

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

MIHA MAZZINI
SELECTED STORIES FROM
THE BOOK CHILDHOOD

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Miha Mazzini: selected stories from the book *Childhood* (memoirs in fictitious stories)

Blue is the Color of Freedom

Nona held the cracked egg above the boiling water and slowly began to break it open. Old age gave her fingers a constant shake that eased the egg white out of its shell. "Touch it," she said to the boy, who had to pull a chair closer and stand on it. Stretching his arm over the bubbling water that was trying to reach him, he pushed the tip of his index finger into the crack.

"What's it like?" Nona asked.

"Wet."

She nodded. "What else?"

"Sticky."

"Yes. And soft, isn't it?"

The boy nodded.

"Move your hand away."

Pushing her thumbs into the crack, she pulled the shell apart. The contents dropped into the boiling water. She laid the shell aside and picked up a ladle. The boiling water had turned the egg white. Nona scooped it up, draining it against the inner edge of the pot before turning around and slowly tipping the ladle above the table so that the egg rolled out onto the tablecloth.

"Touch it!"

His finger poked at the little heap and rolled it over. "What about now? What is it like now?"

"It's not as wet. It is solid. No longer sticky."

"It has coagulated. That is what this is called. Have you ever heard this word? It means to harden."

"At Mass, the Priest says that God can soften hardened hearts."

"Good boy. That's right."

Nona sat down with a sigh. The boy took this as permission to jump off the chair and stare at the white lump across the edge of the table.

“It is,” she pointed to the egg, “like the human heart. It is created wet, so it can cry, soft, so everything can touch it, and sticky, so it can connect with others. But if you are not careful, it hardens, just like this...”

With a circular movement she swept the egg towards the edge. She held the ladle out for the boy.

“Hit it with the handle!”

He was uncertain what to do.

“Slash it!” she indicated impatiently with her right hand.

He took pleasure in striking it from above. The solidified white fell apart and the yoke squirted across the plastic tablecloth.

“See,” Nona said, “on the inside it is still just as it was created. But it can coagulate right through, harden all the way to the core. God can only soften such a heart again in Hell. But for ones like this ...” she waved her hand dismissively in front of her, “the Lord created repentance in this life and Purgatory in the next.”

She fell silent, her chin caught in her shawl. The boy thought she had fallen asleep and wondered whether she would allow him to eat the egg.

A summer shower tapped against the balcony windows and someone ran across the yard, cursing. The water in the pot was still bubbling away and the stove continued to

send waves of heat into the tiny kitchen. Nona spoke without raising her head, “Do you now understand?”

“What?”

She peered at him, without even blinking her age-discolored eyes.

“You asked why my daughter, your mother, sometimes does the things she does.” He frowned without understanding.

“Because her heart is hardened,” Nona turned towards the table. The boy understood that he would probably not be allowed to eat the egg.

*

The boy did not want to wake up. Whenever he opened his eyes during the night he saw what he was not supposed to see, so he kept his eyelids firmly closed but didn't

dare put his hands over his ears because then Mother would know he was awake.

"I have no life," Mother hissed almost out of breath as if she had been running for a long time, "because of you! As the youngest, I am expected to look after you! So I was told by my brothers and sisters! It's easy for them, but I ... I have no life!"

He heard her pacing alongside the bed. There was a crash as she hit the edge and cried out. She almost yelled, but contained herself because of the neighbors.

The boy opened his eyelids slightly. Mother was holding Nona by the shawl, shaking her.

"I have no life! I have no life! I am trapped! Stuck here, looking after you instead of traveling and getting to see the world! It's driving me crazy! All the things I could be, the things I could do, but here I am, enslaved by you!"

Nona groaned and made a gargling sound as if she was about to vomit. Mother let go and the aged body subsided into the supporting cushion. Catching her breath, she sobbed. Mother towered over her before suddenly turning round and running into the bathroom. She switched on the light and the beam coming through the gap of the half closed door illuminated Nona's profile, nostrils flaring as she tried to catch her breath through her toothless mouth.

The plumbing made a whining sound before a strong enough jet of water came through the pipes. The boy knew that his mother was cooling off under the tap. This would destroy her hairdo, adding to her anger. The sound of running water stopped.

Mother appeared in the door as a silhouette against the light. The boy forgot to pretend he was asleep. In the moment before his mother moved he prayed she would not leap at him but at Nona. At the same time he was ripped apart by a sense of guilt over hoping he would be saved to the detriment of his own grandmother.

