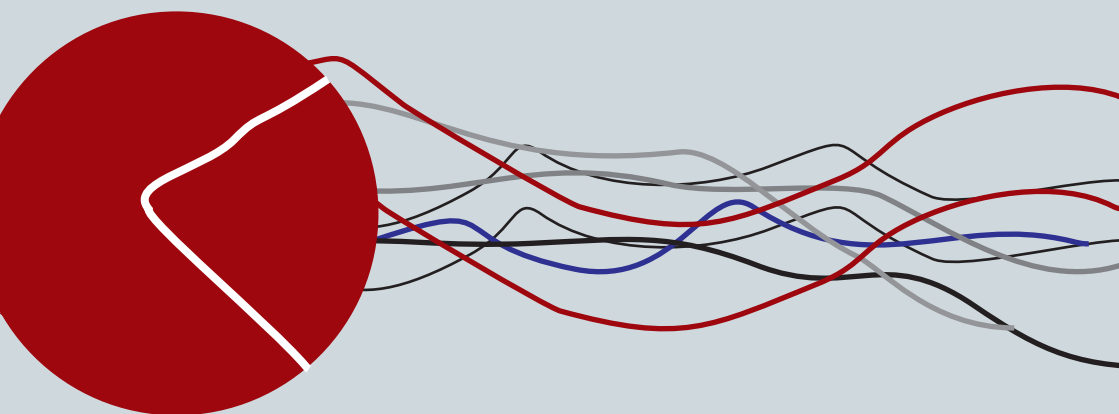


# VOICES ON THE WAY

*sample translations*

UREDILA / EDITED BY  
*Martina Fekonja*



**MILAN DEKLEVA**

*The Dream Exchange*

**FERI LAINŠČEK**

*Argo Grand Circus*

**NATAŠA KONC LORENZUTTI**

*Elevenger*

**SLAVKO PREGL**

*School Report*

**JANJA VIDMAR**

*Children of the World*

0,00 EUR



9 789616 995153

---

# VOICES ON THE WAY

*sample translations*

UREDILA / EDITED BY  
*Martina Fekonja*

MILAN DEKLEVA  
*The Dream Exchange*

FERI LAINŠČEK  
*Argo Grand Circus*

NATAŠA KONC LORENZUTTI  
*Elevenger*

SLAVKO PREGL  
*School Report*

JANJA VIDMAR  
*Children of the World*

---

VOICES ON THE WAY  
*sample translations*

Uredila / Edited by  
*Martina Fekonja*

Prevodi v angleščino / English translations by  
*David Limon (sample translations)*  
*Jason Blake (about the author and his work)*

Založilo in izdalo Društvo slovenskih pisateljev,  
Tomšičeva 12, 1000 Ljubljana  
*Zanj Ivo Svetina, predsednik*

Issued and published by Slovene Writers' Association,  
Tomšičeva 12, Ljubljana  
*Ivo Svetina, President*

Tehnična ureditev in tisk / Technical edition and print  
*Ulčakar & JK*

Naklada / Print run  
*150 izvodov / 150 copies*

Brezplačna publikacija / Free publication

© *Nosilci avtorskih pravic so*  
*avtorji/prevajalci sami, če ni navedeno drugače.*  
© *The authros/translators are the copyright holders*  
*of the text, unless stated otherwise.*

The publication was published with the financial support of the Slovenian book Agency.

Ljubljana, avgust 2016

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji  
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

821.163.6(048.4)

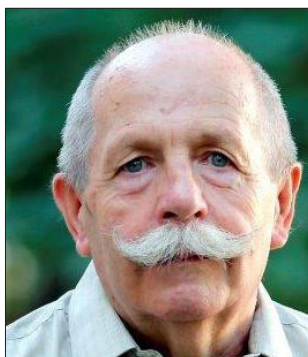
VOICES on the way : sample translations : Milan Dekleva The dream exchange, Feri Lainšček Argo grand circus, Nataša Koncut Lorenzutti Elevenger, Slavko Pregl School report, Janja Vidmar Children of the world / uredila, edited by Martina Fekonja ; [prevodi v angleščino David Limon, Jason Blake]. - Ljubljana : Društvo slovenskih pisateljev, 2016

ISBN 978-961-6995-15-3  
1. Fekonja, Martina, 1984-  
286274304

---

## KAZALO / TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Milan Dekleva</i> .....	4
About the author and his work	
<b>The Dream Exchange</b>	
<i>Feri Lainšček</i> .....	12
About the author and his work	
<b>Argo Grand Circus</b>	
<i>Nataša Konc Lorenzutti</i> .....	30
About the author and her work	
<b>Elevenger</b>	
<i>Slavko Pregl</i> .....	48
About the author and his work	
<b>School Report</b>	
<i>Janja Vidmar</i> .....	64
About the author and her work	
<b>Children of the World</b>	
Co-financing publications of slovenian authors in foreign languages .....	82



MILAN DEKLEVA

---

MILAN DEKLEVA (1946) graduated from Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. He is the first to have published a collection of haiku in Slovenia – *Mushi mushi* (1971). This was followed by a number of other poetry collections, translations, plays and essays. Dekleva has written several poetry collections for adults, while also publishing poetry, plays and prose fiction for children. In addition to his intensive literary work he has also been a co-editor of the student magazine *Tribuna*, a co-editor of Radio Študent, on the staff of the Student Cultural Center, and a member of the Salamander music group. Although he also writes novels, short stories and essays, he is best known as a poet.

### About *The Dream Exchange* (Menjalnica sanj)

*The Dream Exchange* is a picture book about a boy named Oliver and his brilliant dog Charles Darwin. Together, they travel in the Flying Fish to Uruguay in order to exchange Oliver's nightmares for good dreams. Many surprising things happen to them on their voyage.



*Original title: Menjalnica sanj*  
*Published by: Mladinska knjiga,*  
*Slovenska 29, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia*  
*Illustrator: Jure Engelsberger*  
*Year of publication: 2015*  
*Number of pages: 27*  
*ISBN: 978-961-01-3714-6*  
*Copyright holder: Mladinska knjiga*

## THE DREAM EXCHANGE

Oliver's tired and yawning dad had read to him at bedtime Eduardo Galeano's *The Land of Dreams*. Oliver was also tired, but he never wanted to go to sleep. Now that he had a little sister who mum had to sing lullabies to, in the evening he became as lively as a bat. Dad had just read to him that at the dream fair singing salads and shining chilies flew out from a witch's hat, and dreamers exchanged dreams. Oliver was excited by the idea:

"Dad, can you swap bad dreams for good ones there?"

"Yes," said dad with a nod, "you can always find people who'd like to dream about monsters. They'd happily give you their dreams about flowers and nice mothers."

"What about evolution?" asked Oliver.

"Of course," dad laughed. "There are so many dreams about evolution that people are happy to swap them."

"Where is the Land of Dreams?" asked Oliver.

For a moment, dad looked puzzled. He looked through the window of the boy's room, from where you could see the castle and a large illuminated sign on a block of offices. Oliver sometimes mistook the sign for the moon and had once asked dad if the two could be swapped round. Dad couldn't remember what he'd said because at that moment he was busy with geography.

"Hm," said dad, "the Land of Dreams is probably in South America. The writer Eduardo Galeano is from Uruguay."

"Then I'll go there," said Oliver decisively. "Today!"

"Alright," said dad, lost in thought. "But you must take care."

Oliver first made a flying fish that could use its scales to easily break the sound barrier. The turbine engine was controlled via a small computer. The fish, called Big Popper, was very comfortable. Above the padded seats there was an open umbrella with red spots that birds and air submarines, despite Big Popper's extreme speed, could see from a distance and so easily avoid the scaled flying machine. Then he put on gloves, took his wizard's key from the freezer and ran up to the loft. The old locked door didn't interest him. With his ice key he touched the tiny stain on the wall, half a metre



from the floor and about the same from the door frame. After a moment the key slipped into the invisible keyhole, a hatch appeared in the wall, Oliver gave it a slight push and crawled through.

In the room, twisted like a snail's shell, there lived a scholar who had filled it with telescopes and microscopes, models of space, collections of cheeses, beetles, pipes, penknives and rubber stamps. His name was Darwin and he was an exceptionally clever dog. Darwin was never afraid of anyone and had a very refined, almost English sense of humour. This time he was a bit glum, as if he'd got up on the wrong side of bed.

"Come on, Darwin," called Oliver, "I'm in a hurry to get to Uruguay. You're going to help me find the dream exchange."

"Can you give me one good reason why I should go with you?" yapped the poodle.

"Galapagos hot dogs," replied the boy.

"Vamos!" shouted Darwin, with bright eyes. He needed no more convincing.

They were above the Azores in a flash. Darwin said that the Azores were like bores: you had to fly over them like a rocket and before anyone put anything in your pocket, head south.

The journey was a long one and Darwin never shut up. Oliver's head was buzzing with explanations about the sidetracks and dead ends of evolution, worms that became vertebrates, hamsters that developed into sloths and wild garlic that became apple sauce.

"Did we people really develop from apes?" asked Oliver, to change the subject.

"Stupid human bragging," said Darwin angrily, banging his paw down on Big Popper. They immediately found themselves in an air pocket. "Two thousand million years ago, in the Proterozoic, dogs developed so much that they could fluently speak a hundred and twelve languages. They could make lace and dance salsa. Because after one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine point ninety-nine years it became clear they would develop into man, they withdrew and became very sparing with words."

"Apart from you," said Oliver pointedly. "So many words and you still haven't answered the question."

Darwin was silent for a while, staring with an offended expression at the ocean below. "Okay, if you really want to know: nonsense!"

People didn't develop from apes. It's clear to everyone that apes developed from people!"

This conversation, which led nowhere, brought them above the capital of Uruguay, Montevideo. When Oliver wondered who to ask about the way to the Land of Dreams, Darwin opened his cute mouth. "The best thing to do is speak to the President," he said.

"Are you friends?" asked Oliver.

"Just acquaintances," replied Darwin. "When I discovered that Uruguayan jellyfish are more advanced than Argentinian ones, I was invited to a reception and given a national award. I got a golden sausage, decorated with swordfish."

He sat at the computer and a minute later they landed at a small lake in the middle of a forest. The President was standing by a hammock. With one hand he was rocking his housekeeper Madredeus and with the other fanning her. His bodyguards stood at a respectful distance, struggling to stay awake.

Even before the travellers reached the President, sleep won; the gorillas snored like lions.

"Oh!" exclaimed the President. "Have you come to disturb me while I rescue the country from a serious crisis? I can't help you. And even if I could, I wouldn't want to! I'm the fanatical leader of a footballing superpower!"

"That's not very kind or hospitable, sweetheart!" said his housekeeper from the hammock. She was a black woman, so well fed she had trouble opening her eyes. "You can be fanatical with footballers, but not rude to children and dogs."

"Not to mention flying fish," added Big Popper sourly.

"I like children and dogs," breathed Madredeus. "I'll tell you how you can get to the Land of Dreams." With surprising agility she fell out of the hammock.

"Do you see what you've done to my personal advisor for steaks and snake venom?" yelled the President. This was his last statement that day, because in helping up his housekeeper she rolled on top of him.

"There," pointed Madredeus with a tired hand. "Go inside our hut. Tread carefully, only on the rotting planks. When they give way, you'll fall into the Land of Dreams."

They bravely went inside the hut, the floor creaking alarmingly.

“I have an idea,” Oliver said to Darwin. “Since it’s not clear how far we’re going to fall, it would be best to get into the airfish.”

“Clever boy,” said Big Popgun proudly. “I know how to land wonderfully.”

When the fish swam to the middle of the room, which wasn’t only a reception but also bathroom, billiard room, library, observatory and solarium, there was a CRACK and they began to fall.

They didn’t fall far, the Land of Dreams was in the cellar, but more spacious than the Ljubljana Marshes. They found themselves at a fair, in a colourful pleasure ground, where strange dreamers and dreamy oddballs were selling dream products. They included hippies who knew how to dream with their eyes open, railway workers who blew steam from their ears when they dreamed, poets with dreamy pens, beauty queens who saw chocolate cakes in their dreams and lifeguards who in their dreams were transformed into ostriches and buried their head in the sand. There were even some politicians who lied with open eyes as they sold their bla bla bla – and they say that dreams never lie!

The visitors were enthusiastic about the heaps of glowing, fluttering and rustling dreams. They saw suns out of whipped cream covered with cherry syrup; they saw breathing cubes in which twittered friendly rappers; but there were even more monsters – horrors with protruding teeth and eyes poked out, Supermen that had been attacked by deadly dandruff, not to mention loads of screeching umbrellas. There were also a lot of wasted words, gently lamenting and singing sad folk songs. The range on offer was exceptional and so choosing was that much harder. The sellers boastfully yelled out their wares; some of them were so pushy that they hung dreams around the visitors’ necks or shoved them under their t-shirts.

It was good that Oliver quickly managed to get rid of a dream in which appeared a poisonous green Gila monster, which shot you with looks and choked you with bad breath. The dream with the Gila monster was bought by the Uruguayan defence minister because he feared a military coup. In exchange, he gave Oliver a not very inspiring dream about military training. In it, orders kept being repeated: “Lie down, get up, stand up straight, crawl in the mud, don’t wait!” Oliver didn’t want this dream, but the minister didn’t have a better one.

They spent a long time looking for a likeable dream they could swap for the one about military training. They had immense luck that a noble wild boar was selling dreams caught in a magical glass ball and wanted to exchange it for the defence minister's dream.

"That's just the kind of dream I need," she explained to Oliver. "My spoilt little lad is disobedient and doesn't want to roll in the mud at all."

The magic ball contained very gentle dreams, pig dreams, impish dreams with shaved heads, travel dreams of the warm south and school dreams that began: "Whoever is studying, leave dreaming behind."

You can imagine that Oliver wasn't too keen on this strange dream mixture, but the wild boar quickly consoled him.

"The magic ball is precious," she said to Oliver, "because you can choose the dreams you want. If you are awoken by a nightmare you just shake the ball so that the dreams inside it dance like snowflakes and then you choose with a look the one that you prefer. It all depends on you and you are never bored."

That's exactly what Oliver was looking for!

The journey home was dream-like because the whole time Oliver was shaking the magic ball and choosing dizzyingly interesting dreams. Of course, he shared them with Darwin, passing on to him a dream about the developmental forms of the salamander, about the adaptation of giant squid in deep oceans and about shellfish that did not want to be flat. For when leaving Uruguay, Darwin had complained that they had forgotten about Galapagos hot dogs and that he couldn't eat promises.

When Oliver rang the bell at home, his mum burst out crying from happiness and pride that they had such a brave son, little sister Lili smothered him with kisses, while dad just smirked and agreed that Darwin could stay with them (until gripped once more by the passion for new explorations). The flying fish was lent, with her agreement, to the Imagination Institute at the Academy of Arts and Sciences, on condition that Big Popper visited them at least twice a week and slept in the washing machine at the weekends.

After a few nights, thanks to the magic ball, Oliver, his parents and little sister were a lot more rested; the bags beneath their eyes disappeared and they forgot about yawning.

One evening, their arms round each other, they were staring into the magic ball. Suddenly, Darwin burst into the room. "Oliver," he said in excitement, "can you come with me for a moment?"

In Darwin's twisted room they sat down breathlessly at the computer.

"Look at this message" gasped the learned dog. "I caught it with the most up-to-date search engine for mysterious words."

Oliver had no problems reading, but what was written on the screen confused him. It said:

IA WILLA STARTA DESATROYA EARTHA. IA AMA ONA TAV-  
AEUNIA

XEROX

"Can you help me?" he asked Darwin.

"You know I'm the best in the world at deciphering secret writing. This creature, who has evidently come from outer space, is going to start destroying the Earth. It is on the island of Taveuni, far away in the Pacific Ocean. Very far."

