



**Ksenija Kušec**

**One feather / Grandma in my Pocket / REVOLUTION**  
**(the book can be found under all three titles)**

As I climb up the stairs, it becomes clear: I am late. The bankers cleaned out my grandmother's apartment to the dust. On the front door, instead of a lock, there is a hole, and the door is ajar. It is probably the time when bankers don't care if someone will come in the apartment and steal something. They have already become the owners, it's all crystal clear.

I still feel the smell of her in the air. The stains on the wooden floors show me where all the pots, stoves, cupboards, showers, and fickers were placed. You can see where she used to water her plants as the floors are damaged of water, of course over watering plants I do too

The apartment looks much bigger now once it is empty. Nothing is left, and I am too late. In the letter they sent me there were a lot of ugly words and phrases, for example, consent, our right, your obligation, persecution, ownership, court decision, purchase etc. I thought I would come before they would take it all away. I wanted to at least take a photograph, blouse, soup pot, ashtray or something I could look at and think of her and her Zen-ideas.

One of those: as a high school student, I would visit her after classes, talk to her about a brunette boy, a girl with larger breasts who is someone I cannot compete against, and she would simply tell me it's very important to wash my face every morning.

"wash your face with cold water, use a normal soap and put on cream, the best is Nivea. That's how you'll have a clear view of the world.

I look at her and it might be all clear. If I had a clear view of the world, I wouldn't even like that boy.

In the small kitchen the smell is even more intense. I would swear the last thing she cooked was *eingemachtes*. Again, there is nothing from the kitchen I could take with me. Not even the faucet. Before, people just took wheat.

As I was walking through offices, with her obituary, they kept telling me that everything is done by law, as they were justifying them self for something. You don't keep telling people that it's not your fault, if it really, isn't. Everything is done by law, taking the apartment and all the stuff in it. I still thought I would arrive on time for the second repossession. I just need a few things, nothing else.



I return back to the living room, I zoom on to the floor. Maybe they missed some button or spoon? Of course not. I look to the balcony. They even took the flowers! What in heavens name do they need the flowers for? Oh, how did I just bother her when I was a child! I remember, as she was taking care of me, I would come up with the idea that I have to clean the balcony. I was cleaning it all morning. A bucket, brush and water, a lot of water.

"don't spill so much water, I don't want Pepa to have a flood downstairs! She will come and I won't be able to get rid of her."

"I won't, grandma."

I brushed the floor frantically, pushed the water towards the edge, and enjoyed the sound of water falling. If Pepa didn't warn me about her plants floating, I might have watered less. The second time around, I would hammer nails in the doorstep, every five centimeters I would hammer a larger nail. I left them to stick out, so my grandmother would be able to take them out later. She allowed for all of it, pretending she doesn't see it, she'd let me do whatever I want. Is that the reason I loved her more? Maybe, kids are actually selfish.

Around noon, she would call me to join her by the table which was always put together by all the Austro-Hungarian rules. She insisted for me to sit properly, to move like a lady, to eat discreet, and to take small bites. I was not allowed to ask for more, I had to take care I wouldn't swallow loudly, I even had to have my elbows by my body, and make sure I don't make any noise with the chair. The moment I would extend my elbows, she would place a book under my armpits.

- "Were you at the last opera at the Croatian National Theater?"

- "What? What opera?"

When the time is bad, use it to be alone, it is healthy for your soul. A Zen thought would come to mind then.

I get outside on the balcony, and I look down at the concrete yard. Not even Pepa is here, and I was scared! She looked like a dice roller, and she had a mustache! Now, it's all peaceful, there are no noises, no one is cooking, shouting, calling, or playing. The house is repossessed by the bank and construction work has already started. It will be a three story business building, where stuck up girls and fancy men who know math and bank terminology will work. They will calculate all sorts of numbers, come up with terrible ways for us to be scared of them, which is why we will pay, and then of course everything will be done according to law.

I enter into the bedroom and as I walk I feel that I am crushing sugar under my feet. How did sugar get here? I crouch to see. That I cannot take I think to myself, what kind of

memory would that be? Actually, maybe it would be a memory, grandma always had sugar and a glass of water for an emergency if she felt weak, next to the bed on the night stand.

