, to thrive and blossom. Let Expanse thunder forth its mighty song, true Beauty glows in silence. We know our country as we know our mother's face. Her lines and wrinkles are familiar to us, her features of joy and happiness, her furrows of grief and anxiety. Always we are conscious of the clasp of her hands, rough as a peasant's but kindly and warm; we cling to her and have defended her for a thousand years, often with simple means, yea, even with our bare hands, but with success—because the chief sponsor of victory is impassioned love which does not calculate and therefore does not yield even when faced by overwhelming odds. Yes, the primary condition is Love, which is always ready to raise a hand in defence. Deliberate planning and armaments are secondary considerations.

God alone knows, whither my thoughts would have carried me, if I had not been roused by a sound of cheerful whooping and singing. I looked out and down the road. A sizable group of people were coming up the valley. I looked more carefully and presently realized by their gait that they were all local people. At their head swayed a well-known gigantic figure.

“Surely ‘Underground’ is never still alive?” I marvelled.

“Why he was an old man when he made grandfather's coffin.”

The group moved quickly along the road, singing, whooping and waving their hats.

“To whom the devil are they waving?” I wondered. “Eh, most probably it's our house,—they're so full of high spirits that they're waving to our house. after all the house represents the family when that is not at home.”

Reluctantly I left the window and went quickly out of the room.

Auntie stood in front of the house, shielding her eye with her hand against the slanting sunbeams of the morning.

“Where are they off to?” I inquired.

“To Domino Edge.”

“But why?”

“To repair the road the partisans blew up.”

“By themselves?”

“By themselves!” Auntie nodded with visible pride. “It was the carpenter's idea. He wouldn't and he wouldn't give up although he's over eighty.”

“Well, well,” I interrupted her with a bantering smile. “You can surely tell me exactly to the hour how old he is.”

“On the eleventh of October he will be eighty-five, since you must tease me with being an almanac,” she reeled off with a touch of annoyance

glasom:—In vidiš, kako se mu mudi! Sicer pa je bil zmeraj burjast dedec. Tudi med vojno. Sam bog vedi, kako je obdržal glavo na vratu. A zdaj? Še preden se je polegel prah za poslednjim našganim Nemcem, je bila že vsa vas njegova. 'Kaj bi čakali,' je govoril in opletal z rokami. 'Zdaj je vse naše, tudi cesta, pa moramo zanjo skrbeti, kakor že od nekdanj skrbimo za domače kolnike in poti.' In ko se je čemerni Zavoglar, ki med vojno ni bil ne krop ne voda—za delo sam veš, da ni bil od mlada nič prida—razčeperil, češ da je po njegovem cesta državna, se je Podzemljč takoj obregnil obenj: 'Zdaj pri nas ni več države, temveč je čez in čez samo domovina.' Zavoglar je pri priči hlastnil ter ga vzela v precep: 'Kakšna pa je razlika?' Podzemljč pa, saj veš, kakor Podzemljč: pritisnil si je čokati palec na svoj drobčkani nos in ga začel presneto navijati, kakor bi mu drugače pamet sploh ne tekla v glavi, drugo roko pa je razgrnil pred Zavoglarjem in ga hkrati nasadil še na oster pogled, češ sirotka kislja, le miruj, kmalu bo odbilo. In res je odbilo; zravnil se je, bziknil slino, stegnil kazalec v Zavoglarja in zagrmel kakor rajniki Čar s prižnice: 'Domovina daje, država jemlje!'

—Oho! sem vzkliknil. Ostrmel sem spričo tetine žive govorice in Podzemljčeve odrezave modrosti.

—Kaj, ta bo predebela? Me je teta pogledala bistro in preplašeno hkrati.

—Hja!... sem se nasmehnil. Prav tenka ni, prenagla pa je vsekakor.

—Kako to misliš... prenagla? je vprašala z vsem svojim začudenim obrazom.

—Ker je država še potrebna.

—A?!... je široko zevnila in se takoj prijela za spodnjo čeljust, kakor bi se bala, da se ji bo spričo tolikšnega začudenja snela s tečajev. Če naj prav razumem, je nato počasi rekla, je zdaj še država, nekoč pa je ne bo več...

—Tako nekako.

—A!... In kdaj bo to?

—Kdaj?... O tem nisem prida razmišljal... Ko bo domovina slehernega človeka svobodna, varna in... pravično urejena, je nemara res ne bo več treba.

—A!...je poskočila teta. To bi se reklo: ko bodo povsod zmagali ljudje?

