

VITOMIL ZUPAN

SONČNE LISE

CANKARJEVA ZALOŽBA
V LJUBLJANI 1969

Vitomil Zupan (1914–87)

Though he fought on the side of the partisans during the Second World War, it was Zupan's fate always to be out of favor with the regime. In the fifties he was considered a decadent, though in fact he was a realist of great frankness, along the lines of Céline and Henry Miller. His treatments of the war, and especially his novel *Levitan* (1982) on the brutality of the Tito's anti-Stalin purges after the 1948 split, made him one of Slovenia's most popular and influential writers. The Slovene text is from Vitomil Zupan, *Sončne lise* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1969); the translation, by Margaret Davis, is taken from *Le livre slovčne* 17/1–2 (1979): 38–42.

Stališče velikega miru

Trava ob Gradaščici je porumenela v zimi brez snega. Nad velikimi novimi inštituti univerze je drselo sonce v zahod, žolta luč se je razlivala čez golo drevje, čez prazno, sivo cesto, na kateri so zažarele mlake v zlatu. Mlada, iskra konja sta vlekla težak voz, naložen z drvmi. Voznik v škornjih je hodil z dolgimi koraki zraven voza in gledal v sonce. Dve deklici sta v živahnem pogovoru hiteli po stezi ob reki, ki je šumela in žuborela pod redkimi drevesi. Race so v dolgi vrsti sedele na obrežnih kolih, katerih vrh je bil palec pod vodno površino. Siva mačka je nepremično sedela na ruši vrh brega. Majhen bel pes je vohljaje tekal po travi, se ustavil in se ozrl po ljudeh, pa se spet odpravil naprej. Iz daljave je prihajalo zvenenje kladiiva, ki je tolklo po kovini. Od nekod se je oglasil motor, hrup se je povečal, potem je zamiral in utopil v žlobudranju vode, ki se je sivo-zelena sunkovito poganjala po strugi. Vile z zaprtimi okni so, kakor bi dremale, ždele sredi zimskih vrtov. Pljusk ribe, ki se je pognala iz vode. Otroški krik. Okrog sonca so se zbirale prve poznopopoldanske meglice. Mačka se je ostro zagledala v belega psa, ki se je ustavil.

Na trati ob bregu, skrit pod nizkim obronkom, je ležal velik kocast pes, rjavo-črn ovčar, in s pogledom proti soncu držal zajetno glavo na prednjih čapah. Bil je videti povaljan po zadku in iz gobca mu je tekla obilna slina. Krvavo podplute oči niso na prvi pogled obetale nič dobrega. Mali beli pes ga je napeto opazoval. Čuden strah ga je obšel, da se mu je naježila dlaka na vratu, najraje bi pobegnil, toda nezadržna sila ga je spet vlekla proti ležečemu kosmatincu. Bližal se mu je previdno, obstal, se spet prestopil naprej in ga s komaj slišnim cviljenjem opozoril nase. Mačka je potovala s pogledom od njega do ležečega psa in nazaj. Ovčar ga je pogledal, ne da bi premaknil glavo. To je bilo lahko prav slabo znamenje. Mali se je naglo ustavil in začel mahati z repkom. Ko ni bilo nobenega novega znamenja, se je ulegel na trebuh in se poplazel še nekaj pedi bliže.

»Oprostite,« je rekel vljudno, »jaz sem Džoni. Ali se lahko približam?«

Tedaj je z grozo opazil, da je kosmatinčeva slina krvava. »Ali se vam je kaj zgodilo?« je vprašal zaskrbljeno. Toda ležeči ni odgovoril, samo zavzdihnil je. In malega je v hipu minil strah. Vzdignil se je in se približal

The Standpoint of Great Peace

The grass beside the Gradaščica had turned yellow in a snowless winter. Above the big new university institutes the sun was slipping westwards its burnished light spilled over the bare trees and over the empty grey road where the puddles glowed with gold. Two lively young horses were pulling a loaded cart, beside which a farmer walked with long strides and looked at the sun. Two girls engaged in an animated conversation hurried along the path beside the river, which murmured and rippled beneath the sparse trees. Ducks were sitting in a long row on wooden posts submerged an inch or two under the surface of the water. A grey cat sat motionless on the top of the turf bank. A small white dog ran sniffing his way across the grass, stopped and looked round at the people and set off again. From a distance there came the sound of a hammer clanging on metal. A car engine throbbed from somewhere, the noise grew louder, then died away and was drowned in the babbling of the grey-green water that flowed jerkily between the river banks. Villas, their windows shut against the winter, rested as if dozing in the middle of the bare gardens. The splash of a fish leaping up out of the water. A child's cry. The first afternoon haze gathered around the sun. The cat was staring sharply at the white dog, who had stopped.

On the turf by the bank, hidden under the low slope, lay a big shaggy dog, a brown black sheepdog. He was looking towards the sun but kept his massive head resting on his front paws. His hindquarters were obviously rumped and saliva was slobbering plentifully from his jaws. Nor did his bloodshot eyes at first glance bode any good. The little white dog observed him attentively.

