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....and again we slept Pindral

written by David Tišer, Líza Urbanová, Pavlína Matiová

translated by Adéla Gálová

(excerpts)

0.

Grandma: They took my three older sisters. They've told my parents they are taking them to work as sugar beet collectors, but it was a lie. Since they took the girls, my mother spent many nights awake. She just sat and chain-smoked. She kept thinking about them. She couldn't do anything else, she didn't even eat, just sobbed all the time. She knew that they took them to a concentration camp. A few months later, they took my parents there, too. They pulled them from the house to the graveyard, where there was snow. Mum couldn't even take her sweater. We stayed inside. One German yelled at me: „are you still a virgin?“ I began to cry. I feared a lot. „You're lucky I don't have time for you!“ They left and took my parents with them. They didn't even try to run because they wanted to see the girls. Mum wanted to be with them. As if she knew where they were taken. And indeed, they all met in Auschwitz. Dad got seriously ill there. The Germans knew that the Russians were close, they tried to get rid of everything. They didn't even wait for the sick to die, they were burning them alive.

Child: Your dad, too?

Grandma: My uncle, who survived the camp, saw it. Look, here are some pictures. These are my father and Uncle Lacko.

(...)

Child: And what were you doing, grannie?

Grandma: Only us three kids were left home. I was the oldest one, I was 15. What was I to do? I had to take care of everything. It was cold, we were hungry and had nothing to eat. I went from house to house and begged. I had to take care of the fire. Once we heard on the radio that there will be a shooting and that we must leave the town. So, we left our home and wandered around the forests. We only took one blanket, so we slept pindral, just like now. The winter was rough. It was freezing. Nearby there were barracks with their army kitchen. I used to beg

there. I found out that they bury the bowels of pigs and hen. It's a shame to talk about it, but I must admit, we used to go there and dig them out.

Child: You ate them raw?

Grandma: We were hungry, and it was cold. We couldn't make a fire just like that. We didn't know when we could return home. Nobody knew anything and nobody told us anything. We headed back home only around April, when the weather got better. I keep thinking back and still can't figure out how it could all happen like this. We could not even bury them ... Recently I dreamt that my mother came back home. But when she turned around, it wasn't her. It was my sister Brigita. I can't remember what my mother looked like anymore...

Grandma: Tell me everything, darling. Did you have a good time? Were they good to you? Were you not homesick? Did you earn some money?

Daughter: Yes, mum. It was a great experience. But I was really homesick, so glad to be home. How great we came right in the middle of a story! Which one was it, ma'?

Grandma: Well, you know, the girl wanted to hear about when God created men. I need to tell her over and over, she loves it. She's an original, just like you when you were a kid. And then I went on about the wandering, the war, you know, my father and the girls...the camp.

Daughter: And are you going to continue?

Grandma: What else should I say? There was no more, communism came, and everything went right.

Daughter: Oh, mother, don't start again! You know, our mum, she just loves that era – can you believe it? She likes to think back on it. Even today she votes for the communists! (Well, I know ...)

Grandma: Yes, why wouldn't I? Everyone was doing well back then. They gave us everything we needed. We lived in a panel house, we all had our own bed, no more sleeping under one blanket. But now? Look around! We have no money for single beds anymore, we have to sleep pindral once again!

(...)

1.

Grandma: But I tell you this, my girl, during communism we had a good time. You can't deny that. There was a job for everyone. And if there wasn't, they made it up! Remember, how I worked for the Škoda works? With Monika, Andula and the other women? Well, there was no work to do whatsoever, still nobody sacked us! We used to carry a blanket to the morning shift. And then it was a lottery – the one that came first went to sleep in the cubbyhole, the rest was working. And everyone was happy. And if they said the salary will come on the 10th, it was on the 10th! Look at us now - your dad works somewhere in Košice, God knows when he'll be back, and they still hadn't pay him for the previous job. This wouldn't happen under communists. They gave us everything, when you were small, everything was possible! Only the person that refused to work had to go to jail. Like our Uncle Jančo - remember? He refused to work, and he was always in prison. That's where he got all his tattoos from!