—Tako nekako.

and then continued in her former voice "And you can see what a hurry he's in! But then he's always been an excitable fellow. Even during the war. God alone knows how he kept his head on his shoulders! And now? Before the dust was laid after the last German on the run, he was master of the village. 'What are we waiting for,' said he, gesticulating. 'Now it's all ours and the highroad as well, so we must keep it in order, just as we have always looked after our cart roads and footpaths.' And when that surly old 'Round-the-Corner', who couldn't blow either hot or cold during the war—and as for work, you know that he was no good at it from a boy—objected, and said that in his opinion the highroad belonged to the State, Underground immediately turned on him: 'Now we haven't got a State any longer, now it's only our country from end to end.' 'Round-the-Corner' took him up shortly and asked: 'What's the difference?' The carpenter—you know what the carpenter's like—pressed his fat thumb to his tiny wee nose and began to twist it cruelly as if the brains in his head wouldn't work otherwise. His other hand he opened towards 'Round-the-Corner' and at the same time fixed him with his eyes ever so sharply as if to say: 'you stale buttermilk, the hour will strike, wait a bit, wait a bit.' And it really did strike, he drew himself up, spat, pointed at 'Round-the-Corner' and thundered like the late Father Čar from the pulpit: 'Our Country gives, the State takes'!"

"Oho," I cried. I was dumbfounded by Auntie's lively account and the carpenter's epigrammatic wisdom.

"What? Is that too much for you to swallow?" Auntie looked at me at once shrewdly and timidly.

"Hm—yes!" I smiled. "It is a bit of a mouthful—a bit anticipated in any case."

"What d'you mean by that, anticipated?" she asked with an expression of wonder in her face.

"Because the State is still necessary."

"Ah?!" she gasped and immediately took hold of her chin as if she were afraid that with so much amazement her lower jaw would slip off its hinges. "If I understand you rightly," she went on slowly, "the State still exists today, but some day it will have passed away?."

"Something of the sort."

"A! And when will that be?"

"When? I have never thought much about that. When every man's country will be free, safe, and righteously organized, then it will really no longer be necessary."

"Ah!" Auntie leapt at the thought. "That is to say, when the people are victorious everywhere."

"Something like that."

—Tako?... je prikimala in se spet zgrabila za čeljust. Nato je trznila, kakor bi ji nekaj novega prišlo na um. Potemtakem pa je imel Podzemljč po svoje le prav! je vzkliknila. Veš, Zavoglar je gnal svojo in trdil, da je tudi Jugoslavija država. Podzemljč pa: 'Dokler smo imeli kralja, je bila država. Kako naj bi sicer kralj živel brez države? Zdaj imajo Jugoslavijo v rokah ljudje, a ljudje imajo domovino.'

—To o ljudeh je dobro povedal! sem priznal. Vse drugo pa ni tako preprosto.

—O, seveda ne bo... je teta tiho priznala in si v nekakšni zadregi začela postiskati šop las za rob rute. Zato pa človek razmišlja. Toda preden nas eden kaj razmisli... Zamahnila je z roko, a je takoj nadaljevala: —Ljudem bi bilo vendar treba razumljivo razložiti, posebno zdaj, ko vsi vseprek česnajo. O ti moj bog, koliko je dandanes pametnih ljudi! Vsi vse vedo in vse znajo!... Vidiš, se je obrnila k meni, prav kar se države in domovine tiče. Razmišljam, bezam po svojem spominu, in kaj se izkaže? Da ne poznam prav nobene pesmi o državi, o domovini pa kar precej...

—Res je... toda tudi to ni tako preprosto.

—Ah, že spet ni preprosto! me je teta nejevoljno prekinila. In kar ni preprosto, ni za nas, stare babe... Naposled pa ima tudi stara baba razum... Da, in da ti povem, kar se mene tiče... da ti odkrito povem, če slišim domovina, me ogreje pri srcu, če slišim država, pa... no, kako bi rekla... dobro se mi zdi, da jo imamo, češ zdaj smo na svojem sami svoji gospodarji in nam ne bodo več drugi ukazovali, ne Lahi ne Nemci, nobeni!...

“I see!” she nodded and again supported her jaw. Then she gave a little start as if some new idea had struck her. “Then the carpenter was right in his way!” she cried. “You know, Round-the-Corner stuck to his point that Yugoslavia, too, is a State. But the carpenter said: ‘So long as we had a king, it was a State. How could a king exist without a state? Now it is just plain people who own Yugoslavia, and plain people have their Country.’”

“That about the people was well said!” I admitted. “All the rest is not so simple as all that.”

“Of course it won’t be,” Auntie admitted in a low voice and in her embarrassment began to push a strand of hair behind the edge of her kerchief. “That is why one must consider. But before some one of us has thought out something,” she made a gesture with her hand, but continued at once, “things must be sensibly explained to the people, especially now when everybody is holding forth. Oh my good Lord, how many wiseacres there are nowadays! They know everything and understand everything! “You see,” she turned to me, “in this matter of State and Country—I racked my brain and rummaged in my memory—and what did I find? That I don’t know a single song about the State—but I know plenty about my Country.”

“That’s true. But even that is not so simple as all that.”

“Ah, even that isn’t simple!” Auntie interrupted me somewhat crossly. “And what isn’t simple isn’t for us old women. But after all, even an old woman has brains. Yes, and let me tell you, as far as I am concerned. I tell you frankly when I hear the words “Our Country” it warms my heart, but if I heard about our State, well, how shall I put it? It seems good to me that we have it, to be able to say that now we are masters in our own house, with no foreigners to order us about, neither Italians, nor Germans, nobody!”