

**BALLERINA, BALLERINA**



AAAAH! I'M FALLING. I grab at clouds, raindrops, hailstones, sunbeams, I keep waving my arms. It doesn't help. I'm falliiing. Below me is a field, it's getting closer and closer, the horse chestnut tree in the yard, the house, the path leading from the village past the church straight into the yard and to the house. I see the roof with big stones on it because of the wind. No more clouds, raindrops, no more sunshine. I have nothing to hold on to. I wave my arms, faster and faster. It doesn't help. I see the moon. It's shining. Shining on the roof and on the tree top that is getting closer. I'll fall into the tree and wake the birds. Ohhhh. Through the roof. I'll break through the roof. Now. I suddenly wake up. I'm lying by the bed. I fell off the bed, like before, like now. I'm not scared, I just have to go and pee.

I open my eyes and look at the ceiling. I can't see any hole I might have made. I look at the window. It looks the same as always. It's morning. I see the top of the chestnut tree. The birds have not flown away. They're only just waking up. I'm not afraid, I just have to go and pee, like always when a new day starts. I close my eyes. I'm glad the window is still there, that outside is the tree top with the birds and that I have not broken through the roof. I know. I feel warm. Maybe it's spring in the yard, maybe summer. It's not winter. When it's winter, it's cold and the chestnut tree in the yard has no leaves and Mama puts stockings on my legs. It's warm. Suddenly. I wet myself on the floor by the bed I have fallen from. I hear footsteps, Ivanka is coming from the kitchen, up the stone stairs, and she stops at the door, opening it slightly. She looks at me, I know. Mama. Ivanka is my mama. I recognize her because I've wet myself, and because that's what I have done, it must be a new day. And if it really is all true, Mama always opens the door slightly and looks into my room.

I watch her walking toward me. Behind her, everything is blue. From the morning. The wooden closet with a mirror, the closet with drawers, the chair. Everything is blue. Mama is blue, too. The hair that she's combed in the kitchen and pushed into a bun, her eyes, her mouth, her hands. Her hands are also colored blue by the morning.

She lifts me. She holds me under my arms, lifting me. I laugh. Mama laughs, too. She can't lift me because she's laughing. Then she says: Help me, and laughs even harder. We're sitting on the floor by the bed, laughing. I look at her. I see tears in her eyes. They're full of light. I touch them. I touch her eyes and the tears and the light, and I hear, not right now while she's laughing. I hear her talking to someone next to the kitchen door. I'm standing in the corner, then. I'm standing on tiptoe, looking at the kitchen door. Mama is talking. I don't know who's with her. I can't see her face. I'm standing on tiptoe, looking at the bun on her head, her shoulders, her skirt and her slippers. They say that's how it is, says Mama. They say it happens sometimes. All of a sudden and no one really knows why. Out of the blue. She doesn't play anymore. She keeps herself to herself, who knows what she's thinking. You ask her and she doesn't say. She hears everything, but she doesn't talk anymore. She laughs, she cries, but you don't know when or why. You don't know what she's thinking, what's going through her head ... They say it'll get worse every year, says Mama, more quietly, and I stand up even higher on my tiptoes to see her face. I hear Mama's last words. Look at her! She spends hours and hours standing on tiptoe, does everything I tell her to, then she goes in that corner, lifts herself onto her toes and just stays there. There's nothing they can do, they say ... that sometimes it just happens with children. At that moment Mama turns to me. I'm standing on my tiptoes and I can see her face. There are tears in her eyes then, too, and her smile, and I hear Mama's words. What will happen to us, Ballerina, eh?

I no longer hear her words now. Just our laughter, and I see the tears in her eyes. They're full of light.

Mama stands up, using her arms and legs. Come on, Ballerina, she says: It's your party today!

