

“When will Mum be here?” she asks quietly.

“I don’t know yet. Come on, watch the film,” replies Grandma.

The little girl obediently returns to her place. Hunched over slightly, she watches the screen. She sees a woman with red, curly hair, her face in her hands, crying, while a man hurriedly packs a suitcase and tries to fasten his tie. The woman has very long, red fingernails and she’s shaking as if she’s cold.

“It’s because she’s crying,” explains Grandma. “When someone’s sobbing, then it’s like they’re ill, they’re trembling. But you don’t need to know that yet.”

Tears come to the girl’s eyes. She goes over to the window again, the red lights in the distance flicker on and off. It reminds her of a Christmas tree with flashing fairy lights, and the moon is like the star that Mum hangs at the very top. Maybe she’s there somewhere amongst the lights and she’ll be here any minute, or maybe that one that’s flashing is her? The girl sits back down. Grandma wipes the tears from her cheeks. The woman from the film is lying in a narrow coffin, her lips painted cherry red. There is a small coffin beside her and a photo of a smiling baby in the bath. The girl looks down at her slippers and swings her legs. “My legs are like a merry-go-round,” she thinks, “they can’t stop turning.”

“It always ends this way,” says Grandma. “You wind up alone and no one even asks if you got up in the morning, or what colour you like. You’ll see one day.” [...]

“Dorotka, would you like to have black teeth like that?” she asks. “No one would want you. Right, time for bed.”

Dorotka goes over to the armchair where the dog is lying and lays her head gently on his back. Pimpek grunts and breathes heavily. His coat is still shiny, but his body isn’t as warm as it used to be. Since he’s got old, the very moment he sits down somewhere soft, he rolls onto his side and falls asleep. Dorotka lifts and kisses each of his paws. She looks around the room, the light’s already off. Shadows move across the furniture, floor and walls. She spins around to capture the dance.

“Come on, it’s time!” calls Grandma from behind the door.

She’s kneeling with her elbows on the bed, her lips moving rapidly, the occasional word audible. Dorotka kneels next to her and tries to copy her; her lips move noiselessly. [...]

The bedding smells of washing powder, it’s clean and stiff. Next to the bed, Grandma has a lamp and a magazine rack with copies of *Domestic Guide*, *House-*

wife and *You Time*. She always reads for at least half an hour before bed.

“Look, it’s Miss Poland, she was born just down the road from here, and now she’s world-famous. Would you like to be like her?”

The girl shakes her head and notices with pleasure that the woman is baring her teeth in a smile; tomorrow she plans to fill in two canines and a lower incisor. [...]

“Me, I’d like to be that famous,” she continues out of the blue. “I’d fix up the porch, because the door’s broken and there’s a draught in winter. I’d paint all the rooms and buy new shoes and a sheepskin coat. All my clothes are worn out.” Grandma grabs at her nightgown and stretches it out in front of her. “It hangs like from a corpse, don’t you think? That’s how it always hangs on the deceased, every one of them. And since I’m still alive, I want to look like I’m living.”

Excerpt translated by Kate Webster



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Poetry collections

Zimowanie, 2021

Pod wezwaniem, 2018

Sporysz, 2015

Selected awards

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(2022 – nomination, 2016, 2019 – finalist)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2022) – nomination

Adam Włodek Award (2021)

Kraków UNESCO City of Literature Prize (2020)