

The Answer

The Way to Oz

By Mihaela Iancu

January 13, 2011

At least four months had passed since my last visit home and, although it was probably not her who missed me the most, she was the only one who would confess. She was 85 and everybody told me not to trust her whenever she nodded approvingly, they knew it for sure, since they lived in the same house. Grandma could hear almost nothing.

“Even if I speak loud and clear?”

“Even so.”

She was not aware that I buzzed her to open the door. She was sitting in the bedroom at the end of the hallway, in her untidy bed, holding the remote control in her lap and keeping her eyes closed. Her glasses, their rims loose, laid on the nightstand nearby, close to the switched off lamp and the long knitting needles. White tresses of hair emerged from under her two kerchiefs tied up in the front. She was wearing a blue, floral blouse and a brownish, linen skirt. Underneath, she had some grey, knitted socks secured with garters. As for her feet, she was wearing some wool mules, tightened up to the ankles, that she herself had made.

I opened the door ajar and stayed on the threshold for a couple of seconds, waiting. She opened her eyes and turned her head in my direction. She smiled, stretching her arms towards me.

“Oh, you came.”

“Hello”, I told her. I grasped her soft cheeks and bent for her to kiss me emphatically and repeatedly.

I asked her how she was. She shrugged.

“How are you? How is Bucharest?”

It was crowded, sometimes tiring, but I had become accustomed to it.

“Don’t you resent staying there all alone? Come visit us more often. I always ask your mother <Have you talked to her?>”

We weren’t saying anything, we were just holding hands. She had my mom’s cheeks, her eyes. I wondered how close I was to my mother, thirty years later.

She opened the door of the nightstand and showed me the inside. On the first shelf, there were the skeins of wool in several colours: violet, green, white, yellow, and another pair of metallic, silver knitting needles. On the second shelf, three pairs of mules laid folded, the bigger ones above the smaller ones.

“Look, I’m knitting a pair for each of us”, she said to me while she took them in her hands, separated them and spread them on the bed.

“This one is for your father. This is for Bebe. These”, small like her palm, “are for Alexandru. For when he drops by again.”

She looked down and smoothed out the mules with her palm. Alexander, another grandchild of hers, hadn’t come to visit her for more than half a year. She raised her look shrugged.

“He will come eventually. They will do him good.” I caressed her broad back and she said she would get out of bed.

She first touched the floor with her feet, crawled towards the edge of the bed, propped herself on the palms and hoited herself to her feet. Her body was at a straight angle. She always held her head bowed, her hands hanging still. I made room for her to pass in front of me. The ends of the skirt were swaying back and forth as she moved her weight from one foot to the other. We were walking like ants, in a rhythm which was so accurate that it had something military in it.

I told her to stop in the kitchen, but she kept on walking towards the living room, where mother and father were fighting. As they were standing in the middle of the room, at both sides of the table, they saw us walk through the door and stopped. We all sat down. Father, on one of the armchairs. Mother, on the couch. Grandma walked without looking at either of them, until she reached the side of the couch placed near the balcony. She sat down, her eyes focused on the TV broadcasting the news report. She joined her palms and stared at the screen. I stayed near the door, on the second armchair, lifting my knees to my chest.

Then they started again. Mother first. Father answered and moved the papers from their place into another and then again in their place. Mother was watching television. Yet from time to time she looked towards my father. Then father got up and went to the kitchen. From there he continued to explain to mother something that hadn't even been mentioned before. She told him "That's who you are." Clinks of glasses and mugs could be heard from the kitchen. Father must have been putting in order the vessel which had already been put in order and anything which had not been sorted was now being arranged and lined up, on several rows if necessary, anyhow, but not randomly. "I'm the one who did that as well," he added from time to time over mother's voice. He returned to the living room and went back to his armchair. Grandma watched them from time to time, for a second or two, then she looked again at the images displayed on the TV set.

Soon after that, their voices overlapped almost perfectly, and the television stood no chance in this competition. They wanted to have the last word and they could only get it if either of them laid exhausted. They both said "Leave me alone, I'm fed up with this", but at different moments. They went to separate rooms, in order to regain their strength, and then came back with injuries that were a month, a year or ten years old. I myself had heard of very few of them. All the lights in the house were on. No one would have thought about going to sleep anyway.

They were standing again, sneering at each other. Their mouths moved without resting.

"Stop that now, you give me a headache", grandma told them from her corner, almost fading away.

Mother got out of the room. Father arranged the papers once more, then wiped the imaginary dust with his hand. The next day was going to be a sunny one for us, in the south. That's what it said on television, that's what was shown on the map.

I still don't know how well grandma can hear, but you don't need ears to understand what is going on.

Translated by: **Roxana Nazălu** and **Andrei Alecsa**

MTTLC, Bucharest University

LiterNet.ro