She leads me down the stairs, to the washbasin in the hall. Then she undresses and washes me, talking to me. She says I'm fifteen years old, that it's April, that I was born in the middle of spring and that I have to look pretty today. She dresses me in a pink dress with a bow at the side. Oh, how beautiful our Ballerina looks, she says as she combs my hair. I'm looking in the mirror that hangs on a nail on

the wall. I think I look like Mama. She's combing my hair, talking. Mama says I will be beautiful today because it's my party and it's spring on the other side of the door that is still closed, in the yard and in the field. She says it has been dug, the field, and it smells nice because it has rested and no longer has any weeds. She keeps combing my hair. I'm looking in the mirror. I see the field, blue from the morning, the weeds, tall and thin; every time my mother pulls the comb through my hair there are fewer weeds and I know it's going to be a new day. And I see the dug field in front of me, I see it in one part of the mirror, where my face is and Mama's face, which presses itself against mine, talking, the face that is Mama's. We'll put on a bit of perfume, she says, touching my neck with her fingers. It's Mennen, says Mama, *dopobarba*, aftershave, but it smells like perfume. Mmmmm, says Mama, after, you smell so nice, our Ballerina. And I no longer see her, Mama, in the mirror that hangs on a nail on the wall, I know she's walking into the kitchen, telling me to come, saying I'm beautiful, telling me to sit at the table, she'll give me coffee and then, she says, we'll have visitors in the afternoon and I'll get presents and Ivan will come.

I think Ivan is here already. I look toward the kitchen. We're standing by the door, then, I don't know when, because I don't know how many new days have passed since and how many times I wet myself because it was morning. I know we're standing by the door and Ivan says we must measure ourselves to see who is tallest. Ivan is small. He's a child, I think, something could happen to him. I must protect him. And I stand on tiptoe and everyone says: Oh, our Ballerina is growing so quickly! Ivan is laughing and says he'll be a doctor and will cure me when he grows up, and everyone claps.

I look in the mirror. Once more. My hair is combed. I look toward the kitchen. I step through the door and into the corner by the stove. That's the best place.

I look at the door from there, standing on my tiptoes. Then it hurts. I grab whatever I can find and throw it at the door. I nearly always hit the door. If it's a plate, it breaks. Mama picks it up and strokes the door. She's always saying it needs painting. The door and the kitchen, everything. It needs painting white, she says.

I'm in the corner now, where it's nice. My toes aren't hurting. It's just Mama in the kitchen. I know what she's doing. She's washing handkerchiefs in boiling water because *Tata*, my father, coughs and spits into them. He also spits outside the door, sometimes. He's not here now. He's in the bar, with friends. Playing cards, says Mama. He'll come for lunch, like always when it's a new day. Mama says he'll choke with coughing. I see him, coughing in the hall, always, then he comes to the kitchen and looks through the window. He doesn't speak, just says to me: How are you, my Ballerina? And he looks out of the window. I know Mama will hang the handkerchiefs on a line in the yard, later.

The postman comes first. Nearly always when it's a new day. The postman talks, drinks and then goes through the door. Then Mama hangs the handkerchiefs in the yard and I look through the kitchen window, from my corner. I see the handkerchiefs and think that *Tata* is home. In bits on the handkerchiefs ... After the postman is gone.

The postman is here now. I can hear his footsteps. I'm afraid of the postman because he has a cap and heavy shoes. Mama is already getting a glass ready. He'll come in, talking and then he'll drink. Then he won't be able to breathe, after drinking, and he'll laugh and say: O la la!

He's here. Hello, Ivanka, he says and puts something on the table. Mama says she doesn't believe the advertisement and that her name would never be chosen and she would never get the millions. Mama is pouring the drink. *Schnapps*, she says. The postman is looking into the glass, talking.

I stand on tiptoe. I listen.

So? How's our Ballerina doing? He looks at me. I don't want him to look at me. Then he looks at Mama. She's still stirring the handkerchiefs in the boiling water. I see her. Ivanka, have you heard the latest? They say man is going to the moon, but it won't be anytime soon.

Oh yeah? says Mama, staring at the boiling water. I see her.

Yes. Not for another year or so, I don't know when. But tell me, why does anyone have to go to the moon?

Well, I don't know. Maybe there's too many of us ...

On earth?

I don't know. Maybe.