The bed creaked and Nona's body straightened up faster than ever before. "I'm leaving," she said, throwing the shawl across her shoulders.

"Where are you going?" Mother gaped at her.

Nona walked quite differently from her usual manner; no swaying on weak legs and

dislocated hips, as she herself would say, but a determined, solid step that the boy did not recognize and even thought that somebody else must have covered themselves in all of Nona's shawls, pretending to be her

"What is it with you? Have you gone mad?" Mother tried to stop Nona. They grabbed hold of each other and pushed each other around. The room filled with the scent of their sweat.

"I'm leaving! I've had enough! I'm leaving!" Nona kept repeating and Mother's rage had dispersed. The physical effort made her groan uncertainly and all she could do was ask in bewilderment what had happened.

Nona managed to reach the kitchen but Mother blocked the exit with her body and pulled herself together enough to push the old woman into the bathroom and lock the door.

Nona kept banging on the wooden surface, shouting,

"I am leaving!" Bang.

"I am leaving!"
Continuously.

*

Mother came to collect him from kindergarten. As they approached their apartment block she slowed down and came to a halt outside the entrance, looking up at their balcony for a long time. There did not appear to be any movement behind the windows. "She's gone mad. It's all that piety, that'll be the reason!" Mother said and was not sure what she should do.

Once inside the building she fished the key out of her handbag and gave it to the boy. "Go upstairs and stay with her. I am off to clean at somebody's house, I'll be back in the evening. Don't let her out! She is not to get out! She would cause nothing but disgrace!"

*

Nona was sitting in her usual place on the edge of her bed, though she was not, as she normally would be, holding her *Lives of the Saints* but a linen suitcase that up until then the boy had only ever seen sitting on top of the wardrobe where he had perceived it as a constituent part.

“Let me out,” she said, “I’m leaving.” “Nona, I can’t!”

The boy could not count on strength, so he avoided her by swiftness and skill. He ran lightly across the bed and jumped across to the chair whenever he needed to. Out of

breath, Nona sat back down and held onto the handle of the suitcase. “I’m leaving!”

“Nona, please, what has come over you? Mother told me to look after you. I can’t look after you outside, only in here, Nona, please!”

“I’m leaving, I’m going to Lourdes! And Compostela! I don’t want to look after you any more. There are so many holy places I’ll never see because I’m forced to look

after the bastard’s bastard. God’s punishment! Praise be to Jesus! But now the time has come for me to leave. Saint Stanislaus Kostka will look after you while I’m on the road.”

She stood up, her movements still surprisingly youthful. She carried her case to the door and waited.

“Open it, you brat! I demand you open it now!”

“Nona, I’m not allowed to! Mother said...”

“What is your mother compared to God? And God is on my side! You have no choice, do what the Lord wants you to do!”

“Nona, I can’t!!!!!”

“I see, I see, your heart is hardening. Say it, say it out loud! Hardening! Can you hear it, thump, thump, thump, shrinking with every beat!”

Without intending to, the boy repeated after her and felt a crushing numbness to the left of his chest.

“You’re committing a sin,” she said and slowly returned to her usual spot. “You’re a sinner and God will crush you like a nit. I’ve read the entire Bible to you, you’ve been well versed and know exactly how just and angry the Lord is. How many cities he destroyed, how he brought the Deluge upon Mankind, do you not sense how he is coming for you?”

In fear, the boy glanced through the window towards the sky above the neighboring apartment block.

“It’ll come as a sensation, a prickling feeling. Your hand will go numb, your body will wither. Worms will appear and start eating you alive. You’ll spend every single moment waiting for His arrival and your own death. You will not, at any hour or any day, be allowed to fall asleep like most people can. You will stay awake because you are a sinner, sinning against your own grandmother!

The Lord shall show no pity, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!”

*

Uncle Vinko came. He told Nona he was not allowed to drive his mother in the passenger seat because the truck was a company vehicle. Uncle Jule came. He said that the back of his moped was not the place for elderly mothers. Uncle Bruno just shook his head and made a gesture rotating his finger on his temple as he was leaving.

*

Even when she went to the bathroom, Nona took her suitcase with her.

*

Once, after dinner, Mother stared at her hands for a long time, then at Nona, then her hands once more, over and over again. With a clarity that seemed so normal that the boy didn’t have a chance to be surprised, he understood that she was asking herself what all the slapping and shaking ever managed to get out of Nona and how, if it were possible, could it all be pushed back.

