

## Everybody loves Saint Domnius

By Marina Jurišić

It is a warm day in May and the inhabitants of Split are getting ready for the Feast of Saint Domnius. The city is decorated and the Croatian flag is flying from the bell tower of Saint Domnius. Everything is ready for the procession and the Mass. Merchants are setting up stalls where you can buy whatever your heart wants: wooden spoons, baskets, knives, *klepetaljke* (toys in the shape of a bird or a butterfly on two wheels that clap wings when pushed on a stick), flower pots, *bruškin* (floor scrubbing brush), *balote* (bowling balls), *bukare* (wooden cups for drinking wine in taverns).

Duje is not very focused on the celebration. When he was a child, it made him happy. After all, he was named after Saint Domnius (Duje in Croatian), the patron of Split. Now that he is older, it seems to him that people just want to buy things, and eat a lot and drink a lot, and that the Feast of Saint Domnius is no longer holy and beautiful as it used to be in the past. May 7th is an ordinary work day anyway. So this year again, he is trying to avoid the Riva and the city center as much as possible, which is difficult. His apartment on Matejuška is too close to all the events, and now even Mara is obsessed with this day which he hates. She wants him to be her companion and part of the crowd.

Mara spent her whole life in Sweden. She would come to Croatia only in the summer to visit her grandparents, who live in Duje's neighbourhood. Mara fell in love with her parents' hometown, so she decided to move to Split and go to Medical Faculty. Duje and Mara do everything together and they have become really good friends. This is her first celebration of St. Domnius. She has bought a new dress and yesterday she went to the hairdressers'. She has organized everything so that she could attend *Tombola*, the main event of the day, at exactly 7 p.m. It is a competition in which people get tickets with numbers. They circle some of them and if their numbers are chosen, they win a prize. Duje thinks it is a stupid game, but he does not want to say no to Mara.

Mara greets him under the window, enthusiastically. They take a walk together along the Riva. It is crowded and Mara stops at a stall to buy gummy bears. While he is waiting for her, an old man starts talking to Duje.

- And do you know why St. Domnius is celebrated today and not on the day of his martyrdom on 10th April?

Duje remembers something from elementary school, but he does not want to go into details. He just wants to leave as soon as possible, so he replies:

- Yes, yes, I know.

The old man is not happy with the answer, so he continues his story. Mara is still choosing gummy bears. She would like to have the sour ones.

- As Lent (the forty-weekday period before Easter when people stop doing one activity they like, for example, they don't eat chocolate, or they stop playing video games) usually falls in the period around 10th April, when saints cannot be celebrated according to religious regulations, the celebration of St. Domnius was transferred to May 7.

Duje is bored with the old man. Mara finally joins them and the old man is excited to continue his story.

- Can you see this bell tower? We all call it Saint Domnius. But there are two churches dedicated to St. Domnius in Split. Do you know where they are?

-No, Mara replies.

She thought that the Cathedral of St. Domnius was the only church in the world dedicated to the saint.

- There is also a St. Domnius church and a small chapel situated in the neighbourhood of Kman, near my apartment. Why are they there? An old legend says that one day Christians decided to secretly move the bones of Saint Domnius and their magical powers from the basilica at Manastirine to the Split Cathedral. The church was built at the place where they stopped, and under it there is a source of clear and cold water, which can help people who are sick.

- Oh, this sounds very interesting!, Mara says. We need to visit that place. Is it far ?

-No, nothing is far in Split, says the old man.

- But there is another interesting legend that says that people could not lift the coffin with the saint's body. They thought that bad people could not carry something holy, and they left it to the priests. But they could not carry it either.

- Ha! So how did it get to the cathedral? By some miracle?, Mara asks.

- Not really. Someone came up with the idea of asking children to carry it, because children are innocent, you know. And they succeeded .

Mara is ready for her next meal. It is time for *ćevapčići* (a kind of meat typical for the Balkans). Duje is thinking about the green peas and beef stew that his mum has cooked for lunch, like every year on this day.

- Saint Domnius is powerful, the old man continues. He always protects his people. It was 1647 when the Turks came near Split, reaching the fortress where there were only a few Christian soldiers. Fearing the powerful Turkish military force, they began to pray to St. Domnius and the other protectors of Split, when – suddenly – military hats of Christian soldiers started appearing everywhere. According to the legend, the Turks were scared because they believed many soldiers were waiting for them behind rocks and trees and they ran away without conquering Split.

After buying a wooden spoon at the market, it is time for Tombola. Mara bought the cards for it the day before. All the cafés are full, but they finally find a free table. The old man is at the table with them, of course. Mara thinks he is lonely, so she does not want to tell him to leave. A woman is reading the

numbers and Mara is listening carefully. You would think it is easy to follow Tombola because you only need to know numbers up to 90. But no! In Split you sometimes need a translator.

- Holy Mande!, they hear from the loudspeakers.

Every player knows that this phrase refers to number 22, which is St. Magdalena'day. It is celebrated every year on July 22nd.

And then another number.

- Nono!

The old man whispers to Duje: It's number 90. But Duje knows that already. He is looking at his card. He needs one number to get *cinkvina* (five numbers in the same row which would lead to a prize).

- Women's legs!

He circles number 77. It is not his winning number, but somehow he is happy.

Mara still wants to go to the cathedral to feel the powers of St. Domnius, about whom she has learned so much. They say goodbye to the old man, although they have gotten used to his company, and go on their way.

While they are walking around the town, Duje wonders if Mara might be the one he is going to marry. If only Saint Domnius would give me a sign!, he thinks. At that moment, the bells from the Split Cathedral start ringing and soon the bells of other city churches join them.

There is no person in Split who does not like Saint Domnius and Duje thinks that he will give this day another chance. With Mara everything is more fun. He looks at her and smiles while the cantata *The Transmission of St. Domnius*, composed by the scientist, musician, doctor and writer Julije Bajamonti, echoes throughout the Peristyle.