A strange fear seized him, making his hackles rise. He would much rather have fled, but an irresistible force drew him again towards the prostrate shaggy dog. He approached him cautiously, stopped, took a few more paces and with a scarcely audible whine, announced his presence. The cat's eyes traveled from him to the prostrate dog and back again. The sheepdog glanced at him without moving his head. That could be a really bad sign. The little dog stopped quickly and started to wag his tail. When no new sign was forthcoming, he lay down on his stomach and wriggled a few inches nearer.

"Excuse me," he said politely, "I'm Johnny. May I come near you?" Then he noticed with horror that the shaggy dog's saliva was bloody. "Has something happened to you?" he asked solicitously. But the prostrate dog did not answer, he only sighed. And in a moment the little dog's fear left him. He got up and came three short steps nearer, wagging his tail in

na tri pedi, pozdravljajoč z repom. »Tudi čuden duh gre od vas, ne ne zamerite,« je dejal. Ležeči je vzdignil težke veke in popolnoma odprl oči.

»Nič se me ne boj,« je rekel z zamolklim glasom. »Povozilo me je in čutim, da konec ni daleč. Komaj sem se z vlekel s ceste.«

»Ojoj! Kako pa je prišlo do tega?«

»Bil sem zamišljen, motorju sem se izognil, pa prišel pod tovorni avtomobil. Mislim, da imam vse zdrobljeno tu spodaj. Z zadnjimi nogami sploh ne morem ganiti.«

»Seveda, od tod ta duh!«

»Ne. To je že duh smrti, moj mali.«

»Oh, ne govorite tako. Morda pa ne bo tako hudo. Ali lahko kaj storim za vas?«

»Lahko. Zapodi tisto zoprno mačko, ki gleda, kako se bom iztegnil. Že ves čas sedi na tisti ruši in čaka, zraven se mi pa posmehuje. Nekdaj se me je bala, zdaj se pa maščuje.«

»Kako rad bi vam pomagal,« je zajeceljal mali in se ozrl po mački. Počasi je nadaljeval: »Toda precej velika je, stara in hudobna. Ko bi začela teči, bi že šel za njo, tako si pa skoraj ne upam začeti. Ne zaničujte me, toda s takimi mačkami imam slabe izkušnje. Seveda, ko bi imel vašo moč! Mi imamo mačko doma—in to so zelo prevzetne živali.«

»Nečustvene in skrajno sebične,« je pokimal ležeči.

Džoni se je zravnal in videti je bilo, kako zbira ves svoj pogum. »Poskusim lahko,« je rekel s tresočim se glasom. »Pa še vi malo zalajajte!«

»To bi nič ne pomagalo, ker me je videla, kako sem se vlekel in so se ji od škodoželjnosti oči kar svetile.«

Beli pes je še nekoliko pomislil, potem pa se zagnal proti mački in divje zalajal. Toda mačka se je samo zravnila, napela hrbet v lok in ga z bleščečimi se očmi pričakovala. Zaletel se je tako blizu, da je moral odskočiti. Prednje noge je uprl v zemljo in dvignil zadek v zrak pa glasno lajal v sivo žival, ki je rekla s posmehljivim glasom:

»Podelal se boš, smrkavec. Izgini, dokler me je še volja!«

»Ali te ni sram,« je kričal beli pes, »uživati nad tujo nesrečo? Poberi se, ali pa izgubim živce! To je nezaslišano, zasmehovati ponesrečenca! To je po-balinsko!«

»Ti mi boš pel levite?« je rekla mačka med zobmi in prhnila naprej, toda usekala je s kremplji v zrak. Zaprhala je in spet sedla. »Oči ti izkopljem!« je zapretila. Mali se je ozrl na ležečega ovčarja, ki ju je žalostno

greeting. "There's a strange smell coming from you as well, no offense meant," he said. The prostrate dog raised his heavy eyelids and opened his eyes.

"Don't be afraid of me at all," he said in a dull voice. "I've been run over and I feel the end isn't far off. I hardly managed to drag myself off the road."

"Oh dear! How did that happen?"

"I was lost in thought, and managed to avoid a motor-bike, but then came under a lorry. I think everything is crushed down here. I can't move my hind legs at all."

"Of course, that's where that smell comes from!"

"No. That is the smell of death, my boy."

"Oh don't talk like that. Perhaps it won't be so bad. Can I do anything for you?"

"You can. Chase away that nasty cat who is watching to see how I shall peg out. All the time she sits on that grass bank and wails, and on top of that she mocks me. She used to be afraid of me, but now she's getting her revenge."

"How I would like to help you," stammered the little dog and stole a glance at the cat. He wells on slowly "But she is pretty big, and old and malicious. If she were to run, I would go after her, but otherwise I hardly dare start. Don't despise me, but I've had bad experiences with such cats. Of course, if I had your strength! We have a cat at home—and they are very haughty animals."

"Unfeeling and terribly selfish," agreed the prostrate dog Johnny straightened himself and you could see him summoning up all his courage. "I can try," he said in a trembling voice. "But then you bark a bit as well."