They looked at each other.

"Vamos!" cried Oliver. "There's not a moment to lose!"

Dad, mum and little sister, who were waiting for Oliver, noticed that the snowflakes in the magic ball were suddenly dancing wildly.

*Translated by David Limon*



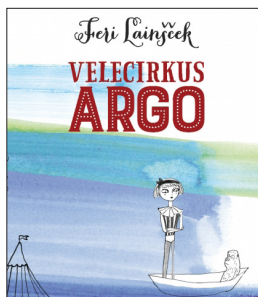
FERI LAINŠČEK

---

The writer, poet, playwright and screenwriter FERI LAINŠČEK (1959) has authored well over 100 books. He is best known for his novels, and to date he has already published 22, some of which have been translated into other languages. He has received many prominent awards and accolades for his literary works. In 1995 he was awarded the Prešeren Fund Prize for his novel *Ki jo je megla prinesla* (The Woman Carried in by the Fog). Twice he has won the Kresnik Award, namely, in 1992 for his novel *Namesto koga roža cveti* (Instead of Whom does the Flower Bloom) and in 2007 for his novel *Muriša*. In 2000, his collection of tales *Mislce* (Little Thoughts) received the Večernica Award for the best Slovenian work of youth literature, while in 2011 he won the Desetnica Award for his book *Pesmi o Mišku in Belamiški* (Mousy the Mouse and White-mouse). Six feature films have been based on his novels.

## About *Velecirkus Argo* (Argo Grand Circus)

First published in 1996, *Argo Grand Circus* was republished in 2015. The main protagonists are the girl Gela Gela and the boy Tulsi who, along with the magician Garam Abdel Garam, work for the Argo circus. As part of the show, the magician casts alternately each into the other's world; only have they have become best friends and learned to trust each other can they return. The show goes wrong for the first time when, unexpectedly, the circus monkey Banfi joins them and lures the young heroes into his imagined world. And so begins their unusually, exciting and eventful journey into parallel worlds.



Original title: *Velecirkus Argo*  
Published by: Beletrina, zavod za založniško dejavnost, Kersnikova 4, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
Illustrator: Meta Wraber  
Year of publication: 2015  
Number of pages: 103  
ISBN: 978-961-284-081-5  
Copyright holder: Feri Lainšček

## ARGO GRAND CHIRCUS

*(excerpt)*

## CHAPTER 1,

*in which Argo Grand Circus has to do another lap of honour*

When on the third morning, the caravan of vehicles belonging to Argo Grand Circus finally stopped for slightly longer, the quartermaster Marcus noticed on the speedometer that they had travelled exactly two hundred and ninety nine kilometres. This beautiful, almost fairy tale number did not please the old circus director Albert Bertie the Second at all. He twirled his carefully groomed moustache and suspiciously eyed the meadow behind the public warehouses, where the circus was supposed to put up its colourful tent. Then, very ill-tempered, he ordered his first driver to lead the vehicles on another round of the town.

Of course, the weary travellers complained loudly and many angry curses were uttered but, in spite of this, the long caravan set off once more along the town's streets. This was the start of its lap of honour, which at times totally paralysed the traffic and, without the help of posters, let it be known that the famous circus had finally arrived.

"Is it worth using my eyes?" said Gela Gela, stretching on her camp bed, and tugging at Tulsi, who was leaning out of the open trailer window.

"Are we in Mexico, Hungary or Bangladesh?" said the boy, whose dark curls were completely tousled by the breeze so that his hair resembled salad more than anything else.

"Who cares!" said Gela Gela with a yawn, really angry that she had woken up before they had truly arrived. "What do Mexico, Hungary and Bangladesh have in common?"

"That's precisely it – they don't!" said Tulsi. "If we're in Mexico, I'll be sorry we're not in Hungary or Bangladesh. If we're in Hungary, I'll be sorry we're not in Mexico or Bangladesh. And if we're in Bangladesh, I'll be sorry that we're not in Mexico or in Hungary. Because wherever we were, it would definitely be better than here."



The girl now got up and peered out of the window. The street, probably the main one, that was slowly sliding past, didn't seem special in any way. During the innumerable journeys made by Argo Grand Circus, she had seen countless streets like this – and many even more miserable. “Now I understand why you get such bad grades in geography!” she took a dig at her friend, who was once more hanging out of the window, reaching out so that he could knock off the hat of a man waiting at a pedestrian crossing.

“I get bad grades in geography because the real world is nothing like it says in geography books!” he shouted back after missing his intended victim's hat by a whisker. “Which is why you, who's always asleep while we're travelling, get top grades.”

Gela Gela moved over to the window on the opposite side and chose not to answer. There was no point in arguing with Tulsi. Although he understood every little thing in his own way and, of course, totally wrongly, he always wanted to be right. And he was willing to fight to be right, if necessary. Gela Gela thought she would eventually find out something about the town, where they would probably spend the summer. And she would be able to see it in great detail as the holidays were starting and for a while at least she definitely wouldn't have to waste time at school.

Finally, the circus caravan stopped again in the meadow behind the public warehouses. The quartermaster Marcus saw on the speedometer that they had travelled exactly one thousand and eleven kilometres and the circus director Albert Bertie the Second was pleased. Of course, this meant that the workers were now able to begin off-loading all the circus stuff and put up the big top. This was no small task and only if everything went smoothly could they hope to finish in a record thirty-two hours.

But usually in Argo Grand Circus things did not go smoothly.

Either the elephants rebelled – and without them the tent poles and girders could not be lifted at all – or one of the beasts escaped on its way to a cage, or quartermaster Marcus mixed up the plans and in the middle of the process they realised that the circus tent was becoming a labyrinth without an entrance or an exit.

CHAPTER 2,  
*which is in no way in favour of idleness*

Gela Gela pulled her camp bed from the trailer and placed it in the shade of the only tree on the edge of the meadow. She really didn't care one bit about all the commotion on the site. School holidays were starting, she had top grades in every subject and, as a reward, her mother had promised her that this summer she would not have to appear in the circus ring with her.

Her only care from now on was Banfi the monkey.

The animal always became irritable in her cage and immediately got a rash that the circus doctor, Lazarus, called *allergitus banfitus*, and prescribed freedom as the only cure. Of course, outside the cage Banfi needed a minder. Although Banfi was only a year younger than Gela Gela, the monkey was still a child. Besides, she was such a hardened kleptomaniac that she would steal from herself if it were possible.

Tulsi was of course angry about Gela Gela being on her camp bed again. At first he looked the other way and went around on his own. But he just couldn't find the right company. If he began talking to the workers, they soon asked him to help them hold or lift something. If he ran after the boys – Whitey, Max and Damian – they started fighting at the first sign of disagreement. And his parents also just shouted at him as if he was in their way. So in the end, he'd meandered back to the camp bed.

"Well, monkey, aren't you going to greet his royal highness?" Gela Gela winked at Banfi. The monkey immediately climbed up and licked the boy first on one cheek and then the other.

"Yuck! That's disgusting!" Tulsi shook the monkey off and wiped his face with both sleeves. "My life would be so much better if it wasn't for that stupid monkey. And better still, I must say, if all these people hadn't developed from monkeys."

"And you'd have the best time of all ..." said Gela Gela mockingly, "if you hadn't developed from a monkey."

"And I haven't really!" said the boy seriously. "I know that almost for sure. My late granny whispered to me a long time ago that our forebears were astronauts. And astronauts, as even you must know, live in space!"

"Oh, dear!" said Gela Gela, her dander up. "You could know by now

that in our grandparents' times there were no astronauts. And the only legend your old granny could have told you was the legend of the Argonauts; after all, the circus was named after them."

"Oh!" Tulsi was angry. "Our circus was named after that instant soup brand – Argo. Because all we ever eat are these damn packet soups."

"Not again!" Gela Gela wanted to hit him. "Yet another example. How come that you can't get it into your thick head that when our circus was given its name, there were no packet soups?" She flew off the camp bed, wanting to get away. But she nearly collided with the circus director, who had suddenly appeared, wiping his perspiring bald head with a huge handkerchief.

"Ah ya," yawned the monkey and ran under the camp bed. The old man was the only person in the circus who she was truly afraid of. Probably because day after day he made her perform under the circus lights, which she didn't feel like doing in the slightest.

This time, though, surprisingly, Albert Bertie the Second wasn't looking for her, but he kept peering alternately at Gela Gela and Tulsi. Then he shrugged, nodded and carefully folded the sweaty handkerchief. The youngsters immediately felt that this was ominous and exchanged worried looks. But whatever had entered the old guy's head would not leave, they knew that much – and this is why they didn't even attempt to get away.

"Hm, yes!" the old man shrugged again. "How can I explain it to you, kids, so that you really get it? But it is what it is and I have to say this – we're doing badly, very badly," he said, looking them in the eye, from close up. "So you should know that Garam Abdel Garam is our last hope. Only his magic – which is a true world attraction – can fill our tent once more and thus, of course, the cashbox..."

"Garam Abdel Garam?" asked Gela Gela. "The magician?"

"The magician – and, by gum, more than a magician," said the director, nodding. "The great magus, really, the like of which has certainly never appeared in a circus before," he said. "Straight from mysterious Eastern lands that may never have even appeared on the maps, he came to us tonight and immediately demanded that I bring him two assistants ..."

"Assistants?" Gela Gela and Tulsi asked with one voice.

"Assistants," nodded Albert Bertie the Second. "A master and a miss

who are not yet twelve!” The director looked pleadingly first at one then at the other. “And who else can I, in my extreme predicament, ask for help if not you two, the only ones here who satisfy this condition?”

### CHAPTER 3,

*in which we meet the Guide Between Two Lands, but find out nothing about his sack*

Garam Abdel Garam moved into a trailer that had to be completely emptied for him at his request. Because of all that emptiness he seemed even smaller than he really was. Even though he wasn't any bigger than Tulsi and his feeble body didn't fit well with his old man's face. His whole luggage, that may also have been all he owned, consisted of a large canvas sack and a barrel-like object, which was probably a drum.

As soon as the circus director pushed Gela Gela and Tulsi into the magician's strange living quarters, the little man sat on the floor again and, leaning on his sack, spent a long time weighing the two children up. Then he gestured to Albert Bertie the Second to come closer and whispered close to his ear: “I'll take them because I know you don't have anyone else. But I have to tell you right now that by giving me them you have also chosen and determined our act. So please remember this every time you are dissatisfied with the performance.”

The old circus director scratched his chin and it seemed that he understood nothing. But the stranger had no intention of explaining things further. Again, he was staring at the youngsters and kept indicating to the director that he should go and leave them alone. The director hung around for a while, uncertain and confused, but in the end there was nothing for him to do but to leave the trailer.

That very moment, Garam Abdel Garam took hold of his large sack, placed it between his knees and untied it. Then he said, without taking anything out: “Now, remember very well what I tell you. This sack contains everything I need for the greatest miracle of all miracles, and what I'm going to ask from you is in your thoughts. Just as I will tie and untie this sack according to my own judgement, you two will tie and untie the sack containing your thoughts. And let this be our secret agreement

which none of us should ever violate.”

Gela Gela and Tulsi looked at each other and read in each other’s eyes that, just like the circus director earlier, they didn’t understand anything.

“You surely weren’t expecting everything to be clear to us straight away,” said Gela Gela after a long pause.

“Of course not,” said Garam Abdel Garam, smiling for the first time. “All I said was that you should remember this well. This is so that you’ll always be able to remember in time. And don’t be afraid – before it starts for real, I’ll tell you this another hundred times.”

“But we were told that you were a magician, not a philosopher!” said Tulsi.

“I’m neither a wizard nor a sage,” said the little man. “I’m just Garam Abdel Garam.”

“That’s a name, not a profession,” said Gela Gela.

“Garam means a land,” smiled the stranger. “Abdel means a man. Garam Abdel Garam can thus mean only one thing: a man between two lands. And that, if you wish me to tell you in your own words, is my profession: I am a guide between two lands. Someone who can safely take you from this world to another – and no less safely back again, of course.”

“Huh!” said Tulsi. “I have to say this is getting interesting!”

“Interesting, but still not really understandable,” said Gela Gela. “I’d been thinking we’d appear in the circus.”

“Of course, in the circus.” The Guide Between Two Lands stood up. “But in fact it won’t be us appearing, we’ll just present to the crowd your other worlds,” he said, taking their hands. “This is why I’m saying the beauty or miraculous nature of our act completely depends on you. The greater your inner richness, the more of it will be on show. And besides, I will gradually enable you to take the most exciting walks man has ever experienced. You, Gela Gela, will be able to run around the inner world of your friend Tulsi. And you, Tulsi, will be able to admire the boundless spiritual planes of your friend Gela Gela.”

CHAPTER 4,  
*which will stun even the greatest sceptics*

When, after exactly thirty-nine hours, the circus workers had at last put up the big top, Garam Abdel Garam took Gela Gela and Tulsi into the ring for the first time. The news about the stranger's incomprehensible and probably unbelievable act had reached every person in the circus and they all wanted to see the first rehearsal. But the magician ordered the director to remove all the nosy parkers, including himself, from the tent.

In the end, they were alone.

Only then did Garam Abdel Garam take his huge sack from his shoulder and carefully put down the object that was probably a drum. Then he took the boy's and the girl's hand and led them in a circle.

"I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I'm a little bit scared," Gela Gela said in a whisper.

"What of?" asked Tulsi mockingly. "You probably already know off by heart the instruction about the sack of your thoughts that always has to be tied in time."

"It's good that you're so different from each other," said the Guide Between Two Lands, stopping them. "The charm and attraction of your appearances lies fully in this very difference between your minds." He winked at each of them and then returned to his sack and untied it.

It contained a huge black cloth, which he spread out across nearly the whole ring, then lifted it in the middle and hung it on a chain so that a pointed tent appeared. But even before the two children managed to have a good look at the material that was neither velvet nor silk, they had to crawl under it on all fours and sit on the ground right in the middle.

"Is it really dark in there now?" asked the magician's voice on the other side.

"Completely dark," confirmed Tulsi.

"Or even darker," said Gela Gela, trying to chase away her anxiety.

"Then everything is as it should be," said Garam Abdel Garam with a laugh. "There's nothing else for you to do but listen to me carefully. After a while, you will hear my drums and my voice, which will be transformed and strange. Only if you listen very, very carefully, will you after some time maybe see through the cloth."

"See through that cloth?" said Gela Gela with surprise.

"Precisely through this cloth," replied the magician. "But, of course, you'll only see whatever you wish for from your heart."

"And if I wish to see myself there?" asked Tulsi.

"Then that's what you'll see," said the voice on the other side. "But still be careful how you picture yourself and what you wish for, because the audience will see everything that you see and nothing else."

"So that's what this is!?" said Gela Gela with unease.

"Quite unbelievable," said Tulsi. Then he felt his way close to her and whispered in her ear: "It increasingly seems to me that this man is pulling our leg."

At that moment the drums sounded. And the magician's voice really was completely different. The closest comparison would be the yowling of a hungry cat. Gela Gela and Tulsi unwillingly came closer together and listened. The words pronounced by the stranger were completely incomprehensible. At times they seemed like a murmured prayer and then again like strange, howled syllables. And this kept going on and on, to distraction.

Then Gela Gela saw a wooden club in the darkness.

"Look, look!" she exclaimed. "I can see a club. Even though I hadn't thought of one."

"But I did," whispered Tulsi. "I wished for one so that I could hit him on the head with it, to make him finally stop shouting like that," he added and at that moment they saw the club dancing on Garam Abdel Garam's head.

"Don't, please!" said Gela Gela, wishing for the old man not to feel too much pain. And at that moment they both saw a helmet on the magician's head.

"Incredible!" they said as one.

