

A GIRL AND HER LINEN DRESS

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It happened in 1950. Maria was 6 years old. Life in Lithuania wasn't easy in those days. It was still the horrific times of Stalin's dictatorship. It was especially hard for the so called "doomed", that is, people coming from the land owner's background back at the times of Lithuania's independence. Her father was left an orphan in early childhood. Her mother's parents were rather well off, but they died early and the Soviets took over all of the children's inheritance. Therefore, although robbed, Maria's parents were happy to not have been deported to Siberia with their children.

Despite being poor, the family kept beautiful traditions. In their free time, the mother and her daughters, Maria's sisters, would embroider. Therefore, the walls of the house were decorated with handkerchieves with intricate pictures on them up. This would make their home cosy. There was no other material in their house, but linen. They would spin and weave it themselves, which helped them out of complete poverty. The mother would make dresses and shirts for the elder daughters, whereas Maria, the youngest, would be left with second hand clothes. She would look at her sisters and cry, asking her mother to make her a dress and embroider it with pictures of lambs, ladybirds and butterflies. Mrs. Helen felt sorry for her youngest daughter and having looked at a piece of newly woven and bleached material she's finally decided to make her a new dress, which would be embroidered by her sisters. The women worked for three nights, whilst Maria joined in sitting on the floor and making herself a new doll out the remaining scraps. The women worked, sang and chatted together, blessed Maria and her new dress. These were cosy evenings; Then, the fourth morning dawned. It was Sunday. The mother woke Maria up early and whispered:

-Put your beautiful new dress on, darling, and we'll go to church.

The young Maria jumped out of bed, washed quickly and put the desired dress on.

-What a beauty, said the mother, what a beautiful girl you are! Mind you, this is no ordinary dress. The grandfather of your father grew the flax, the grandmother wove the material, your mother tailored it, and your sisters embroidered it. It contains a lot of hard work, but also joy. Your dress is made with good hands from beginning to end. You'll be happy wearing and keep it, even when you're older.

The young Maria glowed with joy. She turned this way and the other, everyone complemented her, while in the church people would turn back to look at her. She had never been happier, she couldn't stop chatting and the whole family felt happy looking at her.

One week had passed. It was a hot summer's day. Eighteen year old neighbour Olga popped over to invite Maria's elder sister, Ann, to go swimming. Ann wasn't there, but Maria asked to go swimming instead. The mother wasn't too happy about it, but Olga assured her that she would keep an eye on the girl and the mother let her go. Maria put her new dress on, promised the mother not to spoil it and happily joined in with Olga.

There weren't many people at the river. In order to get to the beach, they needed to get to the other side of the river. Olga told her to wait while she carried their stuff over, but Maria took her dress off, raised it above her head and followed Olga. She thought it was not deep, as water reached as high as Olga's armpits. However, she stepped into a hole and went under water. She didn't even understand she was drowning, all she saw was the flashing light in her eyes … then dark… her fluttering dress, even more beautiful now than it was before, faces… many faces…. her mother, light, dark, dark…

The girl was resuscitated right after she was pulled out. A young guy who happened to be swimming in the river spotted her by chance. Olga would have carried on wading the river….

This moment stayed with Maria for the rest of her life. She still has the dress and wonders whether it was not for the good spirit of the hands that had made it, that she was saved that day.

It was round about then that Maria started making dolls and clothes for them. They got more and more intricate as time went. Later on she started designing and making clothes professionally. Her talent was recognised early on. She would always say to her students that linen was the material alive in its spirits. Therefore, the way to achieve success in designer's profession was to be able turn linen clothes into the guardians of people's auras.

It is probably not for nothing that natural material and handmade clothes are always in fashion, no matter how synthetic the fashion technology has become. The more so, if it is made with inspiration and passion, these clothes become objects of value… and who knows, maybe sometimes, somewhere they save people.