"That wouldn't be any use, because she saw me dragging myself away and her eyes fairly shone with malicious delight."

The white dog deliberated a bit longer and then made a dash towards the cat, yapping wildly. But the cat only drew herself up, arched her back, and waited for him with glittering eyes. He rushed so near that he had to jump away. He dug his forelegs into the ground, pushed his bottom up into the air and barked loudly at the grey animal, who said derisively, "You'll dirty your pants, urchin. Buzz off before I change my mind!"

"Aren't you ashamed to crow over someone else's misfortune?" cried the white dog. "You be off, or else I'll lose my temper. It's a sheer disgrace to mock at somebody that's had an accident. It's a mean, dirty trick!"

"Will you read the Riot Act to me?" hissed the cat between her teeth, and reared up, clawing at the air. She snorted and sat down again. "I'll scratch your eyes out!" she threatened. The little dog looked at the

opazoval z vzdignjeno glavo. V tem ga je prešinil nekak obup, ki mu je vzel razsodek, besno se je zagnal naprej, začutil je skeleč udarec po nosu, toda tudi nekaj dlak mu je ostalo med zobmi, mačka pa je odskočila. Brž ko mu je obrnila za hip hrbet, ga je obšel tak pogum, da se je zagnal za njo in jo z vso silo zgrabil za kožuh. Povalila se je, pes je stisnil z zobmi smrdečo mačjo kožo, izpulila se mu je, spet je začutil bolečino, to pot čisto blizu očesa, mačka pa jo je ucvrla po trati. Planil je za njo, toda ušla mu je čez pot in žvignila na ograjo, s katere je prhnila zadihano:

»Le čakaj, nesnaga, še ni vseh dni konec! Še se vidiva!«

»Samo prikaži se, malopridnica!« ji je zagrozil in s tresočimi se nogami oddrncal k prijatelju, ki je imel zamegljene oči. Mali je sedel kraj njega in si skušal s taco zbrisati bolečino z gobčka.

»Usekala me je, mrha,« je rekel tiho. »Sploh ne vem, kako sem se upal,« je pristavil zase in gledal na ograjo, kjer je še zmeraj sedela siva sovražnica. »Veste, mene je rado strah,« je pripomnil skromno. »A očitna krivica me razburi in mi vlije moči.«

»Dober pes si,« je zamišljeno dejal ležeči. »Ko bi te prej spoznal, bi hodila skupaj.«

»To bi mi bilo v veliko čast,« je vzkliknil mali navdušeno. »Ali daleč stanujete?«

»Tam, na robu Mestnega loga. Služim že tretjega gospodarja.«

Džoni je namrščil čelo. »Pa ne v tisti hišici, ki diši po preperelih vrečah?«

»V tisti. Polno vreč imajo v drvarnici, pa je vlažno.«

»Ojoj!« je zaklical mali in se odmaknil za ped.

»Kaj pa je?«

»Oprostite, ali ste vi tisti hudi pes?«

»Kako to misliš?«

»Jaz se tam mimo sploh nisem upal in sem vas videl samo enkrat od daleč.«

»Da, tisti hudi pes sem jaz. Obesili so mi tako karakteristiko in vse se me boji. Moj gospodar pa še podpira take govorce. Moral bi ti povedati, kako je do tega prišlo. Ali se ti mudi?«

»Ne, ne. Na potepu sem.«

»To je pa slabo. Tudi pri meni se je tako začelo.«

»Jaz se potepam šele tretjič,« je skrušeno priznal mali.

prostrate sheepdog, who had raised his head and was observing them mournfully. Then a kind of despair flashed through him, robbing him of his powers of judgment and he dashed madly forward. He felt a stinging blow in his nose but some fur remained between his teeth as the cat jumped away. The moment she turned her back on him, he gained such courage that he rushed after her and grabbed her coat with all his might and main. She rolled over, the dog sank his teeth into the cat's smelly fur, she tore herself away from him, again he felt the pain, this time right near his eye, then the cat fled across the grass. He dashed after her, but she eluded him, shot across the path and onto a fence, from where she snorted breathlessly, "Just you wait, you filthy wretch, I haven't finished with you yet! We'll be seeing more of each other!"

"You just dare show yourself, you good-for-nothing!" he threatened her, as his trembling legs carried him back to his friend, whose eyes had misted over. The little dog sat down beside him and with his paw tried to rub away the pain from his nose.

"She clawed me, the beast," he said quietly. "I just don't know how I dared to do it," he added to himself and looked at the fence, where his grey enemy was still sitting. "Generally I'm afraid, you know," he commented modestly. "But an obvious injustice makes me wild and fires me with courage."

"You're a good dog," said the other thoughtfully. "If I had known you before, we'd have gone around together."

"That would have been a great honor for me," the little dog exclaimed enthusiastically. "Do you live far from here?"

"On the outskirts of Mestni log. I'm serving my third master."

Johnny frowned. "But isn't that the cottage that smells of rotting sacks?"