"Incredible, yes!" replied the magician's voice, now coming from the darkness again. "Will you now believe at last that what I told you really is possible?"

CHAPTER 5,  
*or the demand for live dreams*

The next day, Argo Grand Circus welcomed the public visitors. For the two young assistants to the magician from Eastern lands, lands that are probably even not on the maps, this was undoubtedly a very special day. Although, like most circus children, they hated from the bottom of their heart the days when they had to perform, now they could barely wait for the show to start. The other members of the circus, including the director Albert Bertie the Second, were no less curious. They secretly doubted that the new act could really draw in and enthuse the public.

Garam Abdel Garam merely smiled all the time and just before they appeared once more told the children not to forget to tie their sack when they felt that they had had enough.

Gela Gela and Tulsi, wearing the new clothes that the circus tailor had to make for them overnight, quickly bowed to the audience and then crawled beneath the black sheet. Immediately, the drumming began.

At first it was dark and quiet beneath the tent, but then crickets could be heard and before the astonished audience a springtime meadow appeared out of nothing, a product of Gela Gela's imagination. It was a true paradise of spring flowers. Then, in the middle of the meadow, a thin, tall birch tree gradually grew in everyone's sight and swayed in the wind.

But – oh, dear!

A goat that Tulsi had come up with came bleating across the meadow and began to graze and trample on the most beautiful blossoms.

"That's not fair!" said Gela Gela and started to think hard how to chase Tulsi's goat away. She could not come up with anything but a shepherd. And there he was – a boy with a shepherd's crook, who began beating the unsuspecting goat.

"So that's how you want to play this!" Tulsi became angry. The goat changed into an angry bull, pawed at the ground and directed his horns at the helpless, timid shepherd. But the shepherd's fear didn't last long, as immediately the toreador that Gela Gela wished for appeared and waved his huge red scarf in front of the bull's eyes. Then they fought for a while, until the sharp horns removed the bullfighter's trousers.



"I don't want this!" said Gela Gela, elbowing Tulsi, and the whole meadow, together with the birch and the toreador, instantly disappeared.

The bull, now alone in the dark, looked around in shock and became very dejected. Then, in front of everyone's eyes, he turned into a donkey. The audience gasped in surprise and then gave a round of applause, the likes of which Argo Grand Circus had never heard before.

Gela Gela and Tulsi, completely overwhelmed by this, wished to create new worlds, but the magician's drum had stopped unconditionally. The cloth above their heads lifted slowly and so they could do nothing but take a bow and leave the ring. Behind the curtain, dozens of people wanted to shake their hand, while the director Albert Bertie the Second even covered them in kisses so that they had to spend a long time after wiping off his saliva.

In the following few days, the news about the miraculous worlds beneath the canvas of Argo Grand Circus spread around the town with unbelievable speed. The next two shows were sold out within moments and then both young and old were literally fighting for reservations. Journalists who could, of course, not ignore this demand for tickets, soon wrote about it. After seeing the live dreams once, many visitors wanted to watch the show again and again. They knew that during each performance they would see something completely new, hitherto unseen.

## CHAPTER 6, *or time for deliberation*

Gela Gela, Tulsi and Garam Abdel Garam were increasingly becoming trusted friends. They were united by an ever greater number of secrets that were their own. The other inhabitants of the circus settlement and the countless curious visitors, who day after day hung around Argo Grand Circus, couldn't really imagine how the threesome created their astonishing act. And they definitely didn't believe that new worlds appeared in front of their eyes, coming into being and becoming entangled and disentangled without any previous plan.

The Guide Between Two Lands was also always the first to notice when their imaginations began to bore his two young assistants. At

times like this, he opened the door of the secret a tiny bit further, hinting at a new possibility that they might find entertaining. Until he finally trusted them so much that he allowed them to take at least a short walk around each other's hidden world.

Without doubt, this meant a much greater risk than even the most fiery and merciless battles between their individual wishes and imaginations beneath the black cloth. And this is why they talked about it in great detail before their first attempt. But above all, the magician kept warning them that they could take a walk in the expanses of imagination only when they felt that they could really trust each other and that there were no unsettled accounts between them.

"Because even the smallest dose of anger that you may not even notice at first glance and of which you're unaware, can be treacherous and dangerous," he told them. "Equally, for the person entering another's world, excessive and ungrounded trust could be fatal. This is why you need to tread very carefully – is it not better to come back still curious rather than maybe never come back?" he asked them.

"Maybe never come back?" asked Tulsi, surprised.

"It has never happened, but I know for certain that it can end that way," said Garam Abdel Garam with a nod. "Because when you, for example, set off to her other worlds, how can you know what awaits you there?" said the magician with a raised index finger. "And especially if you bear in mind that at such times your voice will be completely powerless and she won't be able to hear you easily, however much you try to persuade her of something."

"But I'll always want him to return safely," said Gela Gela confidently.

"Exactly," said the Guide Between Two Lands, nodding. "If you really wish that at all times, there should be no problems. But I know that often deep inside people do not feel that way."

"Oh!" said the girl, offended. "I know myself that much."

"Alright," said the man. "But I still want Tulsi to decide on his own."

"But I already have," said the boy, laughing. "Who else can I trust if not Gela Gela?"

"Alright," Garam Abdel Garam nodded. "I can see that our next appearance really will be a sensation."

"And the next next one!" laughed Gela Gela. "That's when I'll have a go."

"You?" asked the boy, biting his lip.

"What?" Gela Gela noticed his hesitation. "You're not going to tell me now that I shouldn't trust you?"

"No, no," said Tulsi, scratching himself. "But you know me. I often have these ideas come into my head, and I'm afraid ..."

"What?" Gela Gela was truly offended now. "You've never told me that you were up to something."

"I'm not really," said Tulsi, searching for words. "I'm just scared for you. You're a girl. You could easily be scared by some of the wickedness that sometimes nibbles at me. Or by an ugly thought that sometimes tickles me."

"Come on, my dears!" The magician put his arms around them. "Enough for today, we've said a lot to each other. And something about it is particularly precious: it means a lot to me when I see that you understand that it's not just a game anymore."

## CHAPTER 7, *too full of surprises and secrets*

On Saturday night, the circus was packed. Even the town's mayor and his most revered colleagues were awaiting the show with anticipation. This is why the artistes decided to stage a very special act and Tulsi also decided that he would finally risk a journey into Gela Gela's other worlds.

But on special occasions, things like to get complicated.

As the boy and girl were feeling their way to the space beneath the raised cloth, they realised in surprise that Banfi the monkey followed them.

"Damn monkey!" said Tulsi. "It would be today, when we have to be specially focused, that you decide to follow us," he said, trying to chase her away. But the animal liked the secret place and had no intention of leaving.

"At least promise me that you really will be completely still and not spoil the show," said Gela Gela, holding her down and calmly stroking her.

"Ah ya," said the intruder, as if she understood.

And then the drums could be heard.

Tonight, the rhythm was different. And Garam Abdel Garam's voice sounded clearer. "Aber-baber-raber-kaber," he recited on the other side of the cloth. And again and again: "Kaber- aber-daber-aber-baber-raber-aber..."

The boy and the girl held hands and waited impatiently and uncertainly to see whether they would succeed. Because they had to really feel the moment when Gela Gela was overcome by sleep a second and when opposite them a rainbow appeared through which Tulsi would be able to slip to the other side. All this would only be possible, they were told by the Guide Between Two Lands, if they were completely focused and believed fully that the human body could vanish and then return again.

"Are you really not scared at all?" Gela Gela quietly asked her friend.

"What of?" replied Tulsi. "Who can I trust if not you?" he said, squeezing her sweaty hand.

Then the drums became so loud that they couldn't hear each other.

The thickest darkness around them gradually reddened, zebra-like strips first turned blue and then increasingly purple. There was the sound of waves crashing against rocks and then a stormy bay became visible. Between the sparse rocks, an outline appeared of sand dunes, with strange vegetation in the background. No one could tell whether they were small trees or large grasses.

"Is it possible that I would think of something like this?" thought Gela Gela. "Or experience it in my dreams?"

"Isn't all this wonderful?" asked Tulsi, squeezing her hand and then releasing his grip, as if his hand had simply disappeared.

"Don't!" exclaimed Gela Gela. "Something strange is happening! These can't be my worlds!"

But unfortunately it was too late.

The rainbow light that flashed just for a moment had already transferred Tulsi far into the strange, bare sand dune. Enchanted, he wandered there, looking at the colourful plants opening their huge blossoms.

"Aga-aga," said Banfi near Gela Gela's ear.

And then the girl understood.

The world into which Tulsi had entered, wasn't hers but the monkey's. Something no one had envisaged had happened. The poor boy was caught in a world that was impossible to control. It was even more

impossible to tell the animal not to hurt him in her other worlds. Besides, Tulsi most likely didn't know where he was. Whatever happened to him, he would be sure that it was Gela Gela who'd done it. And she didn't want to allow that. If it were possible, she would have immediately gone after him. But a storm was already raging on the mysterious beach. The waves crashing against the rocks were even bigger than before. One of the watery tongues licked the sand dune and swept Tulsi away like a fly.

"No! Not that!" screamed Gela Gela.

And the magician's drums fell silent.

## CHAPTER 8,

*in which there is still some hope*

The Argo Grand Circus audience was more than enthusiastic. They clapped and stomped their feet because they were truly enchanted by the unusual images of unknown worlds. Only a few noticed that the girl crawled from under the cloth with a monkey instead of a boy. Even fewer people thought that something so unplanned and cruel had happened. Only Garam Abdel Garam was barely able to contain his concern. He quickly bowed to the excited audience and pulled Gela Gela out of the ring.

"I'd never have believed this!" He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. "That you could be like that to him!" His eyes were piercing angrily through her. "And especially that you wouldn't let him come back!"

"But – don't you understand either?" Gela Gela began to cry. "The world we saw wasn't mine, it was that stupid monkey Banfi that messed everything up after she came under there."

"The monkey?" asked the magician, looking pale as he sat down. "That's about the most terrible thing that could have happened!" he whispered in a changed voice. "How can we know what's happening in her worlds?"

"Yes, how?" moaned Gela Gela. "But we must think of something anyway."

At that moment, the circus director came through the curtain and

they both stopped talking from fear. His face showed that he already suspected that an accident had happened. "Listen, Mister Abrakadabra," the old man said, standing in front of the magician with his feet placed wide apart. "As far as I can see, the boy has vanished, so can you explain to me what's actually happening? Something will have to be said to his parents who are, understandably, already very angry ..."

"Oh, yes!" said Garam Abdel Garam with a dismissive wave. "A minor complication," he mumbled. "You know it sometimes happens. But it'll be alright – I assure you it will, just give me some peace and time."

"Alright, alright," nodded Albert Bertie the Second. "But you must understand – it's my duty to ask and to be informed. Above all, I hope that the matter will be resolved and that everything will be ready for tomorrow's show."

"Tomorrow's show?" asked the Guide Between Two Lands, scratching himself.

"It can't be cancelled!" said the director, raising his finger. "There are rumours that we may get a visit from the President himself!"

"Well, it'll just have to be cancelled!" said Gela Gela with a raised voice. "We're up to our necks here and you're talking about tomorrow's show!"

"I apologise!" said the director. "But a job is a job."

"What damn job!" said the girl furiously and walked off after the magician, who was slowly heading for his trailer. Banfi the monkey, who had no idea about anything, hopped along behind Gela Gela.

"How could I have been so careless?" whispered Garam Abdel Garam as he closed the door behind him. "How could I have gotten into this embarrassing situation?" He walked around his trailer. "And the worst thing is that I don't have any clever ideas."

"But you have to have an idea, you have to!" Gela Gela tugged at his sleeve. "I'll go mad from misery otherwise. Or I'll die." She could barely stop herself from crying. "There has to be a little crack somewhere, through which you can come back?"

"There certainly is a possibility," said the magician, embracing her. "But Tulsu doesn't know about it. And we can't tell him either. Except, of course ..." he said, biting his lip.

"What?" Gela Gela grabbed him.

“Well, you know, if someone went after him?” he said. “But tell me who – who would be so stupid as to risk it?”

“Oh!” exclaimed Gela Gela. “If that’s how it goes, if that is possible, you know I’ll certainly go!”

“You?” said Garam Abdel Garam in surprise. “I wasn’t expecting such courage.”

“It’s not about courage, it’s about friendship,” said Gela Gela keenly.

*Translated by David Limon*



NATAŠA KONC LORENZUTTI

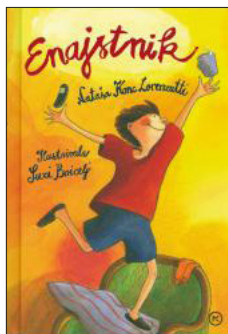


---

**N**ATAŠA KONC LORENZUTTI (1970) graduated from the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television in Ljubljana, at the Stage Acting and the Artistic Word department, where she also completed her master's degree in 2010. Between 1994 and 1999 she was engaged as an actress in two professional Slovenian theatres, and since 1999 she has dedicated herself to literature. To date she has published thirteen books for children and young people and three for adults. She has been nominated for the "Original Slovenian Picture Book Prize" and the "Modra Ptica" (Blue bird) award, as well as twice each for the "Desetnica" and the "Večernica" Awards. Her fiction for adults has won the "Glas žensk" (Woman's voice) award three times, and twice won Trieste's "Mladika" award. In addition to pursuing her freelance writing career, for ten years she has been a teacher of drama at the Nova Gorica High School, where she and her students have also staged her plays.

### About *Enajstnik* (Elevenger)

Nace is a spirited eleven-year-old who lives in the countryside and has a large family, bouncing between desires and duties. He doesn't like most of the tasks and chores his school and parents burden him with, so he thinks up original ways of escaping those boring things and doing what he likes to do; and yet, without overexerting himself, he also finishes that which in his opinion is unnecessary but which is (unfortunately) unavoidable.



Original title: *Enajstnik*  
Published by: Mladinska knjiga, Slovenska  
29, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
Illustrator: Suzi Bricej  
Year of publication: 2012  
Number of pages: 100  
ISBN: 978-961-01-2162-6  
Copyright holder: Mladinska knjiga

## ELEVENGER

*(excerpt)*

I'm writing an essay. For school. The title is: Who am I?

My name is Nace. I live in a yellow house with my mum, dad, my younger brother and two younger sisters. There are a lot of us and so the house is always untidy. There are toys and books everywhere. Mum gets annoyed because we don't tidy our things away. Toys and books don't bother me. But mum's yelling bothers me a lot.

I was born in the last millennium. I'm eleven years old. So I'm a teenager.

I have lots of different qualities. Three-quarters of them good. Now I'm being very good, because I want to get top grade. That would make mum very happy.

My favourite subject at school is maths. I find sums easy. Just occasionally I muddle up plus and minus. I do the sum correctly, but the answer is still wrong.

I've got brown hair and skin. In the summer I turn into a chocolate cake.

I love water. Just like my dad. We like to go to rivers and streams. We explore, play in the sand and play ducks and drakes. Dad skips the stones so well they reach the bank on the other side. I can already throw pretty well, but my brother is only just learning. One day he'll throw as well as me and dad. In the summer we go to the River Soča almost every day. It doesn't bother us if the water is cold. We're like otters.

When I'm grown up I'm going to sleep in. No one will wake me up early. I'll decide myself when I get up.

I haven't decided yet what I'll be. Maybe an archaeologist. I'm interested in the pyramids in Egypt. I'd also like to be a pilot. But I'm often sick in the car, so that probably won't work out. A pilot can't be travel sick.

When I'm grown up I'll get married and become a dad. The only thing that bothers me is the idea of wiping children's bottoms. That seems to me the worst thing my parents have to do for my little sister.

