

Nana

Lydia Tucker

“**H**AVE more soup Karl,” Nana said as she filled grandfather Karl’s bowl a second time. “And you, Tina, eat every bit of what’s in your plate if you want apple strudel.”

Nana was really Cousin Anna, first cousin to Tina’s grandmother Maria, but all the grownups and children in the village called her Nana. Tina had come with grandfather Karl and grandmother Maria all the way across the world to see her beloved Nana, but tomorrow they were taking the big boat back to America. This was the last time they would all be eating together—Nana had cooked a good farewell dinner.

Tina’s eyes followed Nana around the large kitchen. Nana was only five feet tall, and very fat. Once she told Tina she weighed one hundred and a half kilograms—Tina suspected that was an awful lot of pounds. Still, she was quick on her feet and could climb a flight of stairs in less time than grandmother Maria, who was three years younger than Nana.

“Hurry up and finish what’s in your plates everybody. Here I come with the potatoes and Wiener schnitzel,” called Nana in her sing-song voice. She had gone back to the big coal stove and was adding a few sprigs of parsley to garnish her large platter of food.

Everything had to be just right for Nana. The stitching on the cotton curtains of the French windows had to match the stiff crocheted lace border tacked along the edge of the chimney. Tina always laughed when she saw Nana down on her hands and knees scrubbing the wooden floor. Her face was always flushed whenever she tried to reach too far in front of herself with her brush, and beads of perspiration made her grayish blond hair stick to her forehead and she would blow with all her might to push them aside.

“Is everybody finished?” Nana had a bowl of white creamy potato salad under one arm which she rested on her stomach, and the platter of golden-brown schnitzel balanced on the palm of her right hand. Tina always marveled at how many things Nana

could carry at once, but her best trick was carrying the big metal tub of water on her head from the village fountain up to the house.

"Please, oh please, Nana, let me try," Tina begged the first time she had gone with Nana for fresh water for the evening meal, but it rolled right off.

"Tina, your good dress. Tina, you're all wet," Nana laughed—her short fat body jumping up and down, and her face as red as a poppy. Never again did Tina ask to carry the tub.

"Ach, that looks good," exclaimed Herr Flint, rubbing his hands together. Nana placed the food in the center of the long narrow table. Herr Flint and his two children had been invited to help honor the Americans who were leaving tomorrow.

"It is a pity you can't stay for the wine festival next week. It is a big event every year—partly because the grapes are gathered for the wine, but mostly because Frau Nana cooks the celebration supper," he added, winking with approval at Nana.

"Always with your jokes, Herr Flint," Nana blushed as she playfully slapped him on the back. She was not one to accept praise or thanks, yet was always ready to get out of bed at two or three in the morning to comfort a young mother or make the last few hours of waiting easier for some poor soul. She was always smiling, always cheerful no matter how she felt inside. Even now Tina could see that mixed in with the gaiety and pride in her deep blue eyes was a bit of sadness. Since her husband had died these cousins were all the relatives she had in the world, and after today she would be without them, perhaps forever.

In all this time Nana had not sat down once to eat even a bite. That happened at practically every meal, and when Tina would remind her that she had not eaten, Nana would let her plump hands fall to her sides to emphasize her answer, "I had my share. I eat as I cook. I get too impatient to wait till it's all finished."

Next Nana brought forth the strudel. It was still steaming as she unwrapped the cheesecloth she had put around it to bring it home from the bakery. There was only one oven in the entire village, and the women would mix their cakes at home and then take them to the baker's shop to be baked. Tina vowed she would have her pennies and send Nana a real oven all her own from America.

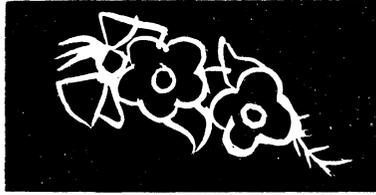
"What, not finished with your meat, Tina? If you don't eat a lot and get fat like Nana the wind will carry you off the boat and

you will never be able to come to see Nana again.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever see you again even if the wind doesn’t take me,” Tina cried hysterically and ran to Nana who hugged the child tenderly—biting her lips to keep back her own tears.

“But of course you will, Tina. Didn’t you know that they are going to build a bridge all the way from the waterfront of the village to America, and when you are big and have a car you’ll be able to drive out to see me every weekend. Now, here, two pieces of strudel for you.” Nana placed Tina in her seat and dried the child’s tears with her apron.

“I have to get a clean apron now,” she excused herself and went into the bedroom.



Big Night

Elizabeth Ann Butler

MARY JEAN came clattering down the stairs, her shoes flapping on her feet with every step. She skidded around the corner and pulled herself to a stop in front of the big chair where I sat reading.

“Lizbeth, can I wear your gold evening slippers tonight?” Her brown eyes pleaded from behind the clear-rimmed glasses.

“Umm?” I was loathe to come out of the novel.

“Lizbeth, you aren’t listening! Can I pu-lease wear your gold evening slippers tonight?”

“Are you kid-?” I stopped short and took another look at her. For gosh sakes! The girl was growing up. What used to be all arms and legs was developing into a form with a few curves. “My gold evening slippers, you say. Won’t they make you taller than Mike?”