"That's the one. They have the woodshed full of sacks, and it's damp."

"Oh heavens!" cried the little dog and moved away a bit.

"What's the matter?"

"Excuse me, but aren't you that fierce watch-dog?"

"What do you mean?"

"I just haven't dared to go past that way at all, and I saw you only once from a distance."

"Yes, I am that fierce watch-dog. People have given me such a name, and all are afraid of me. And my master in fact encourages comments to that effect. I ought to tell you how it came about. Are you in a hurry?" "Oh no, not at all. I'm just roaming about."

"That's bad. It started like that with me too."

"I'm out roaming only for the third time," the little dog admitted penitently.

»Odsvetujem ti. Končal boš slabo. Vidiš, moje življenje je bilo čisto drugačno, dokler se nisem začel potepati. Pri prvem gospodarju se nisem. Potem pa se je začelo to, kar se bo danes končalo.« Zvil se je v bolečini in zaprl oči.

»Ali vas hudo boli?« je nežno vprašal mali. Ležeči nekaj časa ni odgovoril. Dihal je sunkovito. Sonce se je bližalo zatonu. Race so prišle na kopno in ju od daleč opazovale. Ko je spet odprl oči, so se obzirno umaknile. Brez uvoda je začel pripovedovati.

»Kot majhen kuža, sem bil kocast in neroden in vsi so govorili, da sem srčkan. Rojen sem bil na Viču in nekega dne me je kar za lep denar kupil močan mož in me stlačil v aktovko, samo glavo mi je pustil zunaj.«

»Ne zamerite, ali ste čistokrvni?« je vprašal spoštljivo mali.

»Ne popolnoma...«

»Tudi jaz nimam rodovnika,« je naglo pripomnil mali. »Sicer pa to sploh ni moderno. Tudi čistokrvni niso zmeraj najbolj pametni.«

»To je že res,« je žalostno odgovoril ležeči. »Vendar so zame nastale usodne težave, ker je moj prvi gospodar imel to muho, da je ves čas pripovedoval, češ da imam rodovnik. Sicer boš pa vse po vrsti i zvedel, če le utegneš.«

»O, prosim, čeprav bom kregan, ker bom toliko časa na potepu.«

»Torej tisti mož me je kupil in stopil z mano na tramvaj, kjer sva imela takoj lepe uspehe. Tako sem bil všeč ljudem, da je moj novi gospodar kar žarel od zadovoljnosti. Takoj se je začela tista pot, ki me je pripeljala do precejšnje razvajenosti in nečimrnosti. Gospodar je bil trgovski zastopnik in v tistem času, kakor se medlo spominjam, je ravno cvetela črna borza, bila je namreč vojna. Ali veš, kaj je vojna?«

»To je spopad med ljudmi, kajne?«

»Spopad med veliko, veliko ljudmi, in to bolj krvav, kakor si kdo od nas lahko predstavlja. To mi je pripovedoval nemški ovčar, ki je bil na fronti. Mesa na kupe, in to človeškega, in nihče ga ne je. No, tu pri nas je bila vojna zelo čudna: okrog so hodili možje v zelenem, ki so govorili tuj jezik, ljubili živali in zapirali ljudi. Mojemu gospodarju pa še nikoli ni šlo tako dobro. Tudi jaz sem jedel po gostilnah zrezke, posebno kadar je bil moj stari nekoliko okrogel in se je bahal z menoj. Najbolj je bil ponosen na to, da se nisem pritaknil zrezka, dokler mi ni rekel neke posebne besede.«

“I’d advise you against it. You’ll come to a bad end. My life was quite different, you see, before I started to roam about. I didn’t do it with my first master. But then it started, and it will come to an end today.” He writhed in pain and closed his eyes

“Does it hurt you a lot?” enquired the little dog gently. For some time the other did not answer. His breathing was spasmodic. It was getting near sunset. The ducks had come onto the bank and were watching them from a distance. When he opened his eyes again, they tactfully withdrew. Without any preamble he started to tell his story

“When I was a small puppy, I was shaggy and awkward and everybody said I was cute. I was born in Vič, and one day a big strong man bought me for quite a tidy penny and squashed me into his briefcase, only my head he left sticking out.”

“Don’t take offense, but are you a pedigree?” asked the little dog respectfully.

“Not entirely.”

“I haven’t got a pedigree either,” added the little dog hastily. “As a matter of fact, it isn’t at all in fashion. And pedigree dogs aren’t always the most intelligent either.”

“That is indeed true,” answered the other sadly. “But it caused disastrous problems for me because it was a whim of my first master to keep on saying that I had a pedigree. Anyway, you can hear the whole story if you only have time to spare.”

“Oh please do go on, even though I’ll get scolded for being out so long.”

“Well then, this man bought me, and got on a tram with me, and there we were immediately a great hit. People were so taken with me that my new master quite glowed with satisfaction. At once that started the ball rolling until I began considerably spoilt and vain. My master was a sales representative, and at that time, as I vaguely remember, the black market was flourishing, for it was war time. Do you know what war is?”