*

Nona followed him around, telling him how he would fry in Hell, how worms would devour him, detailing all the signs of woes and illnesses the boy would instantly succumb to. He stooped more and more when he walked, staggered around, had difficulty breathing, developed tics on his face, ones that came in waves like the tide and overran his features.

He could not drop guard for a single moment. At times Nona would creep up on him

with surprising stealth, trying to grab hold of him. He could not play or daydream, he had to stay on the lookout all the time and this focus became painful. He realized that it was the most difficult thing he had ever had to do.

*

“You look terrible,” Nona said, “and do you know why? Because, inside, your heart is still soft. You’re not one of those whose heart can harden right through. People will exploit you all your life. Have you ever considered that you could become a saint?

What if we started together, with a small pilgrimage or something? What if we went to Compostela? You promised your help when I needed it!”

Her soft and gentle voice, that the boy had already become unused to, made him lean forward and slow down. She grabbed him and he had to wriggle for a long time before the key was safe.

*

Instead of learning how to read and write at kindergarten he just dozed off all the time, having spent all his attention at home. He overheard the teachers discuss whether he should be enrolled into a special education school.

*

He could no longer bear it. He wanted to get out, get away. Mother worked longer and longer hours and only came home to sleep. Nona carried her suitcase around the tiny apartment and sometimes stood at the doorway as if waiting next to a timetable at a bus stop.

He stooped because he had God on his shoulders and the strain was crushing him. Anticipation was worse than punishment; he began to hate the invisible burden upon him, the expectations of the body’s minor betrayals, the constant dread as to whether this was the first sign, whether it had begun, whether the punishment had arrived?

He wanted punishment now.

The faces of his uncles: Vinko, Bruno, Jule – the first always merry, the second

serious, the third grumpy, but none of them in expectation of the terrible punishment? Nona still kept cursing them and promising they would end up in Hell, apart from Vinko, her favorite, whom she threatened with Purgatory instead – but they all just laughed, dismissively waved their hand and left.

Why doesn't the curse affect them? How can it just glide over them? Are their hearts hardened? Is the hard layer necessary so we do not cry continuously, are not affected by everything and can also live alone?

All of a sudden the boy discovered that his heart was still not hardened enough.

*

"Uncle Vinko?" the boy caught him in the corridor outside the apartment and locked the front door before turning to the waiting man.

"Are you not at all afraid of God?"

"Nona is scaring you, is she?" Vinko nodded and smoothed his moustache as if drawing back curtains. "Yes."

The boy was on the verge of crying.

"You know," Uncle Vinko said, "my God enjoys life, why otherwise would he create it, if he hated it?"

The boy's mouth dropped open.

"Think about it," Uncle Vinko winked at him before hopping away down the stairs as if he was step dancing.

"Uncle, please, don't leave me like this!" he cried out from his heart, so that the still smiling Vinko became serious and waited at the bottom of the stairs for the boy to

come running into his embrace, to the comforting smell of cigarettes, sharp fragrance and gasoline.

"Listen boy," Vinko said. "Nona has read the entire Bible to you, hasn't she, many times over? Do you not think that through the course of the book God appears very different, that he has many faces? Nona has chosen hers, you will have to choose your own. Do you understand?"

"No," the boy shook his head, wiping away the tears.

"You are young. That is how it should be," Vinko smiled with satisfaction.

*

Not only had he not learnt a single letter at kindergarten, he was no longer capable of recognizing images he was shown. He felt his head buzzing and thumping. Was it really possible that this terrifying God who blamed Nona for all her sins was like that only towards her? What had she done that was so terrible? Was it something she had done in her youth? What did Uncle Vinko mean when he said God has many faces? Was there still hope for him if he chose a face other than the one adopted by Nona? How and when would he find out?

*

He did not want to go back home. He wanted to get away, even if it was to Purgatory.

*

Teachers had forbidden climbing the tree, but he needed the solitude. How he missed his corner between the balcony door and the bed that he could now no longer retreat to and play in! The other children and the teachers were sitting in a circle, playing a game of Drop the Handkerchief. Nobody was looking when he ran to the bushes and started climbing the tree.