I don't know what else to write. I hope this is enough for an A.

Nace

## JUMPING

Besides going to school (which unfortunately I have to do), I play guitar and play basketball. I'd like to turn the day round. Until lunch time I'd play basketball and guitar, then in the afternoon I'd go to school for an hour or two, enough to learn what really interests me. But I can only dream about that.

So until lunch time I'm stuck in school, stuffing a couple of kilos of new words into my head, and in the afternoon all these words flit from my head. Because I jump so much.

As soon as I get home from school, I'm jumping. In the hall we have a stand full of winter jackets, anoraks and coats. (Although my family is really too big for one coat stand.) On the lower hooks my sisters and brother hang their jackets. As the oldest, I hang mine at the top, on the highest hook. But because I can't reach that high I take a short run, jump and throw my jacket on the stand as if I was throwing a basketball. Because I enjoy this so much I do it a number of times. With the next jump I take the jacket off again. Then I run up, jump, hang the jacket, run up, jump, take it off, run up, jump, hang it, and so on.

I make my bed in a similar way (I sleep in the top bunk). I take the blanket off, fold it, lift it over my head and throw it onto the top bunk. With the next three or four jumps I straighten it a bit.

Later, when I'm doing my homework, it's only my brain that is jumping. But not always with the same enthusiasm. It only jumps when the homework is interesting. It doesn't move at all when I'm colouring in pictures in my workbook. How dumb that is! If I buy a workbook the pictures should all be finished! Why should we school kids have to colour them in? That's the most boring thing in the world! My brain lies down, yawns and goes all miserable when I have to do colouring. My head hurts. When I'm grown up I'll ban colouring in school!

Later I jump outside. With my brother or on my own. We have a basketball ring on the house. I jump and throw the ball in. When it's not raining I climb the horse chestnut tree and then jump down.

When I come inside I jump at the coat stand again. Sometimes the jackets and coats fall on top of me. That means more opportunities for jumping, because I have to put them all back again. My mum closes the

door so she doesn't have to watch me. She says her hair stands on end when she sees how I hang them. "Do what you want, as long as they're put back," she says before she closes the door.

Then it's time for guitar. Twice a week dad takes me to music school, the other days I practise at home. It's nice to see how my fingers are making progress. I like music. Whenever I manage to learn a new song, I jump for joy.

If I could spend the time I use for colouring things in my workbook playing the guitar or basketball, my brain would never yawn from boredom. I would keep jumping, jumping, jumping.

## STOP WHINING

My little brother knows how to win at games, but not how to lose. Whenever we play Ludo, as soon as I knock one of his pieces off he starts whining. That's no fun!

This afternoon, when he started crying again, I banged the table and said: "I've had enough of this! I'm not playing anymore!" Then he howled!

"Please, please play with me. Just don't knock my pieces off!"

"What?! I won't play, that's no fun at all. You knock my pieces off and I don't whine about it!"

"But I'm so sad when you knock my piece off..." he explained.

"I don't care!" I said firmly. "You should never whine when you're losing a game."

"Okay, fine, I won't cry anymore," he said, upset. "But try not to knock my pieces off and upset me..."

"I won't do that, because then the game's boring!"

Oh, what crying! As if someone had died! I'm not playing anymore and that's that!

Half an hour or so passes. I'm reading a book at my desk. I get the feeling that someone's standing behind me. I look round... and see my brother, his face all blotchy, looking at me so gently that I feel sorry for him.

"What?" I say.

"Play Ludo with me. I've decided I won't cry. I'll grit my teeth when you knock one of my pieces off," he says.

“Okay. Your last chance,” I reply.

We go to the kitchen. The game is still on the table. My brother takes the yellow pieces, I the blue. Like always. We start. Of course, he goes first. He throws three times, but doesn’t get a six. Then I throw three times, but no six either. Then him again... Six! In the next round I also throw a six. We’re playing well. He’s got two pieces out, me one. I’m after both of his. One is three squares ahead, the other three. I throw. Hooray, a four! One, two, three, four. I knock his piece off.

We look at each other. My brother swallows. He blinks. I see he’s trying hard to keep his promise. His chin is trembling, but he takes a deep breath and says: “I’ll manage.”

“Cheers, little brother. Let’s play on,” I shout, feeling proud of him.

The game is tense. I’ve got all four pieces out, my brother three. One of mine is almost home. A yellow piece is hot on its heels. Oh no, my brother has thrown a two. One, two, he knocks my piece off. Good! We play on. Another yellow piece is just behind my second one. One, two, three, four. Yellow knocks blue off. No problem. Now I knock one of his off, but he throws a six straight away and is out again. He goes after my pieces mercilessly. Suddenly all four of his pieces are out. I can barely believe it when all my pieces are back at the beginning! My brother is racing along, throwing sixes and quickly getting near home. Finally, I also throw a six. I chase his pieces but don’t catch any. Before I know what’s happening my brother has all four pieces home. He has won!

There’s a strange lump in my throat. My brother’s eyes are sparkling as if he’d won at the Olympics. If I sang him the national anthem he’d cry for joy! I control myself. I’m the older brother and not long before I was telling him how to behave.

“Well done,” I say and offer him my hand.

“Thanks,” he says triumphantly and is so full of himself that he doesn’t notice how hard it is for me.

“I’m going back to my room. I want to read...”

And I flee. As quick as I can, I slip inside and close the door behind me. Only when I’m alone and no one can see me, do I snivel a bit. To relieve myself. Just a bit. Just enough to get rid of the lump in my throat.

## NO SYMPATHY

"I don't feel very good. My head hurts," I said to my dad when he came to wake me for school.

"My head hurts, too, when I hear the alarm," he replied. No sympathy for his child, I'm telling you! He doesn't pay much attention, but throws the cover off me (and off my brother) and says: "Good morning, boys. When comes the spring, the sparrows will sing!" Then he goes to wake my sisters.

He repeats this rhyme about the sparrows every morning, regardless of the season. He has no sympathy, he never feels sorry for me! If mum was home, she'd be very upset that my head was hurting. She'd feel my forehead and think three times before sending me to school. But mum was already at work. And dad was saying: "Come on, come on boys: jimjams off, clothes on!"

"But dad, I don't feel right..."

"Slippers on! A wee, a wash, breakfast."

"But dad, my head!"

"We'll see. If after the first class you still don't feel right, go to the secretary's office and call home. I'll come and get you." For him, the problem was solved. He stuck us in the car and delivered us: school kids to school, my little sister to nursery.

My head didn't hurt at school, I have to admit. Or maybe it did and I didn't notice. After school mum was waiting for us outside. I could hardly wait for her to comfort me.

"Yes, I know already," she said. That means dad told her over the phone.

"My head was throbbing."

"My head often hurts in the morning. Dad made the right decision. If you were really ill you could have called from school, couldn't you?" she said. Like a parrot! Repeating what dad said!

After lunch I quickly did my homework. (That's one thing I'm good at, I don't waste time over it.) I went out to throw the basketball, but it didn't go very well. Then I rode my bike round the village, but I somehow didn't feel like it, as if I had no strength. I went back home and said to mum: "I don't feel right."

“Oh dear,” she said (finally with a bit more sympathy). “I hope you’re not really going to get ill. Take a book and rest on the couch.”

“I thought... considering I don’t feel well... I could watch a cartoon... uncle lent me a whole heap of DVDs.”

“No, no,” she interrupted. “If you watch cartoons the other three will come in and then you’ll all be gawping at the television. It would be a shame: look how nicely they’re playing.” She went to the window and pointed to the sand pit.

“They really are playing nicely,” I said. “They’re as dirty as pigs.”

“So don’t start going on about cartoons. If they hear the TV they’ll dash straight inside...”

“I could put the headphones on so they don’t hear...”

“Oh no, you won’t. You’ll ruin your hearing.”

Oh, again no sympathy! I lay down on the couch and read. My head was hurting more and more.

“Mum,” I said. “I’m really ill. I can’t even read any more. I could just watch cartoons.” Mum brought the thermometer.

After ten minutes she established that I had a temperature. I was quite pleased. She would finally realise that a child with a temperature can do nothing more than lie in front of the television.

“You really are ill,” she said.

“Can I watch now?”

“Definitely not!” she replied, shocked. As if I had proposed I don’t know what.

“A child with a temperature can’t watch television. Get your pyjamas on and to bed!” And in a moment she was all concern. She squeezed some orange juice, made tea with honey and looked in the fridge for a lemon... She was prepared to do anything for me – apart from what I wanted.

## HELMET BOY

A cycle helmet is one of the ugliest things in the world! I’d rather wear a mole on my head than my black helmet. We’re always arguing about it. I managed to persuade mum that my kid’s helmet was too small and smelled mouldy because I had sweated in it so often. But

what did she do? Bought me another! She brought it home like a prize and expected me to jump for joy and immediately put the ugly thing on and ride round the village for all to see. If she only knew how my friends and the other kids at school tease me about it! "Helmet boy! Helmet boy!" they shout after me. And what am I to do? Tell them I wear it because of my mum?

I soon found a way of outwitting my parents. Whenever I went to school on my bike, I left home with my helmet on. But round the first corner I stopped and put the helmet in my bag and then rode on. So my school friends didn't see me wearing it. But then what happened. Once I forgot to put my helmet on before the last corner when I was coming home. And I met dad outside the house. "Where's your helmet?" he asked in that grim voice that I hate. "In my bag," I replied truthfully, but my dad wasn't impressed with my honesty. He threatened that I wouldn't be able to go to school by bike any more if I didn't wear my helmet. He's got no idea what friends mean to me.

Mum wasn't home when dad and I quarrelled. I told her all about it over the phone, but she didn't feel at all sorry for me. She even sided with dad. She said she wouldn't let me on the road without a helmet! But why only me? I'm always something special! Mummy's boy

When mum came home I pulled a face and let her know I felt down-trodden. But she already had a proposal ready. She said: "Leave home with the helmet on and ride almost to school. Before the last corner, take your helmet off and then ride nice and slowly the rest of the way. When you're coming back, ride as slow as you can to the first house, put your helmet on and then ride home at normal speed. Okay?" Okay. We shook hands on it.

Now the following ending would suit my story best: I'm going downhill, I fall on my head, the helmet breaks but my head stays in one piece! Yes, yes, I know that all mums and dads want such an ending. And then they'd say to their poor kids: "You see, Nace's parents were right! If Nace hadn't been wearing a helmet, he could have been killed!" But no, I won't give them the pleasure. I didn't fall. Something else happened. Something that almost gave me a heart attack!

I rode to school, properly protected by my helmet, of course, and when I came round the last corner but one I saw, just before the home



straight, my schoolmate Tadej. The one who shouts the most when he sees me in my helmet. He was riding towards school and on his head he had... you won't believe it... a shiny black helmet with orange lines on the side. Just like mine!

I slowed down so that he wouldn't see me. I watched him from a distance. I saw (you'll hardly believe this) how he stopped before the last house, got off his bike and sneaked round the corner. What he did round the corner I couldn't see, I could only guess. And I guessed right: Tadej appeared without his helmet, threw his full bag over his shoulder, got on his bike and slowly, very cautiously, he rode towards school.

## SNOW MINER

It's so funny that in the winter the schools, nurseries and shops are all decorated with snowflakes out of paper and snowballs out of cotton wool. For it's a long time since we saw any real snow. At New Year we were all muddy when we went out to play. But on the cards we got there were pictures of snowy spruce trees and happy sledgers. It makes me feel like crying!

But then a miracle happened. And on the first Monday after the winter holidays! We had just copied some sums from the board when I looked through the window and saw real snowflakes falling from the sky! The kind that melt if you take your glove off and catch them in your hand. I nudged Tine who was absorbed in calculations. "Look outside," I whispered to him. Wow, how his eyes bulged! He forgot completely where we were. He yelled at the top of his voice: "Snow! Look, it's snowing!" Maths fell apart. I looked at the teacher, who was saying something, but no one could hear her. Suddenly, we were all at the window.

My dad came to get me an hour early from after school care. At home, I quickly got changed, put on some boots and ran with my brother and sister towards the woods. It was still snowing. The snow was already up to our bottoms (if we sat down, of course). "Let's make a big snowball and roll it towards home," I suggested. "Yes, let's!" shouted the other two. So we made a snowball among the trees and then started to roll it down the path. As well as snow, it contained leaves, grass, bits of

branches, pine cones, sand and animal droppings. We rolled this mixture towards our house until it became so enormous that we couldn't shift it any more. I rushed home to get dad. He was in an unusually good mood and immediately prepared to help. (He's not always like that. Sometimes he's as annoying as a dried-up marker pen.) He put his winter jacket on and hurried with me up the path. With our combined efforts, we rolled the ball into the yard. Then we found just enough snow around the house to make another two balls, which dad put one on top of the other on the giant snowball. We managed to give the snowman only one arm, as there wasn't enough snow for two.

And that's how our snowman came about. He wasn't snow white like the ones on Christmas cards, but looked like he worked down a coal mine, even though he was from real snow.

Although during the night he almost tipped over because of the temperature rising, we were very pleased when we came out in the morning to look at him. The snowman miner cheerfully winked at us with the one eye he had left; I know that he was thanking us for his short, but real life.

## LONG LIVE THE HERBARIUM!

I had a month... One month to collect plants, dry them and make a herbarium. Four Sundays, four Mondays, four Tuesdays and so on... Plenty of time, I thought. Time like flies, I said to myself. I can make eleven herbariums, not just one.

I could already see what I was going to produce, as if it was there in front of me. I could hear the words of praise and amazement; I looked at myself in the mirror and gave a modest nod; I could even see the A in my grade book. What I didn't reckon on was that four Sundays would fly past like my brother on his rollerblades going downhill...

The first Sunday we went to the hills. I rushed uphill and ran down. I overtook my brother and so I forgot about plants. I've got enough time, I told myself. On Monday I went to music school. On Tuesday it rained. On Wednesday I spent the whole afternoon doing maths homework... On Thursday, Friday and Saturday I practised my English – every day almost fifteen minutes with breaks.

The next Sunday we went to the cinema. I was excited, I didn't think about plants, which in any case don't grow in cinemas... On Monday I had music school again. Every day I rode my bike and played football... On Friday there was a terribly strong wind blowing. The book I borrowed from the library was so interesting I couldn't put it down.

The third Sunday we visited a cave. No plants there. The third week passed and the fourth Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday arrived.

"Tomorrow is the day for the herbariums," said the teacher on the Thursday. I thought I'd have a heart attack... The day for the herbariums! Had so many days really gone by?! I counted on my fingers, but I ran out of them twice. Probably the teacher had calculated correctly. How had the time gone so fast? I hadn't forgotten about the plants, I'd just had too many other things.

What was I going to do? What was I going to do?

After lunch I went into the woods. I collected some oak, beech and hornbeam branches. I also broke off some acacia branches. Then I went to the meadow. I picked a bunch of oxeye daisies, clover, flowering grasses and salsify. If anyone saw me, they'd probably think it was my birthday. In the garden I pulled up some carrots as I went past and carried everything together the house.

Mum put her hands to her head when we met on the stairs.

"I'm making a herbarium," I told her. "We have to give it in tomorrow." I was a bit nervous, because I know she doesn't like such interesting situations...

"What? Tomorrow?!" She got agitated, as I knew she would. "With a herbarium like that you can go and feed the neighbour's cattle! Plants don't dry in one night!" she said.

"Can't you iron them?" I asked.

"Don't be ridiculous! If I iron them, they'll be burnt."

I felt as if I'd been ironed and burnt. Even my mum didn't want to help me! I carried the branches, grass and vegetables into my room. I sat on the bed and thought how to save myself. To begin with, I stuck my head under the pillow so I could think more easily: your brain works better when it is warm. And when I felt warmed through I got my first idea: I could get sick, have a temperature and vomit. With my head under the pillow I really did begin to feel sick, so I went for a bucket but I couldn't throw up, I only managed a belch.

