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Jablan

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Twilight had come a long time ago.
On a stubble field below the village in the mountains, Lujo huddled under his coat. Only his freckled face, with large speckled eyes and locks of blond hair spilling from his forehead, stuck out. A few steps before him grazed Jablan.
Every evening in the heat of summer Lujo grazed Jablan late into the night. Watching over him like the apple of his eye. Twice a week fetching salt. Splitting his lunch with Jablan. He loved Jablan – because Jablan was the strongest bull in the entire region. Lujo was proud. He disdained the other cattle herders and their bulls. If Jablan were with him, he wouldn't fear to spend a night in the middle of a cemetery.
– Tomorrow's coming! – shuttered Lujo as if coming out of a dream. He threw off his coat, and his eyes sparkled with excitement.
He rose, went over to the bull, and began to cuddle and coo to him:
Eat well, Jablan,. Have as much as satisfies your soul, brother. Tomorrow's coming! My own, my pleasure, my dear Jablan – tomorrow's coming!
In Lujo's hoarse voice a soft entreaty trembled gently. The bull swung his tail, as was his habit, brushing Lujo's cheek lightly.
– You'd do that to me, Jablan? – he asked reproachfully. – Now I'm going to cry.
He moved away a little, to feign weeping. Jablan lifted his head.
– No, no, Jablan. I am just kidding. You did not hit me. Don't get upset about any little thing. Let's kiss and make up.
They kissed. Lujo wrapped himself in his coat and lay once again on the moist grass to dream of tomorrow.
Tomorrow his Jablan will butt against the Kaiser's bull. He had long burned with desire to see Jablan and Rudonja fight each other. He had pleaded with the village chief to grant him this wish. And the elders also had begged the village chief.
– Oh, my people, it is not so easy – it is the Kaiser's bull. But I will send a petition. If the Kaiser decrees they should fight, it is good – I will not stop it; if the Kaiser does not decree it – it will be as if nothing ever happened. Is it not so, brothers?
– So it is, chief. Only go according to orders, and do not be afraid.
The petition was submitted, and the chief received the answer: It is permitted. Tomorrow is Transfiguration Day, and the Kaiser's anniversary too. Tomorrow at the village chief's house Jablan and Rudonja will fight.
Lujo daydreams about it. One moment he sees Jablan falling, gored to death, the next moment, he sees him besting Rudonja, standing proudly on the tournament field. Lujo then hears Jablan roaring thunderously, and the hills resound. Lujo yodeled:

> Yodel le he lo, yodel le he lo
> Stronger is my dear bull
> Than your miserable cow.
> What an ugly looking cow!
> My curse upon your cowhand
> and the housewife in the kitchen
> and the milkmaid at the dairy.

– Are you cold, Jablan? – One could hear Lujo under his coat.
Jablan grazed silently and answered nothing. Lujo got up, stroked him, pulled two sheaves of oats from the stack, put them before the bull, and lay beside him. After a period of restless, semiconscious tossing, sleep came upon him. After Jablan finished his oats, he then rested next to his good comrade.
A frightening deep silence. A moist chill spread through the night. A lukewarm wind fluttered among the houses stretching in an unbroken arc along the foot of the mountain. The roofs, covered with moss, were indiscernible from the lush, green plum orchards through which they protruded. Only here and there glimmered a new roof. The village slept peacefully, sweetly, like a hardy, sturdy, rustic mountain boy when his mother has nursed him and lulled him to sleep.
The sun rose slowly behind the mountain peaks, which still rested in the clear morning twilight. All of a sudden – all the clouds glistened with iridescent light! Only far below in the shade at the foot of the mountain were the last traces of foggy blueness. Everything raised itself, awoke, everything steamed like hot blood, exuding strength and vitality.
– Oh, dawn already! – Lujo stretched, rubbed his eyes, and looked around. – Jablan, brother, why have you not wakened me?
Jablan had gotten up early, very early and grazed well. Lujo was glad to see the swelling of Jablan's flanks.
– Eh, when you have eaten thus, brother, here is something for dessert – Lujo said merrily and threw a few sheaves of oats before the bull.
Jablan ate. Toward the village chief's house they headed.
The crows were flying from the surrounding woods, lighting upon the corn, which had started to kernel. The keepers chased them away. The scarecrows on the fences fluttered near the corn. The herd was driven to pasture. There was screaming and shouting from all sides.
Lujo went thoughtfully before Jablan. Deep in thought, he did not hear the ruckus, the commotion, that was going on around him. He thought about Jablan and the contest.
Fidgeting he remembered something. He stretched out his palm and started to measure his stick.
– Jablan, will win, won't win, will win, won't win, will win, will win- yelled Lujo, and his eyes sparkled with excessive joy.
Out of sheer delight he started kissing and hugging the bull.
– , You will win, Jablan, won't you? Even though he is the Kaiser's bull. You don't care if he is, my own sweet, dear Jablan do you? Isn't that right? Say yes to your Lujo, my Jablan – he began to flatter him guilelessly.
Engrossed in conversation with Jablan, Lujo arrived at the home of the chief, where many people had gathered. It was the saint's holiday, not a working day, and so people came to chat, and like highlanders, they enjoyed watching the bulls butting.

Lujo's heart tightened when he looked upon Rudonja. He seemed horrible, gigantic, much fatter and much bigger than Jablan.
– Jablan, my brother, if today you pay with your head, do not find fault with me – sighed Lujo, cuddling the bull, and once more starting to measure the stick, hidden from the view of the people. It came out again. Jablan will win! His face brightened.
– Are you afraid, little one?
– You, my son, have nothing to fear. Your bull is an old prize fighter – an old man heartened him.
– I am not frightened at all! – Lujo said confidently.
– You will really moan, little one, when Rudonja gores your Jablan's gut – a ranger frightened him. – And moreover Jablan is a great nuisance to me.
– O, ranger, we will soon see about that! – laughed Lujo with bravado and defiance.
– People, dispense with this idle talk! Women and children to the side! – shouted the chief sternly, almost solemnly.
– Lead the bulls to this flat ground below the fence!
They were led out. Everyone circled on all sides. The bulls started to sniff each other, as if getting acquainted.
– Charge, Jablan.
– Charge, Rudonja.
The bulls roared, digging the ground with their front legs, swaying and shoving, till horn struck against horn powerfully. There were bangs, then crunches. The land crumbled, giving way under them.
Lujo trembled in fright. Every nerve within him twitched. His blue, speckled eyes bulged out unblinking . He followed each movement; each attack resounded in his beating heart. He flinched, he crouched – as if this could help Jablan. His eyes clouded. He could only see something before him, spinning, winding, giving way.
Rudonja attacked full force.
– Go under him, Jablan! – yelled Lujo now clearly beside himself.
Jablan, the old wily prize fighter, pretended to stumble on his right front leg and then caught Rudonja under the neck.
– Stop him, people, he will maul the Kaiser's bull! – cried the frightened village chief.
Underneath Rudonja's neck gushed a stream of blood. Lujo yodeled. Jablan stood on the field proudly and roared, and the mountain peaks resounded, resounded strongly.

See Thomas J. Butler, Between East and West: Three Bosnian Writer-Rebels: Kočić, Andrić, Selimović

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