Mama continues stirring. With a wooden spoon. I see her. I see her nose, chin, forehead, arm. The postman shifts, takes his glass and downs it. Everything in the glass. I watch him. He can't breathe, he opens his mouth and holds it open, for a long time. He breathes in and then out. Then he smiles, Hey there, he says. He gets up, adjusts his cap. He says something else. To me. I think he says it to me because he's looking at me. I don't want him to look at me, I don't want him to say something to me. I stand on tiptoe, even higher. High. I'm shaking. I can't stand on tiptoe for that long.

Hey there, our little Ballerina, eh? What are you going to say, eh? And he laughs. My toes are hurting. He goes on. What do you say, shall we go? Shall we go to the moon? Would you go to the moon, eh? Oh, you would, you would go. Well, if we have to, we'll go, did you hear what your mother said? That there are too many of us! And if there are so many of us, there won't be enough to eat and we'll have to go to the Moon.

I watch him. Bye, Ivanka, he says and goes out the door. Then. I can no longer stand on tiptoe. I grab a glass on the table. I throw it at the door. The glass breaks.

Oh, Ballerina, Ballerina, says Mama, sweeping up the bits of the glass.

I watch her. I'm afraid that if there isn't enough to eat we'll have to go to the moon. Not for another year or so, said the postman. I don't know what a year is. Not one year, not another year ... I don't know.

Mama throws the bits of glass in the garbage. She looks at me. She comes closer, adjusts my hair, strokes me. I feel her hand on my cheek. Oh, my Ballerina, you mustn't be afraid, we won't go to the moon, we'll stay here as long as God lets us. Me and you and all of us.

Mama knows what I think. Sometimes. She knows. So do I. I know she wants me to laugh, not cry. But I can't laugh because the postman knows everything and because he said what he said. Mama moves. I watch her. She takes the handkerchiefs out of the boiling water and goes through the door. Now I'm not afraid anymore. The handkerchiefs are already hanging one next to the other. My *Tata*.

I look through the window. I can't see Mama. Suddenly. All I see are the handkerchiefs. I look around the kitchen. I touch the bow on my pink dress. I look. I see the stove, the table, the refrigerator and the ashtray on it, the cupboard with plates and glasses. Spoons are there, too. I see a small shelf. On the shelf is a box from which talking and singing comes. But only when *Tata* presses a button. Turn on the Grundig, he says to Mama, let's hear the weather forecast. On the box, there is a boat. Mama calls it a gondola. She says they have such boats in Venice, but they don't have the lights, the boats in Venice. Our gondola has lights and sometimes they shine. I look at the slightly open door. Mama is here again. She says lunch will be soon, *Tata* will come, Karlo will come from work, Srečko will come with his mama, Josipina will come, and Aunt Elizabeta and then, when there's cake, Ivan will also come. Here's *Tata*. I can hear him. He's coughing and spitting. He says he's old and sits down. He says I should sit next to him, like always when it is a new day. And I do, always. Now he says I'm beautiful, I'm a big girl, and he holds my hand. Then he coughs again in the hall and returns to the kitchen with tears from the coughing and takes my hand again. What's new, Ballerina, he says. And I take hold of his ear. I like squeezing his ear. He bends over to me, smiling, when he isn't coughing. And I squeeze his ear. *Basta, basta*, enough, Ballerina, he says when it hurts and I twist his ear even more because I like it and I'm calm when I'm twisting his ear, I know.

Mama is setting the table. She says I should put the glasses and plates out. Now she knows I won't throw them at the door, she knows now that I'll put them on the table. I take a plate. Each one separately. Mama says, put it here. I do. The same with every plate.

Always when it is a new day, I put plates on the table. Today, now, too. It seems to me that I hear my voice as I'm putting down the plates. As if I have said something. My ears ring when I have this feeling. Now, too. I'm wearing a pink dress, I have a bow at the side and I'm putting a plate on the table and my ears are ringing. I have to sing, then they won't ring anymore. That's what I must do. They also sing in the box with the gondola on top. Not always. First, *Tata* says turn on the Grundig, and then they sing *Voolare, oooho, can-*

*Ballerina, Ballerina*

*tare, o,o,o,o, nel blu dipinto di blu, felice di stare lassù* ... I hear, always when the Grundig is turned on, I hear them sing, and Mama says it's always the same song on the radio.