I dropped the first idea and began to look for another. It took quite a while, but I found one.

I took a large sheet of drawing paper and folded it in half. I started making a cover. I put a lot of effort in. I wrote in big letters MY HERBARIUM. I drew a wood, a meadow and a garden. And then on smaller sheets of paper I drew the branches, grass, flowers and a carrot. Each one separately. Next to them I wrote their names. For those I didn't know I looked in the book that I'd had ready all month. Then I put the small sheets in the cover, made four holes at the edge and fastened them all together with string. A bit like an exercise book.

And what did I do with the plants that I'd brought from the woods, the meadow and the garden? I fastened them together in a big bunch of branches, flowers and grass. I put the carrot in the middle, but upside down so that the orange colour livened up the bunch. I put it in the bucket I'd brought for throwing up into, added some water and took my herbarium down to the cellar.

At dinner mum asked me how I'd got on.

"It's okay," I said, and after we'd eaten I invited her to come and look. I waited to see what she would say. I looked at her and saw her frowning slightly...

I was completely calm. What I'd produced was really something special. The others had dried flowers, but I'd watered them! The others had killed them, but I'd brought them back to life!

Today is Friday and I'm walking to school in my new sandals, carrying my herbarium. Maybe whoever who saw me yesterday would think they'd got it wrong and that it was my teacher's birthday. Or that the head teacher was getting married. I'm singing a folk song from our music book: "There must be a posy, green or blue." Bees are buzzing round me and it might happen that a rabbit will appear from the long grass when it smells the vegetables. I'll shout "Long live my herbarium!" and throw it a carrot.

## I CAN'T BE BOTHERED

I'm always being ordered around: "Tidy up after yourself. Lay the table. Clear the table! Put your slippers on! Put your bag away! Make your bed!"

I'm exhausted from all these orders. Always the same ones. When I've had enough of everything, I say: "I can't be bothered!"

Then I wait to see what the reaction will be. It depends who I say it to, mum or dad. Dad goes ballistic, but mum goes quiet.

"I can't be bothered, so there!" I say again, when I'm in a particularly bad mood.

Yesterday, when I responded to every order by saying I couldn't be bothered, something strange happened. Mum and dad looked at each other and said nothing. I shut myself in my room and sulked.

After a while, I came out and asked mum to fix me a snack, because I was hungry. You know what she said? You can probably guess: "I can't be bothered," she said.

Feeling sad and lonely, I peeled a banana and went outside. Then I asked dad to get me the ball from the high shelf, because I wanted to throw baskets.

"I can't be bothered," he said and carried on with what he was doing.

Towards evening, I asked mum to help me sharpen my crayons and she said she couldn't be bothered... I was really upset and sulked as much as I could.

In the evening, without being told, I got my bag ready for the next day and tidied up my room a bit (not too much, because I was feeling down). Then I washed my hands, went to the table and waited to see if I'd get anything to eat. Mum said: "Can you get the cutlery and serviettes out?" I wanted to say "I can't be bothered," but I bit my tongue. I did what she asked me. And when she put a tasty looking pie on the table, I asked: "Will you sit with me a bit when I do my English?"

I was afraid she would say "I can't be bothered."

But she didn't! She said: "If you quickly get washed and into your pyjamas, if your room's tidy and your bag ready, then I will."

Mum didn't know that my bag was packed and my room already half tidied. I quickly put away the building blocks and tidied my desk,

got washed, put on my pyjamas and then we did English together for a while. At nine, before she turned the light off, I told her a joke that she'd already heard a hundred times, but she still laughed.

## THE FUNERAL JUMPING DISPLAY

My brother and sister have been playing funerals all day. This morning they found a dead bee and a dead butterfly. They made such a big thing out of this, you wouldn't believe. They laid the bee in a matchbox and the butterfly in a soap packet. They wrapped both coffins in gift paper. (Can you imagine? You find a box, wrapped like a present and inside is a dead insect!)

After lunch we went to the river. They put the coffins in a rucksack. They also took with them a little rake and spade. When we got to the water, they quickly changed into their swimming costumes. They didn't even waste any time going in the water, but immediately started digging graves in the sand.

Of course, I did other things. When we got the river I was so hot that I threw my clothes off and went straight in the water. But my mum was watching how I got undressed and so I had to come straight back.

"Fold them nicely and put them in a pile," she says. (These heaps are a threat to my freedom! Everything has to be in neat piles! Clothes, exercise books, plates... As if piles were the whole point of life!)

"Yes, mum," I reply and come out of the water to make a neat pile. Of course, I notice that my brother and sister have also thrown their clothes on the rocks. I feel like pointing to their twisted underpants, but I think better of it. So that mum doesn't interrupt their funeral, I fold their things too.

I go back into the water. I dive in head first. I splash my little sister, who is playing by the water. We both laugh. My brother and sister who are still digging graves turn towards us. My brother says:

"Quiet! There's a funeral taking place here."

The two of them slyly watch and giggle at what the funeral directors are doing. They put the coffins in the holes, fill them in and make a border with white stones. They also make a cross. My brother calls to me:

“Are you coming to mass?” Oh no, that as well! Oh alright, I go to mass.

“Are you coming, as well?” I ask my little sister. She’s immediately in favour. We agree that I’ll be the priest and my brother the ministrant.

We do it very quickly, because I’d like to go back in the water. My sister makes up a funeral march, but we don’t feel like singing for long.

“I’m going in the water,” I say. “I’ve had enough of this ceremony.”

My brother and sister throw themselves into the water. Me, too. We jump in feet first, head first, dive-bomb... This is no longer a funeral, it’s a noisy jumping display, with yelling and screaming!

Even my little sister, who is just watching, is standing on the river-bank shouting and enthusiastically applauding us – but me most of all, I think.

## SCHOOL AGAIN

At the end of the holidays, mum can hardly wait for school to start. She says the holidays are too long. Once she also said that we needed fields, pastures and livestock. According to her, during the holidays, kids should be out picking potatoes and raking hay, and no one should be lazing around the house without work to do. Of course, I don’t agree with her. .

But the first day of school finally arrived. It started. What a pain! It’s almost dark outside and we’re forced to get up. And then all that rush, a queue outside the toilet... My sister has again got water in the tooth-paste tube and it has splashed everywhere... Oh dear. It’ll be like this every day. My brother falls asleep on the toilet. I haven’t pushed him off all summer because there was never any hurry, but now I have to. We have to get to school. He’s already whining and has gone back to bed, all offended. Dad will soon sort him out!

Today I’m taking just my schoolbag and pencil case. Above all, I must not forget my bag. We’ll get about three kilos of paper from insurance companies. Every year they offer my parents money in case I have an accident! Can you imagine my mum sitting at the table studying all those tables? So much for a broken leg, if I end up in a wheelchair a bit

more and if I die a lot more! Yuck! That really makes me angry – as if money helps if anything happens to anyone. If my mum died my heart would break. And if anything happened to me, my mum and dad's hearts would break. Would money help mend them? Anyway, I'll bring all the paper home. That's why I'm taking my bag. When I get home I'll put it on the table, next to the heap from my brother and the one from my sister. And Mum will take the whole lot to be recycled. (Wouldn't it be nice if everything in the recycling bin turned back into trees?)

It's already five to eight. We're pushing and shoving in the hall. My sister, who is happy to be going into year one today, stands on my foot. By accident, so I won't do it back to her. Let her first day at school be a happy one.

We get to school at the last moment. Now I'm in year six.

We have to listen to a whole lot of rules and instructions. We get, as I've already said, a mountain of paper. Because I've nothing else to do, I decide what is for recycling and what I will read. I choose a magazine about animals, then look through all the ads, but I put them in the recycling pile because I know my parents won't buy any of that stuff. The teacher says to me: "Nace, have you been listening?"

"No," I reply. (My parents say I should never lie.)

"Great," says the teacher. "Ask the others. They can tell you what you have to bring with you tomorrow."

"Okay," I reply.

"Anyone got any questions?" asks the teacher.

I wonder what I might ask. Aha. I put my hand up.

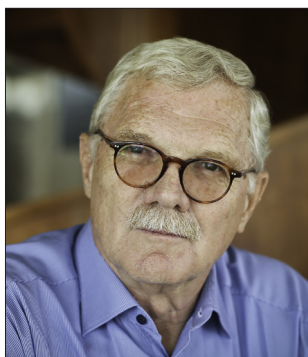
"Yes, Nace?" the teacher says to me.

"What time are we finishing?" I ask. (My parents have taught me that I should never be afraid to ask a question.)

*Translated by David Limon*







SLAVKO PREGL

---

SLAVKO PREGL (1945) graduated from the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana. He is a writer of youth literature, a teller of tales, a writer of fables, a publisher, and an editor. He has published some 50 books, mainly for children and youth; they have been translated into many languages. His creativity has earned him many awards – the Levstik, Večernica, Desetnica and Zupančič Awards in Slovenia, as well as the “Gran Prix Aleko” in Bulgaria and the “Premija Jugra” in Russia. His books have been selected three times in for the “Growing Up with a Book” project.

### About *Spričevalo* (*School Report*)

*School Report* takes place at the end of primary school and relates, in a very funny way, the tallying up of final grades, graduation, and nervousness in a family with two sons. One son has gotten himself tied up with a bunch of hooligans and, in a failed attempt at theft, has had a run-in with the police and also disappointed his friends. But his first love and common sense finally lead to good grades and a more mature exit from childhood.



*Original title: Spričevalo*  
*Published by: Mladinska knjiga,*  
*Slovenska 29, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia*  
*Illustrator: Arjan Pregl*  
*Year of publication: 2007*  
*Number of pages: 169*  
*ISBN: 978-961-01-0239-7*  
*Copyright holder: Slavko Pregl*

## SCHOOL REPORT

(excerpt)

### Chapter 1

*Lenart tosses the money to Denis. – “I knew he was a cool guy!” – A furious question: “Who you trying to mix with, idiot?” – A thin t-shirt, riding up, and worn jeans, sliding down. – “And not a word at home!”*

“We don’t take babies,” said Denis, slurping the brownish liquid in the tall glass through a straw, “get lost!”

The boys at the table sniggered. Kaja and the two other girls giggled.

“I’ve got cash,” Lenart said bravely. He wanted to obscure the fact that he was only eleven.

“Wow!” said Dren, “the kid’s got cash!”

“Yes,” said Lenart with a nod, “ten Euros.”

Everyone stopped talking and looked at Denis. He was a rather fat boy with black hair, a little shabby and a little dirty. But it was clear at first sight that he was the one who decided everything.

“Clear off,” he said wearily, “I don’t discuss anything less than fifty.”

“No problem,” said Lenart with a grin, reaching into his pocket. He pulled out a roll of banknotes. He counted out five and tossed them at Denis. He had another banknote left in his hand.

“O.K.,” Denis replied calmly. “Give me that last ten so that I can get you a drink.”

“Get one for me, too!” said Kaja. “I knew Lenart was a cool guy!”

The cool guy turned red from his nose to the little toe on his left foot and handed over the rest of his money.

“The brat doesn’t talk too much,” commented Slim. “I like that.”

The group was sitting at a long table outside a cafe in the middle of the town, whiling away one of the last Friday afternoons in the school year. Most of them were around fourteen, fifteen. School was mainly torment for them, something they were forced into by the state and their crazy parents, who had in the past read the slogan “Education, education, education!” and it now refused to leave their heads.

Matej, close to finishing compulsory education, came round the corner and spotted his younger brother Lenart at the table next to Kaja. He stopped and asked angrily:

"Who you trying to mix with, idiot?"

"Come on," said Denis. "Leave him be, he's one of us. He paid."

"When and who for?" snapped Matej.

"Me. Just now. Fairly and squarely. That count's for something nowadays," explained Denis, rubbing the pocket on his t-shirt that was showing a pleasant fullness, with some banknote corners protruding.

"You've gone mad," said Matej angrily and spat.

Lenart looked at him with slight unease and slight conceit. He quickly took a sip from Kaja's glass.

"Here's a drink for you, sit down Matej," said Denis, pulling up an empty chair. "We'll start now. Dren, what do we have today?"

Dren was a tall, thin, dark-haired boy from the vocational school. He did a lot of sports and instead of normal flesh he had muscles knotted around his bones. He kicked a black bag out from beneath the table and unzipped it.

"There's a mobile phone," he said, pulling it out. "Top class. Look at the screen. Listen to the music. See the camera."

Lenart's eyes grew large.

"How much?" he asked.

"God, stop!" shouted Matej, jumping up. "What're you doing? You've dragged the brat into this now?"

Denis took two very long drags and then mumbled, narrowing his eyes:

"Calm down, man. The brat has paid and is one of us now. He has priority today."

Matej took a deep breath, gritting his teeth:

"This brat will come home eventually. I'll make him a priority. A real priority!"

Lenart flinched.

"I was only asking, I'm not really interested," he said.

"There's a ghetto blaster," Dren said, reaching into the bag again. "Fifty horsepower loudspeakers. Knock you off your chair, man."

"What about chains?" interrupted Slim. "You've been promising for three weeks."

"I get what I promise!" said Dren, throwing a large knot of silvery

sparkling chains onto the table. "Real fancy!"

Everyone leapt forward and began untangling the chains. Lenart was the quickest. He put one round his neck and went to look at himself in the window of a hairdressing salon.

"Yes," said Kaja, "that could work. Now Gogo has to make a letter. A nice L for you, Lenart. A really cool guy has to have a chain and his letter."

"Yeah," said Lenart with a nod, "with a nice L."

"What about that bicycle?" asked Matej, turning to Denis. "You said you'd sort it."

Denis took another two puffs.

"Don't panic. Shift your arse and look at the bike stand. Do you see something wild and red?" he said triumphantly.

In the concrete rack there was a red bicycle with a million gears, mega springs and impressive brakes.

"Will that do?" asked Denis, reaching out. He opened his hand and rubbed his index finger against his thumb. Yours for eighty Euros."

Matej went over to the bicycle, lifted it and weighed it up, sat on it and tried the brakes, jumped up with it once or twice and then exhaled loudly twice.

"Yeah!" he said. "This'll do!"

He got off and put the bicycle back in the stand. He glanced at Lenart and said to Denis:

"I'll take the lot. The bike, the ghetto blaster and the mobile. I'll give you my old mobile and pay the rest in cash. What do you say? I can add a basketball."

Denis did some calculations. Slim and Dren watched him silently. In front of the class, Denis would be doing similar calculations until the teacher had a nervous breakdown. Now he immediately said:

"Thirty, minus two for the old mobile, and I'll add a chain as a gift for the brat. Deal?"

Matej nodded. He turned to Lenart.

"Did you hear? You've just bought a chain for 28 Euros and got a few presents for your older brother. Well, thanks, you shouldn't have."

"Lenart, you rule," said Kaja, clapping. "You're so cool."

What can I do, thought Lenart, if I'm a babe magnet?

The fact that Kaja was about five years older, didn't bother him at all. What really mattered was that she was tall and blonde and considerably better looking than Tina and Ana, who chewed constantly and pretended they didn't care about it. His conceited view of girls was momentarily clouded by the fact that Matej had just concluded a deal, using his money.

"Lenart!" said Denis, holding up his hand. "Come here!"

Lenart came over and they did a high-five.

"You're one of us now," said Denis. "That's a fact. If anyone doesn't like it, send them to me."

"OK, man," said Lenart with a grin. In his head he was already acting out all the shows he would put on in the school corridor.

They spent a little longer rocking on their chairs, talking about this and that. Then Denis called the girl who was serving and asked for the bill. Between the thin t-shirt that was riding up and her well worn jeans that were riding down, appeared her belly button with a metal stud in it.