I look towards the door and on the old wooden floor I see a feather. It's a feather from her pillow, I am sure of it. She kept telling me that the pillows and blankets always need to be full with feathers. She wasn't able to convince me to use them, but she tried, like really tried. Forcing me to turn to feather pillows and blankets was even part of the Zen world. For example, get used to sleeping on feathers, it's just like sleeping in heaven. Of course she would say that in the exact moment I was out shouting at the kids through the balcony or coming out of the restroom. Once, she even called me just to tell me about the feathers. I wasn't able to ask anything, right after her theory, and facts about feather pillows and blankets, she hung up.

The feather is hers, I gently take it and look at the light. Now, some would say that this feather is full of my grandmother. She slept on it, she breathed over it, and even dreamed on it. I wish I had one of the bags forensics people use as in the TV shows, it would be kept safely then, however I put it and close it in my pocket. I think to myself that it won't fall out once I get home. I will put it in somewhere safe. Suddenly I feel some kind of warmth, my grandmother is literally in my pocket, I have something hers, and this is it!

When I was a kid, she often read me a story about a circus elephant that had huge ears, which is why they were teaching him to fly. Because he was scared, they gave him a feather and said it was magical and that with the feather, anything is possible and you can achieve anything. Maybe this feather is like that too. Because I still don't understand the repossession. Their words were words of accusations, we were guilty for our grandmothers' death, and even, by law, penalty for death is repossession of the apartment. Somehow I believe I need to do something and with the feather in my pocket I will be as the elephant, unstoppable.

As I go to the bank, I put on my earphones, because if I don't do that, I will listen to other people's problems and I won't be able to stop. That's how it was the last time. Every person in line standing had some sort of tragedy, for which it was the bank's fault. When some guy came to counter with his problems I couldn't listen anymore. He borrowed a hundred euros from someone, and he didn't return it back on time, the man pressed charges against him. The clerk who worked at the court, who most probably was given a D in Croatian language wrote every sentence without any comma. The comma needed to separate the house number from the amount of money needed to pay. That's how, the poor man, who lives in no. 42, comma, a hundred euros needed to return the money, and without the comma, the man suffered to pay a greater amount. The man did not work, he limped, mumbled while talking and wasn't dressed in a fancy suit, but rather a sweat suit and a checkered shirt, I simply had to yell at the woman on the counter. She smiled politely and utterly, as well as pressed the button under the counter, calling the security guards with hard armor. They held me and pulled me away, two stupid pumped men pulled me



by my arms that were like twigs. I cursed the bank simultaneously and it made me feel pleased, not even the penalty destroyed me, I just knew I had to stop resisting.

There, that's why I have my earphones on, my questions will be enough. I know what my grandmother would say, 'take care of that feather, without it you are nothing,' that's what she would say, while I would be trying to make coffee in the kitchen. The real coffee, the one you drink with a sugar cube. However, my questions for the bank are everything but not Zen. They are incredibly dull, and I don't even know how to ask the questions. Why did you take what is mine? I mean, in the park as a child, I always had to return the bucket I borrowed, and lastly, where are my grandmothers stuff, where?

With my leg I try to remove the black stain from the sofa which was always placed in the corner of the room. They are not allowed to see it, its intimate, who cares where she used to sit in the afternoon with her blanket over her feet waiting for Dynasty? At the entrance, in the hallway, she had two posters on the wall. One was the main actor of Dynasty. He was facing the right side, so when she would enter the apartment, he would be facing and looking at her. The other poster was with Serbedyija. Although he was almost eighty, she kept that poster on which he was so young, he barely looked like himself. I remember the white shirt with the sharp collar that was faced towards his face, he would look on the left side and escort my grandmother when she was heading out of the apartment.

If they only left those posters! I would have carefully taken them down and folded them, I would at least have something, like this they just made me furious. The repossession of the apartment I can understand to some point, banks need apartments, and we are used to that, but personal items! Old and battered porcelain, clothes with holes made by moths, broken mirrors, handmade cup coasters, worthless paintings, sticky plates, books, pictures of dead relatives, orthopedic shoes... they need all that?

Have they left the posters, I wouldn't go in for the fight, but they didn't. Someone has to start the revolution. I want it all, the apartment, personal belongings, everything, to the last cookie plate which we used to have during afternoon tea. I believe that her Zen phrase for today would be; when the sun is out, don't water the plants and take care of your pocket in which the feather is in.

From the collection of short stories  
10 +1 best stories of summer 2014.