

**Buttons and Spoons on a Window Sill: 3 Prose Poems by Bronka Nowicka
Translated from the Polish by Marek Kulig**



We're very excited to share with you 3 prose poems by the award-winning Bronka Nowicka translated from the Polish by Marek Kulig. They are part of [Nakarmić kamień](#) (*To Feed a Stone*, Biuro Literackie, 2015), a collection of prose poetry that won the Nike 2016 Literary Award, the most prestigious Polish literary prize. Full of vivid but intimate imagery with a slightly surreal twist, their length belies their depth, and they pack a punch. They question our relationships with the objects in our world and excite the reader's imagination. We hope you'll agree and they'll become your new favorites.

Speaking of favorites, our favorite thing to do in September is celebrate translations. There are thousands of ways to celebrate National Translation Month in 2019. We've developed this list of [30 ways to celebrate NTM](#) to get you started, but we're open to suggestions and encourage you to find your own way to celebrate. You don't need our permission to celebrate, just as you don't need anyone's permission to celebrate Black History Month, or National Ice Cream Month in July.

We'd love to hear from you! If you think of a way to celebrate National Translation Month in 2019, email us at nationaltranslationmonth@gmail.com. We're always open to any collaboration ideas. Find us on Twitter [@TranslateMonth](#), tag us using #TranslationMonth, join our mailing list, submit a translation month event, or like our [Facebook](#) page. And, most importantly, celebrate your favorite authors in translation this September and all year round.

—Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman

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Buttons

Grandma keeps her mom in a room with half a door. Half she cut off so she could keep tabs how the elder is getting along. She left alone the half with the lock. She turns it with a key, then tucks that into her bra. She won't give it to anyone lest they release such a plague unto this house.

The other week for a moment she took an eye off her: great-grandma cut up the blinds, put a bag of sugar into the fire. She thought it was coal—one and the other are hard. She disassembled the wardrobe: was looking for an apron because she's going to school. She's ninety years old, doesn't remember her own name, but the apron that you'd tie across the back, of course. If you don't lock her in, she'll turn everything upside down.

"You're being a little too quiet in there for me, mom," calls grandma to the hole in the doorframe.

"I shit myself." From the thin line of the half-door up pops a head.

"Then you'll have to wait."

Grandma won't shrug her duty. She won't overcook the meat. When you have madness under your roof, the rest must be normal. A great dinner belongs to the rest.

Into the kitchen falls a sweater. After it flies a skirt, nightdress, bra.

"Excuse me, miss, can you call my daughter? Because I'm standing here naked."

"I'll be right there, and I am your daughter."

"Not true. My daughter has black hair and is slender like stalk. Like this." Fingers appear above the half-door and grip in their pincers a centimeter of air. "You're grey and fat."

Grandma changes her mother. The diaper straps crackle on the hips.

"I'll die if you pay me well," says the old infant.

Grandma brings a bag of duvet buttons. Spills them on the floor.

"Enough?"

"Like I know. I have to count."

Sitting with my great-grandma on the floor, we count the buttons on our fingers.

"Have you ever seen this much money?" she asks.

When she's not looking, I stick them into my shoes, toss them under my shirt, swallow them. Let there be less of them. Too few for death.

Window Sill

The women, before they squeeze in line, sit their kids on the window sill. At the butcher's there are big windows, from which flies drip. They fall off the windows from overeating and old age. They lay and wither. With flies you can do a lot. The ones with shiny wings, arrange into a bead necklace. With the fat ones aim for the skinny, strike them onto the floor. I've got a fist full of them. Women peck at it. Their stares want to eat flies out of my hand. Women are a lot like chickens. They shuffle their feet, although they don't go anywhere. They extend and retract their necks to see the meat tossed on the counter. Heads up: there's a carcass being trimmed. Heads down: they flick open their purses. Women dig up change with their claws.

“Keep going, mo-mo-mo move yourselves up.”

They take legs, lungs, the heart.

“Whose?” asks a little boy, who's tired of counting flies.

Nylon threaded bags stretch open. Stomachs and breasts push up against backs.

“Mo-mo-mo-move up.”

The first ones in line see prices — “h-h-h-how much” they pass back to the blind rest. A hen wants something, but without the line. She has under her dress a sizable egg.

“Let her pass lest she lay it right here.”

I've decided I'll never be a woman. Even if on me breasts erupt — with time they will fall out, like baby teeth.

Spoon

My mother slices tomatoes, but they themselves bleed out. She mixes them around once to the left, once to the right. She says nothing to me.

Why are you allowed so little? You can't turn back time with a spoon. Nor can you using a wooden knobbed mill with a pepper-scented drawer, nor with a finger stirring the air. You can't link gardens.

If you could tie, like pieces of string, present and past gardens, in it would be me and my mother wearing an oversized, hand-me-down hat. We would say to each other our names and then go play house.

Earlier I'd take off of my mother that poor hat covering her eyes.

About the author



Bronka Nowicka (1974) was born in Radomsk, Poland. She is a film director, scriptwriter, and poet. She graduated in Film Directing from the Film School in Łódź and in Painting from the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, where she is now a PhD student in the Multimedia Department. She frequently experiments with new media: for example, using tomographics and tomovideo (graphics and video prepared with the use of a tomograph and x-rays). Her first book [*Nakarmić kamień*](#) (*To Feed a Stone*, Biuro Literackie, 2015), a collection of prose poetry, was awarded the Nike Literary Award, the most prestigious Polish literary prize, which had never before been awarded to a debut. Nowicka's texts have been translated into English, German, Czech, Russian and Estonian and will be published in these languages in 2017.

About the translator



Originally from Poland, **Marek Kulig** grew up in New Jersey and now lives in Massachusetts, where he once taught high school English and coached basketball. He currently writes for a local food magazine and tends bar. Marek has an MA in English Literature and has contributed to a handful of writers' workshops, residencies, and programs. A member of the Network of Eastern European Writers, he's read his poetry throughout New England and the NY-NJ-CT area.