“It’s fighting between people, isn’t it?”

“Fighting between an enormous number of people, and that more bloody than any of us can imagine. An Alsatian, who was on the front told me about it. Meat, and that human meat, in heaps, and nobody eating it. Well, the war here was very strange; men in green walking around who spoke a foreign language, loved animals, and imprisoned people. But things never went so well for my master as then. Even I used to eat steaks at the inns, especially when my old man got somewhat tipsy and boasted about me. He was proudest of all that I didn’t touch a steak until he had spoken certain words to me.”

»Jaz bi se težko zdržal,« je ušlo malemu in sline so se mu pocedile.

»A rečem ti, da je to zelo važno: ljudje ničesar ne cenijo tako kakor moč ukazovanja. Moral pa reči, da sva izgubila veliko časa po gostilnah, jaz sem tam zapravil svojo mladost. Gospodar pa si je pridobil veliko premoženje, to je druga stvar, na katero se ljudje mrtvi. Potem je prišel konec vojne in gospodarju so vzeli veliko imetja, zaradi tega je zelo preklinjal politiko, ne vem, ali ti je znano, kaj je to?«

»To je nekaj takega kakor zrak, ker moj gospodar pravi, da je politika povsod.«

»Tudi jaz tega nikoli nisem natanko razumel. Toda to je zelo mogočna stvar, ker je v zvezi z ukazovanjem in z imetjem. Ko si je namreč moj gospodar spet opomogel, so ga zaprli zaradi črne borze. Jaz pa sem ostal doma in sem bil zelo žalosten, ker me gospodinja ni nič posebno marala. Že prej je velikokrat rekla možu, da me ima rajši kakor njo. In ko njega ni in ni bilo nazaj, me je prodala nekemu možu, ki je delal slike. Dala je oglas, da prodaja čistokrvnega psa. Oglasil se je najprej študent, kateremu sem bil predrag, potem pa je prišel slikar. Hotel je imeti moj rodovnik, ona pa se mu je zlagala, da ga dobi na društvu ljubiteljev psov. In s tem se je začela moja nesreča. Mož me je kupil in me privezal na vrvico, peljal me je na svoj dom in mi dal mleka. Bil pa je zelo razmišljen in si ni zapomnil povelj, na katera sem bil navajen, tako da sva bila dolgo časa oba zbegana, kadar sva imela svoje pogovore. Včasih je vpil name in mi ukazoval z neznanimi besedami, krilil z rokami po zraku, jaz pa sem si zaman prizadeval, da bi uganil, kaj hoče. Potem se je naveličal, jaz pa sem počasi pozabil, kaj me je naučil prvi gospodar. Potem me je nekega dne vzel s seboj v društvo ljubiteljev psov, kjer so mu povedali, da nisem docela čistokrven—in od tega dne se je moj novi gospodar spremenil v odnosu do mene. Prej je pripovedoval vsakomur, kako lep rodovnik imam, poslej se je tej reči izogibal in obema je bilo nekako nerodno, meni včasih še bolj—izvedel je, da je bila moja mati čistokrvna, da pa sem jaz s svojimi brati plod neke prepovedane ljubezni. Prej me je jemal povsod s seboj, lepo na vrvici, poslej me je zapiral doma in odhajal sam. Tudi za mojo hrano ni bil posebno skrben. Jaz pa tako razvajen. Začelo se je težko življenje zame. Sicer je bil tudi novi gospodar kar premožen. Slikal je junake, v prejšnjih časih je menda upodabljal svetnike, in je lepo zaslužil. Kako srečen sem bil, kadar me je vzel s seboj na izlet, in kako redka je bila ta sreča. Ležal sem doma in začel premišljevati več, kakor se spodobi za navadnega psa. Obupaval sem

“I would find it hard to hold myself back,” the little dog let slip, and his mouth watered.

“But let me tell you that that is very important—people value nothing so much as the power of giving commands. But I must say we lost a lot of time in inns, I wasted my youth there. And my master acquired a lot of wealth, that’s another thing people are crazy about. Then came the end of the war, and he had a lot of money taken away from him, and consequently he cursed politics a great deal. I don’t know if you’re familiar with what that is?”

“It’s something like air, because my master says that politics is everywhere.”