*

He squeezed into the fork of the tree and switched off. Images and thoughts floated all around him, competing with each other, weightlessly and without effect. The terrible God and the curse, the yellow toy truck, Uncle Vinko, waving from the driver's seat, Nona with her suitcase, scenes of collapse and horror, engravings from the Bible. Then, all of a sudden, a focus; a nest in the branches above him. His eyes widening, he pricked up his ears. The other children were still playing, the tree was keeping his hands cool, he could feel the dampness of the bark through his trousers and smell the flowering lilac bush on the other side of the fence.

Slowly he began creeping along the branch. It became ever more wobbly, shaking, and the palms of his hand kept finding less and less space to hold onto as his heart drummed against the bark like a woodpecker.

Reaching as far as he could go, he still could not peek into the nest. He stretched out his arm and shook it. Pulled at it.

It fell and he saw it was full of eggs.

*

A single egg remained intact and it was this one that rolled out of the nest. He picked it up and put it back with the others. He could not take his eyes off the tiny contorted birds with sticky feathers and pink beaks, whose bodies throbbed as if the heart was all that was left inside them.

He picked up a stone and raised it.

He hit away, crushing eggshells and bodies, pounding and mashing all to death.

When he dropped the stone he felt a sense of relief. God would do the same to him.

He wiped the slime and blood from his hands on some fallen leaves.

He closed his eyes and stood up, head drooping. He was plucking up the courage to face the wrathful but just God.

Turning around he raised his face without opening his eyes. He wanted to hold onto the sensation of calm that filled him.

Breathing in deeply through his nostrils, he expected the sulfur that spurts from the open Gates of Hell, imagining it as the odor that lingered across his town whenever the blast furnace at the local steelworks was tapped.

Upon opening his eyes, all he could see was clear blue sky.

He stared at it for a long time, then he joined the other children. Nona's God couldn't care less about him, so he would no longer need to kill.

Maria Novak

“She will die!” Mother held her head. The vein throbbing between her index and middle finger, scarlet and ripe, like a rising river, made the boy fear that he might be left alone if it burst.

“She will die!” she ran over to the balcony window, hitting against it with her elbows.

The creaking of the glass was joined by the groans coming from inside her. She dropped her hands and looked at the boy,

“I told them she had fallen out of bed. It can’t be that bad, how high is the bed? But they ...”

Her gaze sharpened into that of a bird of prey, her chin almost narrowing into a beak. “Perhaps she got beaten there, at the emergency department? They are told to maltreat

old people so the State does not need to pay pensions and benefits!”

The boy was not sure what to say, so he nodded cautiously. His mother was no longer

looking at him; the sharpness vanished as she began dabbing her forehead with the palms of her hand, washing herself without water.

“She will die! And we haven’t even got a grave for her, or anything! Oh! Oh!” The hands stopped and moved apart. Her piercing gaze made the boy gasp.

“Where does Nona keep her money?”

He turned towards the right wardrobe door. They both knew that on the top shelf, under a pile of fustian underwear, grandma kept a plastic bag hidden.

Mother almost jumped to wardrobe and began shaking the door. The boy moved backward into the corner so as to not be in the way as she ran into the kitchen,

returned with the largest knife she could find and started picking at the lock. She panted and the metal blade resonated as it made flakes of white-varnished wood fly

across the room.

The door opened enough for Mother to grab and start shaking it until there was a loud crack and she had to catch her balance.

She opened the bag and stuck her head in it.

“It’ll do!” she said, grabbed her winter coat and slammed the door as she left.

The boy stared with horror at the hanging cupboard door and it took him a long time

to dare even approach it. On the floor he found a holy card depicting Christ on the Cross. He swiftly picked it up, held it against his chest and closed his eyes, wishing for Nona to return.

*

Mother stamped her feet outside the door to get rid of the snow and entered with a triumphant glow on her face.

“You can be proud of your mother! There were some people at the cemetery; their sister has died, she had no other relatives and I did a deal with them about the grave.

They have already signed it over to me. I think they were glad to get rid of her, I certainly wouldn’t give my dear mother away for such a price.”

She rubbed her hand, blowing out the cold from them for a long time. “I must go off to work, do not go out, wait for them at home.”

The boy was unsure of what his mother was asking of him. He sadly looked at his rubber boots and then stepped to the balcony window, observing the fern frost that framed the glass. He could hear children shrieking outside and the occasional snowball came soaring upwards in an overzealous trajectory. The factory chimneys perforated the blanket of winter smog, exhaling through their grey black mouths.

*

“Where should we put her?” the man with a moustache said clearing his throat.