"What are you staring at?" she asked Denis sharply. "The bill is on the table, not in my pants."

"Sorry," said the round table boss. "My thoughts strayed a bit and I don't know what I'm looking at."

Then he turned slowly to his companions.

"I'm thinking," he said, "we'll have to get down to some work. No work, no dosh. My pocket should never be empty."

Matej and Lenart got up. Matej got on the bicycle and put his new mobile in his pocket, while Lenart grabbed the ghetto blaster.

"I'll wait for two days," said Denis, "otherwise the deal's off."

"Understood," nodded Matej.

Lenart shuffled alongside him towards home.

"You'll lend me the money. I'm skint right now," said Matej.

Lenart tried to object.

"If you're with us, act like one of us," Matej stopped him. "And not a word at home!"

"Obviously," said Lenart smugly. "obviously!"

When they got home, mum met them at the door.

"Does anyone want to eat anything?" she asked, looking worried.

"Yes," said Matej. "Spaghetti with tuna. And lots of it."

Mum didn't notice that her first-born was riding a new red bicycle and that her second-born was staggering under the weight of a huge ghetto blaster.

"Get everything ready for school," she said and rushed into the kitchen.

## Chapter 2

Why something fails to have a calming effect. – How a distraught mother crushes all hope. – Who does the form teacher rapidly approach? – The problem with common sense? – What the brat has no idea about.

Mrs Marija Pirc was staggering up the stairs to a door behind which her unsuspecting husband, Mr Stane Pirc, was sitting at his computer. His colleagues had just toddled off for a coffee.

"Disaster!" exclaimed Mrs Pirc.

With one hand she firmly shut the door behind her. This was supposed to ensure that not a single sentence would escape the insurance company office. With her other hand she wiped her perspiring brow, at the same time pushing away the reddish brown curl that clung to her face.

Mr Pirc, an insurance agent dealing with car claims, lifted his eyes from the papers in front of him to his wife and bravely said:

"Come on, sit down, it'll all be alright."

Such a calming sentence would make sense in a normal situation. But it soon transpired that this situation was not normal. Which is why it failed to have a calming effect.

"Disaster!" Mrs Pirc repeated and sat on the chair at the other side of the desk.

Mr Pirc had only a few seconds to think that his wife was being affected by the unbearable summer heat that had been hanging over the town for days. Everyone was turning off their televisions in the evening furious that the weather forecaster with the frozen smile had announced that the warm weather, too warm for the time of year, would continue and there would be no rain.

"Lenart!" With this the distraught mother crushed all his hopes. "Le-



nart has gone completely off the rails. I've just been at the school. In the past week he got three fail grades in a row!"

Mr Pirc became a surprised father with wide open eyes.

"Lenart?" he asked, as if he couldn't believe his ears. "Lenart?"

The school year was approaching its end. Matej was just finishing his final year of primary school and there was a lot of tension in the air over whether he would be able to go to the secondary school of his choice. He had achieved exceptionally good test results and was placed among the three percent of those with the sharpest brains. Otherwise, he was as lazy as all sloths since prehistoric times until today. He paid no attention to minor details like grades. But those minor details were what the school authorities had chosen as the criteria that would or would not open doors for the boy's continuing education and at which school. Mrs Pirc had worn out her tongue and nerves trying to explain this to her son. He just ignored it all and only wanted to know why she was nagging him.

The younger Lenart stayed out of all these battles. He said that everything at school was fine and that he was getting nothing but good grades. He had already begun diplomatic negotiations with his grandmother about the presents he could expect after successfully completing year five. The list was varied and very long, and adorned with bright examples of grandmothers and grandchildren from near and far.

And today Mrs Pirc had gone to sign some papers in connection with Matej's enrolment in secondary school. Suspecting nothing bad, she walked along the school corridor towards the school psychologist's office. In her head she was looking for the right way to confirm that yes, Matej was lazy. But he was bright, just not taking things seriously enough, and it would be a shame to impose a punishment on him with such serious consequences straight away. He should instead be given an opportunity to channel his talents in a brand new environment.

She was still perfecting what she would say when she was stopped by someone calling:

"Mrs Pirc! Mrs Pirc!"

Mrs Pirc stopped and looked back. Her younger son's form teacher was rushing towards her.

"Mrs Pirc!" said Lenart's teacher again as a way of greeting. "You've finally come!"

Lenart's mother inhaled and asked in agitation:

"Where have I finally come?"

"For two weeks," said the teacher firmly, "I've been asking Lenart to tell you to come to school. Several times I've called your home and Lenart always answered and promised he'd tell you. Are you really so busy that you don't have time to come even when explicitly requested?"

Darkness came over Lenart's mother's eyes. Not have time for her son's school?

"I know nothing about this," she said, barely able to keep calm.

And then it all came out.

For the past month, Lenart had been acting like a tourist who had accidentally strayed into the classroom. All he wanted was to have fun. He didn't do any work and his notes resembled scattered salad leaves in a hen house. He had received three negative grades. He spent all the time chatting and threatening his class mates with beating, flattening and hammering for the slightest little thing. Everyone was wondering what was wrong with him.

They may have been wondering. But not quite as much as Lenart's mother was doing now.

She was trying to catch her breath, staggering along the corridor. Sweat was pouring out of every pore in her body.

"Lenart...", she sobbed. "Lenart ..."

The form teacher didn't need to ask her whether she knew anything about this. It was quite clear that she didn't.

"So," the teacher said, "he hasn't told you I've been trying to reach you?"

Lenart's mother shook her head. After her breathing and heart rate had calmed down, they sat on a bench and slowly put together a plan of how they would make the brat climb over the obstacles to the final positive grades. When the form teacher had gone, Lenart's mother spent some time leaning against the corridor wall, trying to reconnect her nerve endings. All this meant she had missed the morning office hours the school psychologist had set for parents.

Lenart's story had caught up with her before she could end Matej's. She swiftly went to see Mr Pirc. The more she thought about it, the clearer it became that Lenart's story may turn into a true tragedy, if not worse.

As she was rushing along the town streets, three forms of heating were turned on full: the sun was roasting from above, the asphalt from below and in-between there was the combustion inside the distraught mother. Almost too much for any human being.

So now, in Mr Pirc's office, there were two of them dealing with it.

"Damn!" said father Pirc. He got up and began pacing up and down his office. But all this movement didn't calm things down at all.

"And where's the little devil now?" he asked, pausing for a moment.

"At home!" explained Mrs Pirc. "I stopped him going to his sports practice and told him which maths exercises to do by the time I come back."

"Aha," mumbled Mr Pirc. "Right."

Mr Pirc believed in trust and common sense. His approach to his two sons was: let's trust them. The next part of his trust was: common sense will tell them not to do anything stupid. But there was a minor flaw in this approach. Common sense kept telling their sons many things. The problem was that the boys usually ignored it.

"Aha!" repeated Mr Pirc.

He remembered that in the morning, on his way to work, he'd run into the mother of Lenart's school friend Vlado. She told him anxiously that she was very worried whether Vlado would manage to turn his negative grade in English into a positive one. This latest grade was on top of another negative grade the previous week. And so the night before, the unhappy mother and the correspondingly unhappy son had spent the whole night revising irregular verbs and everything else from his English lessons backwards and forwards.

Poor thing, father Pirc thought as they parted.

Little did he know that very soon he would give Vlado's mother the opportunity to say something similar about him.

"Well," said Mr Pirc out loud, gently bending over his wife, "we'll come down on him hard and pull him through. And for next school year, we'll give him a home timetable. He'll work until there are sparks flying!"

Lenart had no idea about the imminent threat. He was lying on the rug in the living room, playing with his grey cat. Before this, the cat had rubbed himself against his legs until Lenart, in spite of his mother's prohibition, reached into the fridge, pulled out a bag of cat food and shook its contents into the cat's plate on the floor. Now the cat was full. It lay

on the floor next to Lenart and licked his ear. Lenart was in heaven and felt like the lord of the cats.

A key rattled in the door. Mrs Pirc's hands were full of shopping. On her way home she had bought everything she needed for lunch. The delay by the door was long enough for Lenart to jump up, sit at the table, open his maths book and lean his head on his hand. He created a very convincing impression that he had spent the whole day buried in maths, while the rest of the world was out in the sunshine, playing basketball or on bicycles, jumping on and off the pavement.

"Well," shouted mother, "have you been good, Lenart?"

Every kid, let alone Lenart, answers a question like that loud and clear: "Yes, mum!"

Luckily, she didn't have time to check the truthfulness of his words. Lenart noticed this and quickly asked:

"Can I go and ride my bike for a bit now? I can do maths after lunch again."

Mum didn't show any great enthusiasm for letting him go out. So he put on an offended, irritated voice as he said:

"Everyone else met up in the park straight after school. They're riding up and down the hill on their bikes. I'm the only one not there. I'll be back by lunch."

Mum had a slight headache. If she continued this tense conversation with her son, the headache would definitely not go away.

"All the others didn't get loaded down with negative grades in the last week of school," she managed to say coldly. Then she said slightly more warmly:

"Show me what you've done so far."

"I've just closed my book and notebook and tidied them nicely into my school bag, like you always want me to. Should I take it all out again?" said the boy cunningly. "I'll definitely be back by lunch, honestly I will!"

Mrs Pirc very clearly felt that a shower would feel much better than any kind of negotiations with her son. In this overheated atmosphere she silently nodded. Even before she had spread her shopping bags around the kitchen top, Lenart had already gone through the garden gate.

### Chapter 3

*"I don't have any money," replied Matej, "sorry." – "Why are you all filthy?" asked dad. – "Yes," said Lenart, running his hand over his spiky hair. – "Sorry," said the waiter and became serious. – "We wish you many sons," says mum.*

In the evening, life became well and truly complicated.

"We'll meet at seven instead of half past," mumbled Matej casually away from the phone. He had just been having a discussion with Timothy about the end of year dance.

"What?" exclaimed his mother from the ironing board. "In the morning you said that we're meeting at half past seven."

"Yes," replied Matej with a nod, "I was wrong."

"Do you realise what you're saying?" said dad through his newly capped teeth. "We've got to leave in five minutes?"

"Yes," said Matej, "sorry."

"Lenart isn't even home yet," said mum with a temporarily broken voice and then exclaimed with full force again: "Matej, call him!"

Then she rushed to the bathroom.

The family had spent the whole week slowly getting ready for Matej's prom. The preparations were being carried out at a suitably nervous tempo. All the important finishing touches were to take place in the last thirty minutes before departure. Now those thirty minutes were suddenly gone, but all the necessary tasks remained.

"Don't call from the stationary phone to a mobile! How many times do I have to tell you?" the father hissed as he hastily cleaned his shoes.

"I don't have any money on my card," Matej replied calmly as he continued to dial the number. "Sorry."

At that moment, the doorbell rang loudly. Lenart came in, he had only rung the bell out of habit. His sweaty t-shirt was stuck to his chest and back, his hair to the top of his head and his legs were nice and black below the knees. In his pocket, his mobile phone was ringing.

"Where's mum?" he asked innocently.

"Leave her be, just have a wash and get dressed, we're leaving in three minutes," said dad quickly.

“Where?”

“To the dance, idiot!” explained Matej, who’d put the phone down. He walked up and down the living room in his underpants, looking for his trousers.

“Why are you all filthy?” dad asked Lenart. “Don’t you know we’re going to the dance?”

“Yes,” said Lenart uncertainly, looking at him in surprise, “the chain on mum’s bike fell off and I had to put it back on.”

Dad didn’t want to go into the issue of why the chain on mum’s bike always fell off when Lenart borrowed it. He just added in a very low voice:

“Get washed and dressed. Now. We’re leaving in three minutes.”

Matej went to the bathroom and banged on the door.

“Mum!” he shouted. “Where are my trousers?”

“Look in your wardrobe, where trousers are supposed to be,” came mum’s voice through the closed door.

Dad was simultaneously shaving, changing his shirt, tying his tie and begging himself to keep his cool as he would probably need it. He needed it straight away. Lenart appeared in his underpants, looking for his trousers.

“They’re on the ironing board,” said dad, seeing them there quite by chance.

Matej went to the bathroom and banged on the door again.

“Mum!” he shouted, “where are my trainers?”

“Look in the shoe cupboard!” came through the closed door., which then opened and mum appeared. She was slightly flushed. Her hair was bewitched into a new, fresh hairdo.

“Ooooooh,” said dad in astonishment, but mum didn’t have time to receive compliments.

“Lenart!” she shouted. “Have you combed your hair?”

“Yes,” said Lenart, running his hand over his spiky head.

“Lenart!” shouted mum. “Did you wash your hands?”

Lenart turned his hands over and they were black from the bicycle chain. He replied slightly surprised and uncertain:

“Not yet.”

“Let’s go!” announced dad as he put on his shoes in the hall. Matej

stood next to him. Cologne was running in streams down his hair. The streams were combining into a river that ran down his neck.

“Damn it, son,” moaned the male half of the parents, “you’re going to suffocate us.”

Then mum, dad, Matej and Lenart rushed in a light trot towards the car and jumped in.

“Put your foot down,” Matej told his dad.

“Don’t be silly,” dad said to Matej and put his foot down.

Driving through the town, they found that the red traffic light always came on automatically when their car approached within fifty metres.

“Have you got the tickets?” dad asked mum as humbly as he could, while they sat waiting for the green light at one of the many junctions.

“Didn’t you bring them?” said mum as humbly as possible after she had taken a few deep breaths during two waits at a red light. “I put them out in the living room.”

Now dad began to breathe deeply. The hot evening of the approaching summer still offered the odd breeze that provided some relief.

“I’ve got the tickets,” said Matej from the back seat and tossed them into mum’s lap.

They arrived at the hall where the event was to take place. A few groups of boys and girls stood in front of the entrance. Dad looked at his watch.

“Didn’t you say seven?” he asked Matej.

“Yes,” replied Matej. “We get together at seven. You parents come at half past.”

He got out of the car and joined one of the groups. Lenart trotted after him. Mum and dad exchanged astonished looks.

“I’ll buy you a coffee,” said dad.

“I think I’ll need more than that,” said mum, putting her head on his shoulder.

Dad parked the car. Then they walked to a cafe across the road and ordered a drink. A tall boy with black hair, whose downy moustache had not yet been blown away by the draught, brought them a tray with two coffees and two glasses of wine and said with a grin:

“A hundred and eight Euros fifty.”

“Don’t,” said dad, “we’ve just brought our son to his final-year dance

and our nerves are rather frayed.”

“Sorry,” said the waiter and became serious. “In that case it’s only eight fifty.”

“That’s more like it,” said dad, giving him a ten Euro note.

“Enjoy!” said the waiter.

“We wish you many sons,” said mum, when after the first sip her eyes came to life again.

*Translated by David Limon*







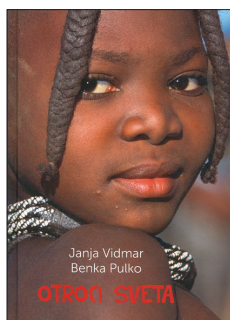
JANJA VIDMAR

---

JANJA VIDMAR (1962) graduated in Slovenian Language, Literature and Pedagogy from the University of Maribor. She is the author of over 50 books, many screenplays, plays, radio plays, as well as essays and articles. For her work she has received many national and international awards, among them: the Večernica Award (1998 and 2008) and the Desetnica Award (2006 and 2013); she has made the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Honour List (2010), while also winning the “Glazerjeva listina” (Glazer Award, 2007), the Medaglia d’oro (1999), and the “Zlata paličica” (Golden Stick, 2010). Twice she has been nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, in 2013 and 2014.