“I’ve never understood it exactly either. But it’s a very powerful thing because it’s connected with giving commands and with wealth. For when my master’s situation improved again, he was jailed because of the black market. But I remained at home and was very sad because my mistress didn’t specially like me. Even before that she had often remarked to her husband that he liked me better than her. And when he didn’t come back, she sold me to a man who painted pictures. She advertised a pedigree dog for sale. First a student called, but I was too expensive for him, and then the painter came. He wanted my pedigree, but she lied to him that he could get it at the Society of Dog Lovers. And that was how my bad luck started. The man bought me, put me on a lead, took me home and gave me milk. But he was very absent-minded and didn’t remember the commands I was used to, so that for a long time we were both confused whenever we talked together. Sometimes he shouted at me, giving commands in words I didn’t know, waving his hands about in the air, and I tried in vain to guess what he wanted. Then he got fed up, and I gradually forgot what my first master had taught me. One day he took me to the Dog Lovers Society, where they told him I wasn’t quite a pedigree—and from that day my new master’s attitude towards me changed. Before he used to tell everybody what a fine pedigree I had, from then on he avoided the subject and it was rather embarrassing for both of us, sometimes even more so for me—he got to know that my mother was a pedigree, but that my brothers and I were the offspring of an illicit love affair. Previously he took me everywhere with him, nicely on a lead, but afterwards he shut me up at home and went out on his own. He didn’t bother all that much about my food either. And me so spoiled! It was the start of a hard life for me. On the other hand, my new master was quite well-to-do. He painted heroes, earlier on he’d very likely done pictures of saints, and made quite a bit of money. How happy I was whenever he took me with him on an outing, and how rare was that pleasure. I lay at home, and began to think more than befits an ordinary dog. I grew depressed and

in se zapiral vase. Kadar so me izpustili na cesto, da opravim, kar je treba, sem jo pobrisal na stari dom. Prvič me je odpeljala stara gospodinja nazaj, drugič me je prišel iskat novi gospodar, potem pa so se navadili, da je hodil pome sosedov sin. Bil sem tudi tepen, toda zakrknil sem se in nisem popustil, potep pa je zdaj postal zame edini čar življenja. Osamljen sem bil in zato tudi hudoben in razdražljiv, začel sem popadati in moj gospodar je moral plačevati odškodnine. Privoščil sem mu, ne vedoč, kako se bo to vse končalo. Nekega dne sem popadel njegovega prijatelja, ki je v časopisih pisal lepo o njem—in to je sodu izbilo dno. Gospodar je poklical sosedovega sina in mu ukazal: Odpelji ga h konjaču ali kamor hočeš, samo da gre ta malopridnež izpred oči! Deček me je privezal na vrvico in me vzel s seboj. Celo popoldne sva hodila in se menila—ta fant me je imel nekoliko rad. Srečala sva veliko ljudi in vsakemu me je ponudil, ogledovali so me, me ogovarjali, toda vzel me ni nobeden, dokler se me ni usmilit železničar, moj sedanji gospodar, ki je šel iz službe. Ni slab človek, ne smem reči, ne tepe me in me srednje dobro hrani, toda za tri mesece me zaprl v kurjo ogrado na dvorišču—in spet sem premišljal. Videl sem, da sem si veliko sam kriv, kajti tistemu prijatelju svojega gospodarja bi res ne bil smel pomeriti hlač. Sklenil sem, da se bom poboljšal, toda mojemu novemu gospodarju je zlezlo v glavo, kar mu je pripovedoval sosedov fant, in je bil najbolj ponosen na to, da sem od sile hud pes. Vsakomur je to pripovedoval, vsakogar je svaril pred mano in je bil zadovoljen, kadar sem komu pokazal zobe. Tak pes je boljši kakor puška, je govoril, in ljudje so hodili strahoma mimo mene. Seveda tudi on ni znal ukazovati in vse tisto, s čimer sem se ponašal nekdanj, je docela splahnelo, postal sem navaden hud pes. In brž ko sem imel priložnost, sem se začel potepati, seveda me je tudi želodec priganjal k temu, in pa grenkoba, ki se mi je nabrala v duši. Ali veš, kaj je duša?«

»Tega pa ne vem,« je z občudovanjem dihnil mali.

»Duša je tam, kjer te začne boleti, če si razočaran, če si kregan po nedolžnem, če si tepen, kadar ne zaslužiš, če se ti ne izpolnijo želje, če si osamljen, če si želiš prijazne deklice, pa si obdan s kurjo ogrado, če čutiš neki talent, pa ti ne dovolijo, da bi ga razvil. Ali si me kaj razumel?« Zadihan od naglega pripovedovanja je utihnil.

»O, razumel,« je pokimal mali, »saj nisem posebno zabit.«

»Ne mislim, da bi bil zabit, samo mlad si še in izkušnje ti gotovo manjka.« Pri tem se je zvil v bolečini.

shut up in myself. Whenever they let me out on the road to do the necessary, I ran off to my old home. The first time my old mistress brought me back, the second time my new master came to look for me, and then they got used to the neighbor's son going for me. I was beaten as well, but I got hardened to it and didn't change my ways, in fact, roaming about now became my sole pleasure in life. I was lonely and consequently vicious and irritable as well. I started to go for people and my master had to pay damages. I thought it served him right, not knowing how it would all end. One day I attacked his friend who had written nice things about him in the papers—and that was the last straw. My master called in the neighbor's son and ordered him, "Take him to the horse-knacker or anywhere you like, so long as that good-for-nothing gets out of my sight!" The boy put me on a leash and took me with him. The whole afternoon we walked and chatted together—that boy rather liked me. We met a lot of people and he offered me to everybody. They looked me over and spoke to me, but nobody took me until a railwayman, my present master, took pity on me, on his way home from work. I can't say he's a bad chap, he doesn't beat me and he feeds me reasonably well, but for three months he cooped me up in a chicken run in the yard—and again I had a good think. I realized that I was to blame myself to a large extent, for I really shouldn't have gone for that friend of my master's. I decided that I would turn over a new leaf. But my new master had got into his head what the neighbor's boy had told him, and he was particularly proud of the fact that I was a terribly fierce watch-dog. He told everybody this, warning them about me, and was pleased when I bared my teeth at anybody. A dog like that is better than a gun, he said, and people were afraid when they went past me. Of course he didn't know how to give commands either, and everything I prided myself on before disappeared without a trace, and I became the usual fierce watch-dog. As soon as I had the opportunity, I started to roam about. Of course it was my stomach that drove me to that as well, and the bitterness that had gathered in my soul. Do you know will the soul is?"

