

IT'S GOOD TO HAVE FRIENDS

We are in trouble. Despite our efforts, we can't find new accommodation. Mr Benati is at our door often. "When are you leaving my property?" he keeps asking.

"We have to accept Natek's invitation to move to their apartment," I say to my neighbour Monica. We are sitting at the kitchen table having morning tea.

Monica befriended us at the time when I could hardly express myself in English. She came over with her little son Johnny, and somehow she was able to make me understand that she would like him to play with Ruth.

From that day, we kept seeing each other, talking, laughing and miming when necessary to make things clear. Luckily, after three and a half years of being neighbours, we can communicate with each other now without miming.

Monica detests Mr Benati. It seems that most of our neighbours are annoyed at him for some reason or other. Perhaps they don't like his sick pet rooster running around.

Today, I can see that Monica wants to tell me

something. "I don't think there will be any problems with you living with Natek's family," she assures me. "But, the size of their flat may limit you taking your furniture there."

How did she guess what was on my mind at that moment, I wonder. Recently, we had paid off our debt for the furniture; the thought of disposing of it is hurtful. "We are trying to work it out," I say.

Monica claps her hands. "I have an idea," she says. "Our front room is nearly empty, so you can store everything there that you cannot take with you to Natek's!"

I look at her with disbelief. "I wonder how Ivan would react to that idea? Wouldn't he be angry?" I ask my friend.

"My husband is fond of you and Heniek, and he would be happy to be of assistance," she assures me. "We don't use that room at the moment, so the problem with furniture is solved and it is one less worry for you, Anna!" she laughs.

I look at Monica, but can't find the right words to say anything.

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Two weeks later. We are shifting today. Most of our furniture is already stored in Monica and Ivan's lounge room. We would never be able to accomplish it without the help of Mietek and Natek who spent the whole day packing and carrying our stuff. The

whole Benati family is standing in a row close to the gate, watching us silently. I am sitting on top of a large carton left in our bedroom. They won't let me carry anything. Monica has bought lots of fine white wool for me, and she has taught me how to knit. Now I keep busy knitting a singlet for my baby. I am glad that Hanka is taking care of Ruth today. It is a chance for my daughter to spend some time together with little Bianca.

Everything seems to be taken care of. We leave the house in good order. Even Mr Benati won't be able to find a reason to complain. Monica and Ivan stay with us when Heniek hands the house keys to our landlord. We are happy to see that our friends' presence discourages Mr Benati from making a last noisy performance. We close the gate behind us without looking back.

Monica puts her arm on my shoulder. "Anna, I would like both of you to have a drink with us before you go."

I am not sure what to do. "They have invited us for a drink," I say to Heniek.

My husband is embarrassed. "Thanks, Monica. But it's a bit late for today. All of us, including you are tired. Perhaps some other time?"

"He is right, Mon," says Ivan. "Just look at poor Anna! Let's invite them for next Sunday."

Monica nods her head. "Okay then. Next Sunday lunch, and no excuses," she smiles.

Heniek turns to Ivan. “Before we go ... I just want to thank both of you for everything.”

“Don’t mention it, mate. It’s okay,” Ivan says simply.



Ruthie and Anya