“Put her down here!” Mother pointed to the gap between the bed and the wardrobe. “That won’t do, Madam,” the man shook his head, adding in a voice that allowed no objection, “We shall dismantle the bed, put the mattress in the kitchen, you’ll just have to bear it for these two days.”

*

The boy stared at the wet tracks left on the floor by their boots, slowly forming a puddle. The men in blue overalls leaned the bed frame against the balcony window, brought in a stand and some planks that they covered in black cloth, left and came back with the coffin.

They lifted it onto the bier and leaned the lid against the wall. A cross with a small branch winding round it glared from the lid. They straightened the plastic veil, placed a smaller stand at the feet and a piece of white cardboard with lettering and black ribbons stretched across its top corners. In front of that they paced a pot full of something that looked like salt. A sprig of spruce was tucked into a glass next to it. "There," the man in charge looked upon it all with satisfaction. "We'll be back the day after tomorrow." Mother nodded.

With a final greeting they left. The smell of cigarettes and beer vanished and the room was filled with a much heavier, sweetly scent, stuffy yet at the same time inviting.

The boy stepped on his tiptoes. All he could see was a black hump inside the coffin with a waxy mass on the pillow, stretching the fabric netting that covered it.

"What is this, Mother?" he asked.

"We say *Who* is this," his mother grunted. "You are old enough to speak correctly."

"Who is this, Mother?" "Maria Novak."

"Who is Maria Novak?"

She flicked him above the ear, so he cried out.

"You'll not get far in life, you are too curious. People don't like that." Nevertheless, a little later she explained,

"They wouldn't sell me just the grave."

*

The boy climbed onto the chair and could not take his eyes off Maria Novak. She appeared to be incredibly old and pale, waxy, like the candles in church. He stared intensely at the veil and her mouth to see whether she would breathe. He tried competing with Maria, holding his breath, but gave up. He was tempted to go up to her and touch her, but didn't dare. He thought Death might jump into his hand, turn him to stone. He tried to imagine laying in the dark, without breathing, alone and helpless, for all eternity, as his grandmother used to say, and thought he preferred to be in Heaven among the angels. Or even in Hell, anywhere, just not in the motionless solitude.

*

“I have taken the day off tomorrow,” Mother said. “Just pretend she is not here.”

The mattress in the kitchen was half leaning against the wall and when they tried to lie down there was barely enough space for one. The boy was thus given a folded coat on the floor and a winter jacket for a pillow.

*

“Go and play outside,” Mother said.

He ran out into the yard. Both warring sides showered him with snowballs but eventually one allowed him to join them behind the piles of snow that served them as ramparts. Though he shouted, jumped around, spat at the snowballs to get them to freeze solid, and participated in all the onslaughts, his inner thoughts were still back at the apartment. He kept looking up toward the first floor balcony, the wood leaning against the window and the darkness behind where Maria Novak lay.

*

“They will take her away tomorrow and bury her,” Mother said. “See, it wasn’t that terrible. Now everything is ready for my mother, were, God forbid, anything to

happen to her. It’s a good job Maria Novak is a short name, they charge by the letter. We will need to save up.”

They had spaghetti with an instant sauce for dinner and the boy unwittingly looked towards the door.

Mother, wiping her enamel plate clean with a piece of bread, stopped. The boy also pricked up his ears. Slow, sliding steps could be heard coming from the stairs, as if the

person approaching was unable to lift their feet the extra half an inch from the floor. They both held their breath and heard the asthmatic gasping for air.

Mother turned white and looked towards the room in panic. The boy jumped to the front door and flung it open.

“Nona!”

He snuggled up to her and had to use all his powers to reach the familiar smell through the layers of disinfectant and medicine that had settled over it.

“Oh, at least you love me,” his grandmother said and stroked his hair. “But where is

that useless daughter of mine? Having to make my own way back from hospital at my age! In this weather! The doctor was kind enough to drop me off personally, such a good Christian, a true Good Samaritan!”

She leaned on the boy as she negotiated the last couple of steps.

Mother stood at the table, her fingers pulsating as if she was breathing through them. “Admit it, you are not pleased I am still alive!” Nona said.

Mother muttered something.

Nona started making her way to her room, using the boy as crutch.

“No ... NO!” Mother finally moved.

“No what? Oh, I see, who are you hiding there? You have a man, Are you screwing around?”

“I will not allow you to speak like that in front of my child!” Mother arose. “Why then am I not allowed into the room?”