"That I don't know," breathed the little dog with admiration.

"The soul is the place where it starts to hurt if you are disappointed, if you are scolded when you are innocent, if you are beaten when you don't deserve it, if your wishes are not fulfilled, if you are lonely, if you want a nice girl friend, but you are hemmed in by a chicken run, if you feel you have a certain talent, but they don't let you develop it. Have you understood me to some extent?" Breathless with his hurried narrative, he fell silent.

"Oh, understood," nodded the little dog, "for I'm not all that stupid."

"I didn't imagine you would be stupid, only you're still young and certainly you lack experience." At that point he writhed in pain.

»Ali te boli duša?« je potihoma in s skrbjo vprašal mali pes.

»Zdaj že bolj telo kakor duša,« je stokaje odvrnil ležeči. »Čutim, da ne bom dolgo, pogled se mi megli.«

»Morda pa zato, ker sonce zahaja?« je zašepetal beli pes.

»O, ne, dobro vem, kaj prihaja. Veš, jaz se smrti nič ne bojim, ker sem že enkrat umrl.«

»Umrl?« je strahoma vprašal mali.

»Umrl,« je potrdil kocasti. »To je bilo takrat, ko sem živel pri drugem gospodarju. Hišnik me je hotel zastrupiti in je z nečim posul meso, ki mi ga je nastavil. Tri dni sem se zvijal, pa nisem popolnoma umrl, toda izvedel sem, kaj je tisto stanje, ko te preneha vse boleti in kar sladko odplavaš, in nisi več lačen in duša je čisto lahka. Bilo mi je kar nekoliko žal, da sem se prebudil, kajti takoj me je začelo spet boleti, postal sem težak in žalosten, potem sem se nekaj časa vlačil kot senca in gospodar je rekel, da sem vstal od smrti. Smrt je zelo velika uteha. Ali te je kaj strah, zdaj ko bo mrak?«

»Ne preveč,« je toplo odvrnil mali, »zakaj začel sem te imeti rad in naučil sem se veliko. Hvala ti.«

Tedaj je kosmatinec vzdignil glavo in se pazljivo zagledal v bližnje golo drevo. Tam so sedele nepremično tri vrane.

»Ali si jih opazil, kdaj so prišle?« je vprašal čisto tiho malega, ki je strmel v črne ptiče in zamišljeno odkimal. »Vidiš, zaduhale so tisto, kar pride, in zdaj bodo mirno počakale. Saj ne bo dolgo.« Spet je zamolklo zastokal od muke v drobu. Race pa so odhajale s starcem, ki je imel dolgo šibo v rokah in jim prijazno prigovarjal. »Rad imam, da si se zadržal pri meni, toda to, kar pride, ni za tvoje oči, premlad si in bi ti nikoli ne šlo iz spomina.«

»Morda pa ne bo tako hudo,« je drgetaje rekel mali.

»Tu ni nobenega dvoma več,« je dejal ležeči z gotovostjo. »In ti bi moral biti že doma.«

»Kregan bom, to je res, morda tudi tepen, zakaj tako dolgo si nisem upal še nikoli izostati. A če smem, bom pri tebi, kaj pa so moje težave v primeri s tvojimi.« In se je plašno ozrl na vrane.

»Meni bo še malo hudo, potem pa bo vse dobro. Že čutim, kako prihaja mir vame.«

»Mir?« se je začudil mali. »Ves čas se ti čudim, s kakšnim mirom govoriš o življenju. Ali bo prišel še večji mir?«

»Popolni mir,« je z nekako blaženostjo šepnil ležeči. »In s stališča tega miru življenje ne boli več.«

“Is your soul hurting you?” asked the little dog quietly in a tone of concern.

“It’s the body now more than the soul,” answered the other, groaning. “I feel I shan’t last long, my eyes are misting over.”

“Perhaps that’s because the sun is setting?” whispered the white dog.

“Oh no, I know perfectly well what’s coming. I’m not at all afraid of death, you know, because I’ve already died once.”

“Died?” asked the little dog frightened.

