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*Translated by Daria Torre*

### **Money No Problem**

Since I was a young girl I have pitied two sorts of beings: stray dogs and old, broken men... Especially drunkards... My grandfather and my father were both drunkards. When I was little they used to take me to the pubs with them... My father would buy me a raspberry soda. He drank *mussolini* (raspberry soda with wine). My grandfather used to seat me on the bar. He had friends who used to tell me strange stories... I still remembered his weary eyes, full of sorrow... Just like my father's eyes, always thirsty...

They would sell their soul to the devil for a drink, my mother used to say about beggars... But she always gave them something when they would appear at her doorstep. If she had no money, she gave them some food.

- They would drink the money anyway - she used to say. As it is, they're at least not hungry.

Strangely, she was indifferent to beggar women. As if they were deceiving her...

- They are - she said - the only ones to blame for their destinies.

Not the old men: in my mother's (and my) eyes these were helpless...

My husband's voice roused me up from my remembrances.

That's what you call a peep! - I heard him yelling. Fearless, already completely convinced about his predominance over the intruder.

- You came here to steal! - he yelled again. - That's what you came here for. Let's see what have you stolen. Then we'll go to the police. You and me together!

- Please, sir, don't! - the old man whined.

Pathetically. Pleading.

- What did I take? - he started to cry. - Here, everything dropped down... Here, have a look. You can search my pockets. Take it all! Just let me go...

At these words my husband closed the door of the room so I couldn't hear what they were talking about. Only the sounds of commotion reached me - as if my husband searched the old man's pockets... Then the entrance door closed quite roughly and I could hear my husband picking up the coins from the floor... The footfall of bare feet on the wooden floor followed.

- I scared him! - my husband said entering the room. Victoriously.

- He was scared stiff - he laughed. - If you could only see him! An old man... He says that he eats downstairs, in Caritas. (Our flat was across the street from the church.) I've emptied his pockets!

He clutched his and old man's coins in both his hands; the coins mingled.

- We even earned something! - he explained to me with satisfaction. - He dropped our change on the floor! That's how he disclosed himself!

- That one is harmless - he added putting the change on the table.

- That's why I let him go...

I was thinking about what just happened to the old man...

He was probably begging around... Why would he otherwise climb up to the third floor? When he came to our door he saw the doorknob! Something available... He didn't resist the temptation... Instead ringing the bell he tried the door. And there: the door opened. He saw a hall with a coat hanger. And

my husband's raincoat. (I kept mine in the closet in the room.) He already went too far to give up now... He didn't hear us talking in the room, he was probably rather deaf... And so he reached into one of the pockets... Full of change from the coin-box... which my husband broke yesterday... Our daughter's coin-box... (because of the distress we had our daughter living with my mother). And the pocket had a hole, just as the other one... I was mending them, but my husband would always tear them apart again with the eternal change and everyday search for coins... This pocket just started to unstitch... Pushing his hand into it, the old man turned the little hole into a big hole through which the money fell down on the floor!

That was the noise that we heard in the room! The noise of the coins falling out of the ripped pocket! When he bent down to pick them up, the rest of the coins fell, too...

- What a bad, bad luck! - I cried, out of my wits with sorrow.

Then I started to explain the proportions of the old man's misfortune... The door-knob... The raincoat... The coins in the pocket! The fatal hole!

It was all so horrible!

- We took the last of his money! - I remonstrated with my husband, with myself. Exasperated with misery. - The money he got by begging. He's not the real thief if he eats at Caritas! What did he eat there? Beans, probably! And one is thirsty after eating beans. One has to drink... The old man has, hence, started to beg for a drink... We scared him! We robbed him of the last money he had! The poor old man! We should be ashamed!

My husband has already stopped counting coins a long time ago. He listened to me with a depressed expression on his face. As a scolded dog.

- What can we do now? - he asked almost desperately. - Everything you said is true! But I thought he was a burglar! I didn't know what to do! I'm sorry now... But I can't do anything about it now.

- You can! - I said, perking up with hope. - Quickly, put your clothes on. Run after him! Maybe you'll catch him! And I'm going to gather all the coins!

My husband hastily put on some clothes... Helter-skelter. His shirt was unbuttoned... I poured the coins into a plastic bag. I gave it to my husband who started after the old man. Dedicated to his task... From the window I could see that he was dedicated. I watched him from there... So that he wouldn't cheat, by any chance...

When he disappeared out of my sight I sat on the bed and waited ... Again I thought about my grandfather Karlo. I remembered his sitbed, narrow as a train compartment, where he lived in his last days. In that room he once cut me with a knife while we played. I still had that scar on my forehead...

I was roused up by the noise of my husband's steps... I went out to meet him, full of the old hope... He entered all unbuttoned as before, helplessly showing me the plastic bag.

- I didn't find him! - he said. - I looked everywhere. I was even in the church! He disappeared without a trace!

I couldn't bear such an ending.

- You didn't try hard enough! - I reproached him, although I knew it wasn't true.

- We snatched money for bread from the poor guy... Or, which is the same, for a miserable drink... We became robbers! The worst among the worst!

I threw myself on the bed and started to cry as if the old man was my grandfather in disguise. Whatsmore, my father... Also dead. With whom I never got along very well. When I remembered that, I started to cry even more. Inconsolably...

My husband looked at me; he didn't know what to say. In his family he had no drunkards... To pity...

Finally I pulled myself together, got up and wiped the tears away. My husband and I counted all the coins... The ours and the old man's...

And then we put our coats on and went to the cinema...