I leave the plate on the table. I step into the corner, on tiptoe, and I sing. Loud. I shout, *VOOOlaree, o, o!!!* Like the Grundig. Then my ears don't ring anymore. Inside my ears. Mama lets me sing. She knows it won't be for long. When it's lunch, I only sing twice.

Karlo comes. Through the door. I see him. Mama says he's my brother. He comes from the woods, Karlo does, I know. Mama says he guards the woods. He looks at me like he always does when it's a new day. Karlo. I don't want him to look at me. I run into him. Now. And I push him through the door into the yard. He comes back, strokes me. It's OK, it's OK, *Ballerina*, he says. Sometimes he stays in the yard. I see him through the window, spooning the *minestra* into his mouth. He sits on the bench under the chestnut tree, slurping the *minestra*, and then he returns to the woods, because he has to guard them. Mama says that Karlo is older, that he's forty years old, that I'm the youngest, that my sister Josipina is also older, Mama says. Albert is also my brother. Mama says he's the oldest. He won't come to lunch because he's in Australia, Mama says.

I don't know who Albert is, I don't know what Australia is.

Karlo and *Tata* are here. They're sitting at the table. Mama says we should wait for the others. Elizabeta comes. Mama says that she and Elizabeta are sisters. Ivanka and Elizabeta. Mama says that it's not quite sixty years since they were born. I don't know what that means. Mama says she wants to go to Ajdovščina once more, where she and Elizabeta were born, because it's not far. Karlo has a car, he could take her, and Elizabeta, Mama says in the evening as we stand by the window in the room. I will go, too, Mama says, but first I have to have my photograph taken for a border pass, she says. Karlo sometimes takes me to Elizabeta, I know. I know Elizabeta. She's like Mama. Karlo takes me to Elizabeta in the car. Mama says the car is not Karlo's. But it isn't far. Mama says that everyone is close by, that there aren't many of us and that we're all close by.

Elizabeta kisses me and puts a bag next to the door. In the bag is something for me because it's my party, I know. Elizabeta then sits at

the table. I don't know which is my mama. Suddenly.

I hear footsteps. Laughter. I recognize it. Srečko. Mama says he's already drunk. He's coming through the door. He doesn't say anything. He just laughs and comes into the kitchen. His mother, Aunt Lucija, is with him. Mama says that Aunt Lucija is my father's sister and therefore she's my aunt and Srečko is my cousin. Srečko is laughing and looking at me. Lucija says to him: Sit down, sit at the table. I watch Aunt Lucija. She's wearing slippers like mine. With a butterfly. Mama says she's forgotten to put her shoes on again, the poor thing ...

In the evening, when Mama and I are looking through the window and she's talking to me quietly, because, she says, Karlo is asleep, *Tata* is asleep and even the birds in the chestnut tree are asleep, she says she doesn't know what will happen to Srečko when Aunt Lucija is gone. Mama says Aunt Lucija will die because she's old and forgets to put her shoes on.

Now I'm watching Aunt Lucija, she's pushing Srečko toward the table and says to me, because she's looking at me: Oh, Ballerina, how beautiful you are today, and she sits next to Srečko. He keeps laughing, but a little more quietly now. Karlo is also laughing quietly and so is *Tata*. Everyone laughs when Srečko is here.

Ivanka, do you know where I found him? says Lucija.

No, says Ivanka, my mother.

In the square!

Surely not?!

Yes ... he was there, in the middle of the square, looking toward the sea, trembling. Like a leaf.

Is he still afraid?

Yes, still ... I tell him to go and buy some bread and he gets lost and then I don't know where he is. I have to get dressed and put my shoes on and go looking for him.

Srečko is still laughing, still quietly. I'm standing in the corner, looking at him and listening.

If the road is too wide or if it's a square, he's afraid. He can't go on. Everything that is wide and big. I tell him, stay home, but he goes and gets lost and then stands there trembling, calling me ... You know,

what happened in Spain. He said he was going to Spain. He took the train, got to Spain and just stopped at the station. One day. A whole day. As he reached the station exit, he saw a square and didn't dare go out. He was scared, I know. If it's a square, he's scared. And then he took the train back. From station to station. Seventeen hours on the train. Now you tell me that he isn't crazy!