Daughter: Well, Mum, it was not only the people, but those who also wouldn't wanna work, who went to jail. It was others, too, and how unjustly! Remember our neighbour who lived across the road? The one you called „the Gadjo bookworm“? His family had a butchery - you used to go shopping there. Really nice people- if a woman with children couldn't pay right away, they would wait until she got her salary. Remember? All of a sudden, the bookworm Gadjo disappeared. The state took the butchery and they would call you „comrade“, but they wouldn't wait till you got your salary anymore!

Grandma: Oh, it wasn't so bad...

Daughter: Well, Mum, this is the truth. So many other stories like that!

“My grandma was Jewish, and with my grandpa they were both in a camp during the war. Only grandpa came back. And when he finally managed to put his farm in order and could return to normal life after the war, the communists took everything from him, and he at his old age would die as a beggar, just because he refused to join the collective farm.”

Grandma: Right, this is terrible... But Milan, you know, you at least had something. We did not have anything. It was the very first time that Gadjo treated us like a man. Suddenly we were called „comrade Horváth“.

3.

Daughter: And ma', do you remember, what happened to Marča?

Grandma: Oh yeah, that was really terrible...

Daughter: Who was Marča?

Grandma: Now listen carefully:

Social Worker: We're closed, come back next week!

Marča: But Mrs. Social Worker, it's only ten to two... I've got a certificate of employment!

Social Worker: I said we're closed! It's Friday, and the last person we accept should be here at 1pm at latest! We won't stay here till midnight only for your sake! Come next week, comrade, but mainly - be here on time!

Marča: But Mrs... I mean comrade... social worker, I have to be at work, I can't get here sooner! My work starts at six in the morning, by then you're not open.

Social Worker: This is not the right form anyway, comrade. First you need to have your request approved, and you haven't even written it down. Plus – just show me! - it has to be grammatically correct; you understand? I wouldn't accept it like this anyway.

Marča: But comrade, I dunno what to do anymore! Four years ago, I collapsed collecting potatoes. They took me to hospital unconscious and before I came to my senses, you took my kids! For four years you have been dragging them from one children's home to another. I keep bringing you documents but you still refuse to tell me where they are!

Social Worker: Comrade. you should finally realize that no one is taking your children from you. We had received numerous reports, that your kids are walking around all filthy, with their clothes shredded, and that is why they have been put in an institution to get the care and education that are proper within the socialist constitution. If you're incapable of filling the form properly, you shouldn't be surprised that we just cannot give them back to you!

Marča: But I've done everything you wanted! I've been working for three years now! I've got a nice flat, and it's still not enough! Do you even know what it's like? Do you have your own children? This is impossible – you must give me my children back! GIVE ME BACK MY CHILDREN!

Social Worker: Look, first of all, you should realize that as long as you act like this, nobody's going to give them back. So just calm down now, learn to be here on time, and have all your documents sorted. Goodbye, comrade.

4.

Daughter: And do you know when she got to see her kids finally? When they turned 18 and were released from the institution!

Grandma: Right. Poor Marča...

Daughter: And there were hundreds or even thousands of similar stories!

Grandma: You are right. How they took our kids from us was terrible. We were lucky. We were together with your dad and we both had work, so they left us alone. But you had everything!

Daughter: Well, everything... You didn't even teach us our own language, so that we would not provoke. Today even some Gadje speak Romanes, and I don't...

Grandma: What use would it be to you anyway...

Daughter: Don't you care that we forget our Romani language? Don't you care that we don't respect it anymore? Romani words hold our smiles and our tiny tears. The Romani language was given to us by the Lord himself. Don't let anyone take it away. And if our language disappears, we will be estranged from our own soul. But mum, I know how much you loved us and that you did the best you could...