### About *Otroci sveta* (*Children of the World*)

*Children of the World* is a social reading journey to faraway peoples, traditions and lives lived in the most varied corners of the world. This collection of stories unites the pen of author Janja Vidmar and the eye of photographer Benko Pulko. The stories bring to life portraits of children captured by the lens on many wanderings around the world. By reading *Children of the World*, young readers can visit their peers on five continents. They can travel, stop at various stops of prejudices and board the train of composition of multiculturalism, diversity, racial closeness and compassion.



*Original title: Otroci sveta*  
*Published by: Undara Studio, Jakčeva 39,*  
*1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia*  
*Photo: Benka Pulko*  
*Year of publication: 2013*  
*Number of pages: 135*  
*ISBN: 978-961-91149-7-1*  
*Copyright holder: Janja Vidmar in*  
*Benka Pulko*

## CHILDREN OF THE WORLD

(excerpt)

### THE CHILDREN WHO PLANTED WORDS

*Cambodia*

In the Cambodian province of Pursat, the Jaroni district had developed a bad reputation as an area where people did not speak. The ravages of nature and poverty had turned the souls of the Jaronians to ashes. In place of a heart, they carried an urn in their chest. The wrath of typhoons had blown the future out of their eyes. Typhoons came to the Jaroni district strong and fresh, gathering strength as they travelled across uninhabited plateaus. They blasted through some deserted villages and then gave it their all in the little valley. The only school spent more time under water than on dry land. The roofs were blown off the houses. Pine trees, rosewood and teak trees knocked against each other until the wind ripped them out and tore off their leaves. Even when the wind dropped, there was still turmoil in the shadows traced on the ground. But both the trees and the people always straightened up again.

After some time, co-existence between man and nature was further disrupted by the fighting on the border for one of the temples. The area around the largest temple resonated with artillery fire. Machine guns rattled and fragments of flesh and wood flew around. The Jaroni people nearly went crazy with all the noise. The trees turned into skeletons. There was as little calm between storms as there was between battles. Until one day the two sides involved in the conflict came up with the idea of declaring the truce of all truces. Then even the typhoon inexplicably laid low on the other side of the highlands.

At first, the Jaroni people pricked up their ears to hear when – instead of terns, woodpeckers and cicadas – landmines would once more begin to rumble and winds to howl. They listened so hard and for so long that they failed to hear the rustling of the leaves and the breeze rubbing against the grass. Only children's yelling got through to them. And the honeycomb of dew on the flowers. Old wounds and fears, buried deep

beneath the surface, opened up. Tears rinsed their eyes. The Jaroni people once more heard the light, the birds, ants and stardust. But once they became accustomed to the silence, they became greedy for it. They decided to keep their newly found treasure through their own silence. They laid it across the district like a glass bell and declared a Buddhist peace. A voiceless life was ordered. The only exceptions were the village chief and the teacher at the school.

Parents continued to tie ropes around children and fasten them to themselves with clasps. Just in case winds or grenade fragments should come again. Children were thus constantly close at their parents' heels, but at the same time separated by an impenetrable desert of silence.

Three school children, Munny, Phirun and Chantou, were too big for ropes and too small for silence. After school, they liked to hang out on the platform behind the school.

"Not speaking isn't the same as silence, it's worse," whispered Munny while they were doing their homework on the ground. The teacher had told them to find as many opposites as possible.

"Night and day," said Chantou with a shrug. A few scattered sheets of paper lay around her.

"Someone loves us and invented night so that we can sleep."

"Shh, quieter!" hissed Phirun. "The one who invented the night did it so that at least in the dark, he wouldn't have to look at people."

"Words and silence," said Munny carefully. He felt a tension in his throat. He hated whispering, he was at an age when he wanted to shout out loud.

"Which would you choose?" Chantou asked quietly. She was very pretty, but who would tell her so in a land of silence? She bent her arms a little and circled her wrists. After school, she had to carry dozens of bagfuls of sand, together with the others. The copious monsoon rains and floods were coming. Chantou felt as if she had a hot coal in her spine. She made noise among the adults who moved almost noiselessly, as if under water.

They communicated with nods and when it could not be avoided, with barely pronounced syllables. Chantou forgot herself once and coughed half out loud. Her voice struck the wall of petrified, impenetrable faces. She cleared her throat so that she could retain for as long as

possible the hoarse, fresh feeling of being alive.

"Noise and silence," whispered Phirun. "I prefer noise."

“Do you think there’s a lot of noise in the world?” asked Munny.

Chantou nodded. "If we lived surrounded by noise, we'd try everything to shake it off."

"Like our parents, you mean?" said Phirun.

“No, not words. Voice and silence,” quietly added Munny.

"I prefer voice. So I could sing."

Chantou leaned close to his ear: "I wish you'd call my name."

“But you’re here!” said Munny with a frown. Phirun nudged him to lower his voice.

"I'd like so much for someone to say my name out loud," said Chantou, blushing.

“Shhh!” Munny berated her. Chantou sighed. It got on her nerves when they tried to control each other. When they imitated grown-ups instead of bursting with life.

"I don't know why they even gave birth to us if they behave like we're not here," hissed Phirun.

He threw his pencil into the plastic dish in which they kept their writing utensils.

“But they’d be even poorer without us!” Chantou said quietly. “We’re their greatest treasure.”

“Shhhh!”

"I can't stand it," said Munny, putting down his pencil. "I'll have to shout or I'll explode!"

Chantou sprang up and put her hand over his mouth.

“Write it down!” she whispered. “Write what you’d like to shout ...”

“Shout inside,” Phirun encouraged him. “Every evening, I do this …” He puffed himself up and held his breath. His stomach bulged and his face became red with effort. An internal scream takes much more of your strength.

Munny followed their advice. Out of breath, he wrote down:

AA  
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA, which in the Cambodian alphabet  
looks like this:

He felt better. He felt as if he had screamed out loud, but in some

other part of his body rather than his throat. Suddenly, he had an idea how to speak in silence.

"Come on, let's write down everything we want to say," he said to his friends conspiratorially, pointing at the paper.

Chantou shifted in excitement.

"You think so?" she asked in a croaky voice. Munny nodded.

"Let's tear up the sheets of paper into messages," said Pharun with enthusiasm.

"And let's draw pictures," suggested Chantou.

"Let's write our thoughts and bury them," Munny whispered grandly.

"Let's hide them in tree cavities," proposed Chantou. They thought for a bit. Then a smile appeared briefly on their faces. Phirun put his hands together, deep in thought. They would create a wonderful surprise. How had none of the adults thought of this?

"I like it," he said out loud. "We'll make sure that words don't die. Whoever finds one of our messages, will read it."

"Shhh!" Munny and Chantou reminded him. They covered their mouths with their hands and burst out laughing silently. After a while, Munny looked pensively into the distance.

"Have you noticed that there are two kinds of words," he mumbled. "With one kind, you just open your mouth and out they burst. The other kind depends on your heart. They steal your attention and thoughts. Sometimes you're unable to utter them, you can only write them down, but they still sound as if you'd said them."

"Nicely put, Munny," Chantou commented gently.

They looked at each other and their eyes reflected a story that is difficult to put on paper.

"Don't go all soft on me," Phirun grumbled.

"We must keep our heads clear now."

The next few days they were very busy. At first, they had to act secretly. They tore sheets of paper out of their notebooks and discarded the covers. They folded each sheet several times and then tore it up into smaller pieces. On these, they wrote all sorts of things: their names, opposites, poems, famous quotations from their reading book and hidden messages for those who didn't want to hear them. They folded the bits of paper several times and buried them in the soil. They put some into tree cavi-

ties, between branches and under bushes. They planted the most precious pieces of paper outside their houses, like seeds. Their families and neighbours were busy with their errands. Their footsteps loosened, stamped and turned the soil beneath which the words multiplied and matured. People got up, drove the cattle, weaved baskets, worked in the fields, went to town, plucked chickens and cooked, without having any idea that beneath their feet words were combining into sentences. That beneath the surface of the earth, another story was growing, parallel to their own.

Munny, Phurin and Chantou kept ceaselessly planting. The gaps of silence between noises had to be filled. The silence of the adults had to be filled with realisation of how the life they had missed carried on. Munny, Phurin and Chantou were worn out, but each day brought with it something that needed to be put into words. And so they simply continued.

One day, the sky once more took on the colour of a plum. The air was heavy and thick, not even the slightest breeze stirred. Sweat poured from people's faces. An invisible vacuum sucked up the air, an otherworldly deaf silence lay above the trees. Everything became still. Then came the wind, the tree tops whistled sharply, a deafening howl could be heard. Leaves, branches, clothes, stones, shards, sticks, hoes, bags, the vegetable stall, bits of fences and tools all twirled in the air. There were loud cracks one after another and a number of trees broke in two. Dirty, slimy, brownish water came rushing in, taking with it carts, wood, cattle, crockery, buckets and other meagre possessions. The loosened mud spewed out the scraps of paper and they floated to the surface. The wind blew the scraps of paper from the bushes and tree trunks and whirled them in the air. People were fleeing their homes and shouting the names of their loved ones.

"Chaaaaaaaaaantouuuuuuuuu!" yelled Munny as loud as he could. The rushing water was pulling his legs from under him. If he fell, his shouts would turn into bubbles beneath the water. And the world would once more be dumb.

"Muuuuuuuunny!" shouted Phurin while saving his dog.

"Phuuuuuuuuuuuriiiiiiiiiiiiin!" Chantou shouted at the top of her voice. She was carrying her little sister in her arms. A tyre floated past them on which sat a boy, catching the bits of paper falling from the sky. The bits of paper were dancing around people, landing for a mo-



ment on rooftops and then blowing into the sky again. Like white petals they poured over an old man, carried motionless by the water. Shouts, laments, screams and requests, together with the written messages, undulated and disturbed the surface of silence.

Towards evening, the wind ran out of breath. The night wove a carpet of silence again. In the morning, water still persisted in places. The exhausted, dirty, wounded people made their way through the mud and silt. On their shoulders were the poles from which hung the wooden coffins of the flood victims. The crumpled, decaying bits of paper on which it was still possible to read thoughts about the beauty, love, happiness and grace of this world stuck to their soaked clothes.

## FORGIVE ME

### *Pakistan*

Behind the fence the colour of white coffee there opened up a yard with a garage. On the other side was a wooden bench with cushions. A garden hose ran through the kitchen wall. By the sink stood a bed and above it washing was drying on a line. The door made of horizontal logs finished in a gable the shape of a right-angled triangle with decorative latticework.

Malik spent his evenings in the doorway. He pressed his cheek to the warm wood, absorbing the silence. After his *Abbu's* death, the door between the yard and the pantry became a passage between two worlds. Sometimes he could see *Abbu*, his father, in the open doorway. But in truth, the door was always closed. After a while, he poured the voices from his memory to the other side of the door. The previously unconnected sounds, individual syllables, muted murmuring. Then he peered through the keyhole. He filled the empty room with the images that rose before his eyes. His beloved *Abbu*. Hussein, father's old uncle. Malik's *Bhai*, his brother, Bahhaar. Uncle Noor. Mother's brother, Hanim Abd Rabuu. The neighbours. The members of his tribe. A multitude of *topis*, traditional caps, in different colours. Sitting on the cushions. Getting up in excitement, waving their arms. Within the whitewashed walls they raised their voices threateningly. But they all united when

Malik's *Baji*, his sister Faiza, refused to marry the leader of the Islamic seminary. The marriage would bring great honour to the family. It is customary for a daughter to submit to her *Abbu*'s wish.

"You will do as I tell you," shouted *Abbu*.

But Faiza remained steadfast. Their *Ammi* dragged her daughter to another room to bring her to her senses, but instead the house became filled with female screaming that was not very promising.

The punishment for disobedience was stoning to death.

*Ammi* was pressing her hands to her chest. Malik thought her heart would break from the pain and begin oozing between her fingers.

*Abbu* refused to budge. Faiza was heading for death.

Malik hurled a few stones at his sister, too. Bahaar advised him where he should aim. Faiza was a worthless one who had tarnished Allah's name and dishonoured the family. But his sister's stoning did not remove the weight from Malik's heart. Because when he had found *Ammi* in the garden, secretly picking the poisonous oleander leaves, he had not told *Abbu*. Instead, he had closed his eyes and tried to breathe as quietly as possible to deny his presence. Nor did he say anything when *Ammi* smuggled the leaves to her daughter, who was locked in the boiler room. He had silently watched Faiza chew the leaves, together with the seeds. The bitterness in her mouth made her grimace. She put her hands into her mouth to smother her sobbing. She clung to *Ammi*, saying goodbye for the last time.

*Abbu* and Hussein put a sack over her head. They stuffed her into Hanim's car and drove her out of the town to the Kharan desert. The sand dunes rode on the waves of the wind for tens of kilometres. In the distance, stretched Hamun-i-Mashkhel with its cracked layers of clay and faded gravel.

In the blazing sunshine, Fariza collapsed from a heart attack before they managed to kill her with stones. They buried her in a shallow hollow and covered her grave with stones.

Malik stared at the heap, telling himself his sister had chosen her own destiny. Hussein spat on the stones and kicked the nearest one so that it rolled into the sand like a chewed, forgotten bone.

Malik rubbed his forehead. His eyes were stinging from the images penetrating his eyelids. Uncle Noor was on his way with important news.

After *sallah*, the morning prayer, the next day, *Abbu* said firmly:

“Chin up, son! Whatever you hear about me isn’t worth a penny.”

“But everyone says only good things about you,” said Malik. “You’re the best doctor, you save lives! You give antibiotics to the poor for free. You’re the best *Abbu* in the world. Or should I not believe that?”

*Abbu* stroked Malik’s hair and shook his head: “You’ll hear bad things tomorrow. They’ll tell you about my dark side. But Allah is merciful, he’ll help you separate the wheat from the chaff. You’ll understand.”

*Abbu*’s last words comforted Malik. He would understand one day. But for now, he was lost in fog. “Let those fight in the cause of Allah Who sell the life of this world for the hereafter...” *Abbu* recited *ayat* seventy four in the fourth *sura* of the Quran.

Malik swallowed hard and continued in a trembling voice: “To him who fighteth in the cause of Allah - whether he is slain or gets victory – soon shall We give him a reward of great value...”

“Control yourself, in the name of the merciful Allah!” *Abbu* ordered him. Then, as if regretting this, he held Malik tight and continued in a calm voice:

“Malik, remember that while there are many who are trying to extinguish in every possible way the flame of Allah’s faith and shake our belief in Prophet Muhammad, Laa Ilaha Ila Allah, none has the right to be worshipped but Allah. If anything should happen to me, you’ll be the head of the family. Be strict and just! Repeat the *ayats* about jihad, the holy war that is defensive, aimed at the Western bloodsuckers!”

*Abbu* kissed him on the forehead. Then he pushed him away and quickly went out the door. The scent of garam masala, a mixture of spices *Abbu* liked to put in his yoghurt, was all that lingered after him.

In the afternoon, Malik snuck into the yard. He was eavesdropping the conversation on the other side of the door with the decorative gable. He peeped through the keyhole and saw something that astonished him. *Abbu* put on a waistcoat and Hussein and Hanim Abd Rabuu fastened it with the straps at the sides. The waistcoat had countless pockets. Long, tubular objects with screw tops protruded from them. They were all connected by wires, leading to a box in the middle. One of them finished in a kind of trigger.

Malik stopped breathing. He jumped away from the door and bumped into Bahaar, who had sneaked up behind him. “Do you want *Abbu* to catch you?” hissed his *Bhai* and slapped him round his ears.

“He’ll beat you into a kebab.”

Malik rubbed his burning cheek.

“I’d like to know what’s happening,” he whispered.

“Have you heard of Haqqani?” Bahaar quietly asked him. Malik shook his head cautiously.

“Better for you that way,” Bahaar gently shoved him in the chest and left.