Everyone is laughing now. Srečko very loudly.

And then he has to have a drink, says Lucija, and he's drunk. Oh, Ballerina, Ballerina, what would you say, eh?

And I look at her slippers with a butterfly, like mine.

I tell him, says Lucija, listen to music. If you can't work, if I can't even send you for a loaf of bread, listen to music. What can you do, he likes it. Silvester was just like him. The organ and nothing else. In church all day long ... On the organ. And this one is just like him, just like Silvester. May he rest in peace, he did leave me a pension.

I look at the window. I hear footsteps. I know it's Josipina. She always runs, my sister does.

In the evening, when Mama and I are looking through the window in the room where I sleep, and Mama is talking to me quietly, she says that Josipina secretly does the ironing for the watchmaker's wife. She says Josipina's husband doesn't want her to do the ironing for other people and wants her to be at home, but she still goes, secretly. Mama says her husband is big and strong. I don't know who he is. He's not in the kitchen today. He never is. Only Josipina runs here sometimes. She has something to eat, then she runs back. I've only got two more things to do, says Josipina and then runs. She irons two things and runs home. In the evening by the window above the chestnut tree, Mama says that Josipina's husband was on a ship when there was a war, that he shot at planes and that he gets nervous at night, because he still sees them up in the sky and shoots at them from his bed. Mama says that he's Italian because he's called Giacomino.

Now she's here, in the kitchen. Josipina. Breathing. Deeply. She laughs. She comes to me. Happy Birthday, Ballerina, she says and gives me a bunch of flowers. She says they're tulips. Oh, how beautiful they are, says Elizabeta and puts her hands on her knees. I got a letter, says Josipina, breathing. From Albert. From Australia, she

says. What does he say? asks Karlo. I watch her. Her eyes are shining. He says he's coming in a year or so. For a visit. And she sits down. No one talks. In the evening, when we stand by the window, Mama says that Albert also used to guard the woods, like Karlo. Then, says Mama, he went to Australia, with a *signorina* from Istria. And then she cries, does Mama. Then she says that Karlo started guarding the woods and he got Albert's job. Because there was no one else to do it.

Now everyone is here, says Mama in the kitchen. And she brings a pan to the table. *Tata* is looking out of the window, I see him.

Is *signorina* coming with him? he asks.

He didn't write anything about her, says Josipina.

And then everyone is quiet. We're sitting at the table. Srećko is quietly laughing, then everyone laughs and eats, everyone. And we laugh.

Then we don't laugh anymore. Just eat. Soup. I squeeze my spoon with my whole hand, bringing the soup to my mouth and slurping it off. *Tata* says I should eat slowly. I'd like to stand on tiptoe, there in the corner. And sing. I don't sing. I want to hold his ear. I hold his ear. I'm thinking of the postman, of the moon, I think about how there will be no more room on earth and we won't have anything to eat. I slurp the soup. Faster. Still holding the ear of the man who is my *tata*.

Later, there'll be cake. After lunch. Ivan will come then. Mama says he's in school now. She says I used to be there, too. Not now. Later. They said I'd go to school again, but I have to grow first. They said when I'm big, I'll go to school, Mama says. In the evening when we're looking through the window, she says there's still time. When it's a new day, says Mama, that's when I'll go to school.

*Tata* takes my hand and puts it on the table. I can see him feeling his ear. It hurts. I look at Elizabeta. I see Mama. I don't know which is Mama and which Elizabeta. She also has her hair in a bun. I look at her hands. She says they're rough. I know what it's like at Elizabeta's, when Karlo takes me to her when Mama is tired, when she says she loves me, but she needs a rest. Karlo also says Mama has to rest, that she can't wash me every day, pick up bits of plates from the floor in front of the door and sing. Mama sings with me and I'm not

scared any more, I know. We stand in the hall and sing. Both of us. We hold hands and sing. Loudly. In the hall. Me and Mama. Then Mama is tired and Karlo takes me to Elizabeta's in the car.