“Yes, died,” said the shaggy dog. “It was when I lived with my second master. The caretaker wanted to poison me, and sprinkled something on the meat which he put down for me. For three days I was writhing in agony, without actually dying, but I learnt what that state, like when all the pain stops and you drift off nice and soft, and you’re no longer hungry and the soul is absolutely light. I was even rather sorry that I woke up, because the pain started again immediately, I became heavy and sad then for a time I dragged myself round like the shadow of my former self, and my master said that I had risen from the dead. Death is a very great consolation. Are you afraid at all now that it’s getting dusk?”

Then the shaggy dog raised his head and gazed attentively at a bare tree nearby. Three crows sat there, unmoving.

“Did you notice when they came?” he very quietly asked the little dog, who stared at the black birds and nodded thoughtfully. “You see, they have scented what is coming and now they will wait quietly. For it won’t be long. Again he uttered a dull groan with the pain in his intestines. The ducks had departed with an old man who had a long switch in his hand and coaxed them pleasantly along. “I’d like you to stay with me, but what is coming is not for your eyes—you are too young and it would always remain in your memory.”

“But perhaps it won’t be so bad,” said the little dog, trembling.

“There isn’t an atom of doubt about that,” said the other with conviction. “And you ought to be home by now.”

“I’ll be scolded, that’s true, and perhaps beaten as well, for I’ve never dared to stay out so long before. But if I may, I will stay with you; after all, what are my difficulties in comparison with yours?” And he looked fearfully at the crows.

“I will feel bad for a little while longer, but then everything will be fine. I already feel peace coming into me.”

“Peace?” the little one was astonished. All the time I am amazed how peacefully you talk about life. Will there come even greater peace?”

“Complete peace,” whispered the prostrate dog with a kind of felicity. “And from the standpoint of this peace, life holds no more pain.”

»Ali tudi želja nimaš več?«

»Tudi želje vse utonejo.«

»In duša ne boli več?«

»Nič več, moj mali.«

»Zakaj pa je meni potem tako hudo?«

»Ker sem svoje bolečine preselil vate, da bo vse življenje modrejši. Ali boš hud name, ker te bo zaradi mene nekaj časa bolelo?«

»O, kako naj bi bil hud nate! Zakaj se nisva srečala že davno! Jaz pa sem razkopaval smetišča in plašil kokoši, namesto da bi se učil življenja pri modrih psih.«

»Dragi moj mali, tudi jaz nisem bil moder, dokler me ni podrlo trpljenje, dokler sem bil še živ in nemiren. Kaj ko bi zdaj šel domov? Zelo težko se že pogovarjam.«

»Kar molčiva, samo dovoli, da ostanem še malo pri tebi.«

»Poditi te ne morem. Zelo prijazen pes si.« Ozrl se je na drevo, v mraku je bilo videti vrane, ki so se spustile na spodnje veje. »Strašno so lačne, da tako pozno čakajo na večerjo,« je pripomnil.

»Morda pa samo spijo tam?«

»Ne slepi se! Saj vendar čutim mir.« Vtem ga je streslo, ga prevrnilo na bok, dihal je težko, eno oko je imel zaprto. »Zbogom!« je rekel.

Vrane so se spustile komaj slišno na travo. Mali je pogledal ležečega in ga v veliki stiski ovohal. Dobil je težek duh. Zagnal se je proti bližajočim se vranam, ki so se umaknile za nekaj sežnjev in ga gledale. Stopil je k ležečemu, podvil rep in glasno zajokal nad mrtvim prijateljem.

Pozno v noč so slišali ob reki zavijati malega psa. V medli mesečini ni bilo videti s ceste, kaj ga priklepa na tisto mesto.

“Not all that much,” replied the little dog warmly, “because I’ve started to like you and I’ve learnt a lot. Thanks to you.”

“Don’t you have any more desires, either?”

“All desires sink too.”

“And your soul doesn’t hurt any more?”

“No longer, my child.”

“Then why is it so bad for me?”

“Because I have transferred my pain into you, so that you will be wiser all your life. Will you be angry with me because for a time you will suffer pain on my account?”

“Oh how could I be angry with you! Why didn’t we meet each other long ago! I’ve been digging up rubbish tips and scaring hens instead of learning about life in the company of wise dogs.”

“My dear child, I wasn’t wise either, until suffering laid me low at the time I was still lively and restless. What if you went home now? It’s already very difficult to talk.”

“Let’s not talk any more, only do let me stay with you a bit longer.”

“I can’t drive you away. You’re a very kind dog.” He looked at the tree. The crows could be seen in the twilight; they had dropped to the lower branches. “They are terribly hungry since they wait so long for their supper,” he commented.

“Perhaps they are just sleeping there?”

“Don’t fool yourself. But all the same I do feel peace.” Just then something shook him and turned him over on his side, he breathed heavily, one eye closed. “Farewell!” he said.

Almost inaudibly the crows dropped to the grass. The little dog looked at the prostrate one and sniffed at him in great distress. It was a bad smell he got. He drove himself towards the advancing crows, who had moved several paces and were looking at him. He went to the prostrate dog, dropped his tail between his legs and wept aloud over his dead friend.

Late at night they heard the little dog wailing beside the river. In the faint moonlight they could not see from the road what bound him to that spot.