“Because...” her voice suddenly became barely audible. “... I am asking you not to.” “Hah!” Nona triumphantly opened the door and her loud breathing came to an instant halt.

“Oh!” she cried out, pushing the boy out of the way and leaping forward with unusual sprightliness.

“Maria Novak?” she read out the sign. “Who is Maria Novak?”

She noticed the broken door to her sanctuary.

“Oh! No! My funeral savings! You cow, you dared do this! Is there nothing sacred with you? You betray me with some other Maria! You go and bury her with my savings! May you roast in Hell! How could you? How? You went and got yourself a new mother, one that is already dead! Is it not enough you almost killed the first one?” All Mother did was open and close her mouth, waves of color flashing across her face. She spoke with the voice of a schoolgirl,

“I only meant well. I was buying a grave for you, Mother. And I was given her as well, her folk don’t want her.”

Nona placed her hand on the sign as if she wanted to read it with her fingers as well.

She stared at the face under the veil. “Leave me with her,” she said.

*

Mother slept and snored slightly and the boy watched Nona sitting at Maria Novak's side, praying. She steadily pushed the beads of her rosary through her fingers. the only clear words being *the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen*.

Her voice lulled him, his eyelids lowered and because the winter jacket kept getting dislodged, his head only stopped on the doorframe.

"...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen."
"Amen," said the boy, already sleeping.

*

His arm went numb, sometimes his leg, his neck hurt, he cried out a number of times and sleepily opened his eyes.

Nona was talking to Maria Novak.

"I see," she said and remained silent for a long time. "It all goes by so quickly. Men, children, life, everything. Everything. But God remains. The more everything else passes, the more God remains. In the end it is only He who is important. All the rest is wind ... dust ... nothing."

The boy was asleep again.

*

With his right hand he grabbed his left and shook it. Only with great effort did he manage to regain sensation, and with the pins and needles came pain.

"I get you, yes. I used to carry bread around the isolated mountain farmsteads. The solitude, the cold, the fear, it's all indescribable. Then you look upwards. So many stars, so much longing. I would like to see that sky once more, the sky, so much greater than me, like God is so much greater than creation.

What a sky! Imagine the rucksack full of bread, freshly baked. Smells so good, warms your back! Your stomach rumbles and you are worried it might dig its way through your back to get to the food.

The bread, right there, but not for you, and above you the sky that is for you, yet you cannot reach without God.”

She sighed deeply.

“It’s easier for men. They can leave. If they don’t leave, they are taken away. Did you have anyone you hoped would stay? Someone you looked into the eyes and said, stay, please stay?”

*

In her sleep, Mother stretched out her leg and kicked the boy. He looked up. Nona was crying.

“How sad, that after all that you had been, you are just a body that nobody wants. I can understand you. I know what that’s like. Being a nuisance to everyone, all of them waiting for you to die so they can forget you. No one to light a candle for you, no one to pay for mass and write your name on your grave. Your story, forgotten like a speck of dust.”

In his half-sleep the boy thought he could hear an unfamiliar voice answering back, but he could not make out what it was saying.

*

Mother was mixing the coffee substitute and when Nona came out of the bathroom she handed it to her meekly as if it were the greatest gift. The doorbell rang.

Mother looked at the clock, said ‘It’s too early’ soundlessly by moving her lips and apprehensively opened the door.

An elderly woman with grey hair, a black jacket and skirt said, “I have come for Maria Novak. I feel guilty.”

“Alright,” Mother said. “Will you also return any of the money?” “I will.”

“How much?” Mother’s face became slightly cunning.

“What’s going on?” Nona interrupted the haggling. “You will sell Maria? Sell her into slavery, like the early Christians? Such heathens, I cannot believe it. I won’t give you

Maria!”

She angrily pushed her daughter’s shoulder.

“For years and years I was merely a nuisance to you all. When I finally get a friend,

you start trading with her, you cow!”

Mother growled at her,

“There is no pleasing you! It’s impossible to satisfy you! I want this, I want that! Only last night, I want my money, I don’t want Maria! And today, I want Maria, I don’t

want the money! How am I supposed to follow what you want?”

“I won’t give my friend! I won’t!” Nona sobbingly shook her fist in front of her face.

“What will you do to me? Send me to hospital again?” Mother put her hands on the hips.

“Tell you one thing, you old bat, it’s about time you realize who is boss around here. You can only have one head of the family. That is me. Is that clear?”

*