In the evening, when Mama and I stand by the window, she tells me that she and Elizabeta came to Trieste together. From Ajdovščina. To Trieste. When they were really young girls. Mama says that she and Elizabeta cleaned other people's houses. They washed, cooked and ironed, like Josipina. But not secretly. Then Mama used to go and get milk from the house in which we are now, she says. Milk for the lady she ironed for, and once she was told that she should come again, for milk, that Franc would come, that he was handsome and that they would marry. Then, Mama says, Franc came from the army and he was handsome and they did marry. Franc is my *Tata*, the one whose ear I pull. Mama says that he plays cards in the village, in the bar. That he even goes to play in Venice. Not now, because he's old, Mama says. Mama says that *Tata* brought the gondola with the lights which now stands on the Grundig in the kitchen. Franc. Once upon a time.

Then I stop looking at Elizabeta. I don't want to go to Elizabeta's. I don't want Mama to be tired and Karlo to take me to Elizabeta's.

I sit, crumbling bread. I eat the crumbs, slowly. I roll them around my mouth and then swallow them, the crumbs. I watch Srečko. He's talking. He says that Beethoven is the greatest composer. Now he's crying. Aunt Lucija, in her slippers, asks him why he's crying. He says that he's remembering his life, Beethoven's, and that's why he's crying. Srečko winks at me. I see his mouth, his teeth with gaps between them, his fine hair and the remains of his tears because his eyes are red. My eyes get red when I cry, too. After, if I look at myself. He winks at me again. He's talking to me. To my face. I watch him, I look into his eyes. Srečko says that he can sing all Beethoven's compositions, for the orchestra, for the piano, symphonies, string quartets. He says he knows them all by heart. That it's all in his head and that when he gets lost and can't go on in a square, he remembers Beethoven, he says, and then he's less afraid of the wide square. I don't know what quartets are and all the rest. No one knows, I know.

I watch him, Srečko. The others laugh at him. They like it when

he talks about Beethoven, because he cries, always. *Tata* says to him, Talk, talk, Srečko! But now he isn't talking anymore. Aunt Lucija says he has drunk too much, that's why he's crying, not because of Beethoven. I look at her slippers with the butterfly. I bend over and look under the table at her slippers. They really are just like mine.

I get up and go to the corner and stand on tiptoe. Oh, our Ballerina will dance, says *Tata*. Srečko walks into the yard. I see him come into the yard, I see him through the window in the kitchen. The others are sitting. Karlo says that soon they will unveil a monument in memory of the partisans who died. That the choir will sing. I don't know what a monument is and who partisans are. I stand on tiptoe. I look through the window. I see Srečko and his mama Lucija in her slippers. She's arranging his shirt, he's pushing her away, she tries to arrange his shirt again, he pushes her away. Then he lets her arrange his shirt.

Ivan. He's here. I see his head through the window. He'll come through the door now.

He's here. He's holding a bunch of flowers in both hands. Oh, how beautiful they are, says Elizabeta and puts her hands on her knees. Josipina gets up. OK, I'm going now. Wait, we'll have the cake now, says Mama. Ivan is here and we'll have the cake. Ivan is standing in front of me, still holding the flowers in both hands, looking upward at me. I look down at him, at his eyes. I look at his face. His hair is combed, he's wearing a white shirt and blue pants with a crease. Blue like the morning, when everything is blue. Josipina takes the flowers from him and pours water in a vase. Happy Birthday, Ballerina, says Ivan and shakes my hand. I'm not on my tiptoes now. I let him hold my hand. Mama cuts the cake. Josipina quickly eats a slice and says she's going. I can already see her—she'll run, with quick steps. She's off. I see her, Josipina is leaving.

I'm eating the cake with Ivan. Ivan is wiping my mouth with a napkin. He says I'm all chocolatey. How's school, Ivan? asks Karlo. Good, says Ivan, good, and he goes on eating the cake. Then *Tata* says something. What will you be when you grow up? A doctor, says Ivan. And then we eat our cake. Until we finish it.

Others are talking now. Ivan is with me, telling me he will cure

*Ballerina, Ballerina*

me when he's no longer at school, when he's a doctor. I look at him and give him my hand. He takes it. He holds my hand. His hands are soft. Then he says he's going. Ciao, Ballerina, he says and leaves. Bye, Ivan, say hello to everyone at home, says Mama. And Ivan leaves, I see his head through the window.