Malik had a premonition. Haqqani. He remembered the mysterious strangers. The angry voices. The subdued murmuring in the middle of the night. The answer came to him when in the corner attic room he found his *Ammi* inconsolable. She was peeling off layer after layer of the endless emptiness left by the loss of her daughter. Upon seeing Malik, she started and put her hand to her chest.

“You frightened me.”

“*Ammi*, what is Haqqani?”

Something in his look defeated her. Her face acquired strange features. Her voice toneless, she mildly, barely audibly occupied the room. Her words pushed the breath from Malik’s chest. He walked over to the window. His lips attached themselves to the glass, flattening his nose. Children ran around the street. There were clouds in the sky. Haqqani, a Taliban network. An extreme Islamic group. He couldn’t understand what *Abbu* had to do with it. He thought hard, but his thoughts climbed into paper boats and sailed down the rapids. He turned to his *Ammi*, who was standing by the door like a ghost. He wavered between the need to understand and the desire for a blind, unshakable faith in Allah, the kind that *Abbu* had. But Malik was unable to combine the two under the same roof.

“Forget it!” his mother said. “You must forget what you’ve heard!”

The next day, at midday, *Abbu* exploded in the middle of the town’s marketplace. Nine other people died with him, including two women and one child.

In the living room, *Ammi* fastened the muslin curtain behind the coffered door. *Daddi*, Malik’s grandmother, was sitting on the couch. Swaying rhythmically, she mourned her late son. On the wall hung a picture with a quote in relief from the Quran. As he looked at the saying God is Great, something shifted in Malik’s chest.

*Abbu*’s doctor’s coat hung across the chair. Someone had thrown his

cardigan with the tattered elbows over it. *Abbu* used to put it on when he visited his patients in their homes. The sight produced such pain in Malik that the saliva escaped from his mouth uncontrollably. He wiped his mouth with his sleeve. He was missing *Abbu*, oh Jahannam, hell, how he missed him! Hussain kept repeating: “The Quran, second *sura*, *ayat* two hundred and sixteen says: ‘Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not.’ Your *Abbu* sacrificed himself for the higher good! Let’s celebrate the name of Allah!”

Malik hunted down the screaming birds inside him. Obediently, he shut them in a cage. He wanted to believe in Allah. But Hussain was tarnished with someone’s blood. Whenever he was not kneeling on the *sajjāda*, the prayer mat, he had a knife stuck in his belt. As soon as he laid down the holy book, he would put a Kalashnikov over his shoulder. At night, Malik had bloody nightmares. He could not get the picture of his *Abbu* putting on the waistcoat with the explosives out of his head. Drops of sweat collected on his upper lip, while his uncle’s breath whipped his face.

“Don’t think about the dead,” Uncle Noor told him.

“What matters is the message!” And he added: “Pack the essentials. I’ll come and get you in a few days. Allah needs a solid, strong army!”

And so Malik didn’t shed a tear for his *Abbu*. They tried to persuade him that every droplet passing his eyelids would be a betrayal of his father’s heroic act. His *Abbu* had paved Allah’s way with his own blood so that Malik and Bahaar would not stray from it. And so Malik absorbed the tears, which wet the dried out layers of his insides. Externally, he was empty and dead, but inside a flood of betrayal and denial raged on.

Malik remembered Faiza. By killing her they had saved her from hell. But had they? He sighed and put a white *topi* on his head. It was time. He could already hear voices from downstairs. Uncle Noor had depicted the training camp as the last stop before paradise. Malik would start the day at four in the morning with prayers, then he would run for over ten kilometres along the dried up riverbed, swim and crawl along excavated tunnels. This would be followed by learning about weapons and special training.

“The no-goods describe us as fundamentalists, but in truth we are

liberators!” said Noor loudly. At their last meeting, he had put his hands on Malik’s shoulders and looked at him trustingly: “After you finish your training, we’ll send you abroad. Your *Abbu* would be proud of you!”

“But I was proud of my *Abbu* when he was saving lives, not taking them,” blurted Malik.

“Shut up, dog!” shouted Uncle Noor. “Your *Abbu* has become all-powerful!”

“He hasn’t!” exclaimed Malik. “He was all-powerful, now he’s just dead!”

He evaded the hand that sprung out towards his throat. He jumped down two stairs at a time and ran into the street. The bright light nearly blinded him. He heard his *Ammi* jostling with his Uncle.

“Run, Malik! Run!” she shouted as dust fell on her.

“But...”

“Forget your family! Just run!” she shouted, blocking his Uncle’s path with her body.

Malik looked over his shoulder and continued along the street. There was sand between his teeth. His every movement was accompanied by a cloud of dust. It rose from his sleeves, the ground, his jacket and passing vehicles. He ran across the road and by the railway tracks. The train going past rattled a slow melody. As if bewitched, Malik stared at the windows reflecting the whole world outside. The movement of the train was interrupting the circuit in the wires that provided power to the light bulbs. And so the train carriages were rhythmically lit up by blinding orange lightning. Together with them flickered the bloody, butchered faces.

Malik felt as if they were looking at him accusingly. Oh, *Abbu*, what have I done! He couldn’t hear the footsteps of anyone following him, but he was running as fast as he could. He climbed a fence at the spot where there was a gap in the barbed wire. Goats and hens scattered before him. Sweat was running down his temples. Exhausted, he grabbed the edge of a stone well, gasping for air. He found himself in a small marketplace. On the other side, the nimble locals were building a channel, through which to direct water from higher lying areas.

A man wearing a *salwar kameez* – loose trousers and tunic – walked up to Malik. He offered him a bucket of water. Malik hesitated. Then he reached for the clear, cool water. He washed his face and greedily sipped

from his cupped hands. The taste of dust and the feeling of dirty, sticky skin disappeared. They were replaced by an all-encompassing silence.

"You're the doctor's son," said the man. Malik nodded carefully.

"I saw you with him in town."

Malik looked at him questioningly, at the same time somehow staring at himself.

"Why?"

"Your *Abbu* is a good man," nodded the man. Malik's face turned to stone at this. The man didn't know that the hand that had given so generously was in one single gesture able to take more than those that took in small instalments.

"He saved my son's life. He paid for the medicines himself and came every day until my son was well again. Tell him that the poverty stricken Jabbar sends his regards."

Malik's face revived. A mixture of feelings stirred with such rapidity that he felt shame, pleasure and disbelief all at once. He stared at the man carefully, at *Abbu's* messenger, Malik's saviour.

"Really?" he said.

"To a father his son's life means more than the whole of mankind," said the man.

"Really?" Malik repeated. Hope grew in his voice.

"Respect your *Abbu*! And pray for him!" said the man with a laugh, stroking his moustache. "Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Raheem!" he added. "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful!"

Malik fell on his knees and closed his eyes. He offered his face to the sand, dust, air, breath, the world. He felt a tingling on his neck. The warmth of *Abbu's* invisible hand. *Abbu's* breath brushed his face. It was like a caress. It left behind a feeling of blissful happiness.

## HOME

*Slovenia*

On Sunday mornings, Granny went to mass. Very focused, she sat in a pew, with the prayer book in her hands. She stared at the cross behind the priest in order to draw the attention of God's son to herself. She needed his help more than ever.

Meanwhile, Granddad sat on the concrete plant trough behind the church. While Granny was begging those above for Granddad's health, Granddad was busy filling his pipe with tobacco. When Granny was being given absolution in the confessional, Granddad was inhaling his fatal vice. Before Granny crossed herself on all sides of the sky, Granddad fed his lungs with smoke. Granny was terribly afraid for Granddad's health. She persistently placed it in the care of the angels, but deep in her heart she didn't trust them. Perhaps that was why Granddad's health was declining, but his heart was getting stronger.

After the mass and the pipe of peace, Granny and Granddad joined the family for Sunday lunch. Granddad wore an Alpine hat, even though there had never been any Alpine herdsman's huts on the Slovene plains. Lukec was the one made happiest by their visits.

"Lift me, lift me!" he would say, reaching up to Granddad.

"Lift you where?" replied Granddad with a grin.

"Up, up," begged Lukec.

"Not up, that's Granny's domain!" After his pipe ritual, Granddad was in a terribly good mood.

"Carry me!" said Lukec, who at that time still lacked a sense of humour, stomping his feet.

"Alright, I'll carry you. But later, you'll carry me," said Granddad. He put Lukec on his shoulders and carried him out among the horse chestnut trees behind the house. After a while, they swapped places. Lukec gave Granddad a piggyback.

"Like Martin Krpan carrying his mare!" said Granddad with a chuckle. They both laughed so much that they nearly fell into the soft leaves.

"I had no idea that you were that strong," Granddad praised Lukec. Granddad.

Lukec's face lit up. Granddad was as light as a feather on his shoulders.



They went deeper among the trees. They climbed a few metres along the slope and found themselves on the edge of a field with rows of sunflowers. The sight of hundreds of suns took their breath away.

"When I was little we used to kick a ball made of old rags in this field," said Granddad. "Sometimes we went to school, but more often we had to help at home. Then years ago they planted sunflowers here. One for each of us children."

"If we played catch among the sunflowers, we'd get lost," said Lukec. "They're all the same and we'd never find our way home again."

After a while, a bench was put in the horse chestnut plantation. After all, the concrete trough was intended for plants. But strange things began happening to Granddad. Lukec and he would sometimes still go to the horse chestnuts behind the house. But Granddad found it increasingly difficult to put Lukec on his shoulders. He kept tripping up, wheezing and coughing up phlegm. Ever more often, he would go off on his own.

Sometimes, Granny would find him on the bench beneath the trees. Even more often she had to get him from the sunflower field. Lukec went with her.

"Shall we play football?" asked Granddad.

"I'll be the goalie," Lukec offered.

"There's just the three of us," said Granny, gently berating him.

"That's not true!" Granddad stuck to his guns. "Count all the sunflowers, if you can!"

"You should be in bed," Granny said.

"We can play football with the joy pad on my computer!" Lukec tried to please them both.

"Football on a computer? How wimpish is that!" said Granddad grumpily.

"We've got to go home," repeated Granny nervously.

"I'm like a sunflower," said Granddad, wheezing. His cheeks were deathly pale. He looked at Granny and ran his hand over his forehead.

"Where am I?"

"Let's go home," said Granny.

"I don't know how," said Granddad, exhaustedly.

"The way home is the first thing a person remembers," said Lukec.

Granddad took off his Alpine hat and put it on Lukec's head. "This hat is only for hikers. Not for old men."

They went home. Granny helped Granddad into bed.

"What's wrong with Granddad?" Lukec asked Granny at the table. She said nothing for a long time. Then she replied dryly: "Something is growing in his lungs. He has difficulty breathing."

"How did that thing get into his lungs?" said Lukec.

"Often it's from smoking. And sometimes it just happens."

"But why is he so strange?"

"Sometimes he loses his mind because of the pain." She put a cup of sweet cocoa in front of Lukec.

"Is Granddad going to die?" Lukec asked.

Granny didn't reply. She was a woman of few words.

After this, Lukec most often found Granddad on the bench below the horse chestnuts. Bed finishes you off, Granddad would say, resisting Granny when she tried to drag him home. Lukec tried to carry him piggyback, as before. But Granddad had become too heavy and they could barely keep their balance. Lukec wondered how much the mind must weigh. Because in the past, Granddad had been considerably lighter, together with his mind. Lukec accompanied Granddad home and stayed with him. In church, Granny tried to get the saints to give Granddad a little more time. She no longer stared at the cross, but preferred to look inside herself.

"Can't be helped, I'm going to die," said Granddad in bed. It sounded reasonable.

"I've never seen a dead person," said Lukec. "Will I be scared of you?"

"Put some tobacco in my pipe, I'd like to smoke," Granddad said.

Together they got the pipe ready. Granddad said blissfully: "Now I can die."

His sigh came from a remote loneliness.

"How will we talk?" asked Lukec.

"You'll find me in the sunflower field."

"But what if I want to talk to you in the evening? I'm not allowed to leave the house at night."

"I'll be with you," said Granddad. That did not sound reasonable.

"How will you be with me? Even now, you can't find your way home."

But Granddad had closed his eyes.

Lukec started thinking and couldn't stop. Suddenly he came up with a solution.

"I'll be right back!" he shouted to Granddad and ran out of the house.

He drew markers on the trunks of the horse chestnuts trees. He put another on the fence of their house. And he made the last marker from cloth and fastened it to his hat. A marker shows the way. With its help, a person can return to the beginning. He smiled. Even after dying, Granddad would not get lost.

The markers would lead him to Lukec. Home.

*Translated by David Limon*

---

# CO-FINANCING PUBLICATIONS OF SLOVENIAN AUTHORS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

## **Slovenian Book Agency (JAK)**

Founded in 2009, the Slovenian Book Agency (JAK) is a government institution that deals with all actors in the book publishing chain, from authors to publishers and readers.

## **Subsidies to translators for the translation of Slovenian authors**

The main form of international promotion is the co-financing of translations from Slovenian into other languages. JAK annually publishes a call for applications for co-financing translations of Slovenian authors' books into other languages, including adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, and essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, theatrical plays and comics. Publishing houses, theatres and individual translators can apply. In each case, a contract is concluded with the translator, and therefore all funding goes directly to him or her. The subsidy covers up to 100% of the translation costs. Grants cannot be awarded retroactively.

## **Mobility grants for Slovenian authors**

The call for applications is published once a year. The applicant can be a Slovenian author who has been invited to a literary event abroad. The application must be enclosed with the invitation and the program of the event. The subsidy covers up to 100% of eligible travel expenses.

---

## Contact

Javna agencija za knjigo Republike Slovenije / Slovenian Book Agency  
Metelkova 2b, 1000 Ljubljana,

Slovenia Phone: +386 1 369 58 20

Fax: +386 1 369 58 30

Email: [gp.jakrs@jakrs.si](mailto:gp.jakrs@jakrs.si)

Webpage: <http://www.jakrs.si/en/>

## Trubar Foundation

The Trubar Foundation is a joint venture of the Slovene Writers' Association, Slovenian PEN and the Center for Slovenian Literature. The aim of the Trubar Foundation is to subsidize publications of Slovenian literature in translation.

Subsidies to publishers for the printing costs of books translated from Slovenian

Foreign publishers can apply for subsidies to publish unpublished translations of Slovenian authors in their native languages. The Trubar Foundation contributes up to 50% of printing costs. It does not subsidize translation. Priority is given to the works of living authors who are already established in Slovenia. However, the Board will take all applications for works of fiction, poetry, drama, or literary essays into account, as long as they are originally written in Slovenian. The Board consists of seven equal members, including the Presidents of the Slovene Writers' Association and Slovenian PEN. They convene at least twice a year, usually in March and October. Therefore, applications received by the end of February and the end of September will be considered.

## Contact

Društvo slovenskih pisateljev / Slovene Writers' Association  
Tomšičeva 12, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Phone: +386 1 251 41 44

Fax: +386 1 421 64 30

Email: [dsp@drustvo-dsp.si](mailto:dsp@drustvo-dsp.si)

Webpage: <http://www.drustvopisateljev.si/en/>

---

---

Milan Dekleva: Photo © osebni arhiv  
Feri Lainšček: Photo © osebni arhiv  
Nataša Konc Lorenzutti: Photo © Pavšič-Zavadlav  
Slavko Pregl: Photo © J. Suhadolnik  
Janja Vidmar: Photo © Branimir Ritonja



---

Društvo slovenskih pisateljev /  
Slovene Writers' Association,  
Tomšičeva 12, SI-1000 Ljubljana

Tel.: + 386 1 25 14 144  
[www.drustvopisateljev.si](http://www.drustvopisateljev.si)  
[dsp@drustvo-dsp.si](mailto:dsp@drustvo-dsp.si)