In the evening, as we stand by the window, Mama says that Ivan is younger than me, that he's in second grade at college and that he's good at school. Mama also says that he doesn't live far away, next door, says Mama.

Karlo goes to the pantry. It's cold in the pantry. I know he's getting the accordion. Karlo plays the accordion. He's back. Mama is smiling, I see her.

For Ballerina, says Karlo and plays. Now Srečko and Lucija, his mama and my aunt, are here too. *Tata* is sitting. Everyone is looking at Karlo. Srečko is crying. Elizabeta is tapping her knees with her hands.

I stand on tiptoe again. I listen. Karlo is playing. The accordion. My toes are hurting. I grab a plate, squeeze it in my hand and hurl it at the door. Everyone ducks. The plate breaks. *Basta* for today, says Karlo and puts the accordion away. Srečko peers at me and leaves. Everyone walks into the yard, I see them. I take another plate and it breaks against the door. Mama is picking the pieces. Alright, alright, Ballerina, and she starts singing. Mama is singing.

*Voolare, o, o! Cantare, o, o, o, o ...*

Now we're in the hall, both of us. We're holding hands and singing.

*Nel blu, dipinto di blu, felice di stare lassù ...*

Mama has a nice voice. I can hear it even when she isn't singing, when she isn't talking. I hear it inside. She's holding my hand and singing. In the middle of the hall. She closes the door. Mama says it's the main door. Wait, she says. She closes it. I can't see the yard anymore. So that we don't disturb the neighbors, she says, and we go on singing, at the top of our voices, because the door is closed now. If Mama sings with me, I'm not afraid anymore.

She's holding my hand and walking me to the kitchen. We're singing. She walks me to the chair. I sit. I'm singing. Mama is stroking

my shoulders, singing after me. I can't see her face, only the door. The hall. There's no light there. Mama puts a bundle of paper on the table. She says it's a magazine and I should leaf through it, she says. *Domenica del Corriere*, she says. I know she's already done this before. I know. *Domenica del Corriere*, she says, and I look through it. She says I should see what's happening in the world. So that you can tell me things, she says. I'm leafing through the magazine, singing. More quietly now. I look at the faces. Women's, men's. I don't know them. They've never been here. Then I stop looking. I look at the window. I can see them in the yard. They're all still there. They're looking into the kitchen. Elizabeta, Karlo, Srečko, Lucija, Ivan. Josipina isn't there. I know she ran away, I know she went through the door earlier.

In the evening Mama and I are standing by the window. There's a bed behind me. I know that Mama will take me to my bed. Soon. Now, we're here, by the window. Below is the yard, the chestnut tree, where the birds sleep. They're coming now. I see them. I can see the leaves moving. I look into the distance past the chestnut tree. Mama says there are fields, then come the hills and then the mountains. Mama says that there's a valley below the mountains and that that is where she was born, in that valley I can't see. Below the mountains. Mama is talking like she always does when we stand in front of the window and before she takes me to bed. Can you see? That's Mount Čaven, that's where the *burja* wind is born. And there, see? That is Angel Mountain, the blue one, see? I see. I say nothing.

That's where my nicest day was, she says. It was there. Early in the morning, Elizabeta and I walked. There, to Angel Mountain. We walked on the dewy grass, nearly two hours to the top. And suddenly, she says, we saw a meadow, big, huge, so that you couldn't see the end of it. And it was full of flowers. It was as white as snow ... And then we walked among the flowers, Elizabeta and I, and we felt so good, I can't tell you how good, she says. Then we picked some flowers, a big bunch ... And it was so nice, so terribly nice that I can't tell you how nice it was.

That's where my day is, she says, and takes me to bed. I lie down. Today was your day, Ballerina. Go to sleep now and don't start thinking. I feel her hands on my face. I look at her bending toward

*Ballerina, Ballerina*

me. She kisses me. I can see the window behind her. I know the birds are sleeping, I'll go to sleep, too, and I will dream. Mama says I'll dream and everything will be alright.