

THE CAROLERS

By Veronica Badea

CHARACTERS:

WHO	DESCRIPTION
COSTEL	Young man
MITICĂ	Young man, Costel's cousin/friend
TUDOR	Young man, friend
VASILICA	Costel's younger sister, very girly, but tough and intense. Ideally very young or young-looking
MOTHER	Tough, no-nonsense, rules the house with an iron fist
FATHER	
UNCLE	

Somewhere in a Romanian village. It's the day before Christmas Eve. The three young men, COSTEL, MITICĂ and TUDOR are holding a meeting at COSTEL's house. Possibly in the shed? They are preparing for their caroling duty the next day. TUDOR is fiddling with a drum, checking it etc. COSTEL is wearing a peasant's/worker's cap.

COSTEL: Ok, so first we go caroling to the Mayor's house.

MITICĂ: I thought we were supposed to go to the priest's house first.

COSTEL: No, the Mayor is first.

MITICĂ: But my grandad said...

COSTEL: Your grandad? Huh. With all due respect, your grandad belongs to a different era. It's the Mayor who's the most important now.

(TUDOR has finished with the drum and put it on a table/crate. He now sits down quietly watching the other two argue).

MITICĂ: Fine. Ok. The Mayor is first. So we go to the priest next.

COSTEL: Nope. We go to the teacher next.

(VASILICA comes in surreptitiously, and busies herself around the table/crate with the drum. The boys take no notice of her).

MITICĂ: What?! No, that can't be, I'm pretty sure Father Botezatu is more important than Mr. Pamfil!

COSTEL: Well, my dad said that after the Mayor we go to the teacher's house.

MITICĂ: Oh I see. My grandad belongs to a different era, but your dad is very modern. Huh. I say we go to the priest's house next. I do hope to get married one day, you know?

COSTEL: What's that got to do with anything?

MITICĂ: He's the one who's going to do the ceremony in church, right?

COSTEL: Yea, so?

MITICĂ: So what if he says no, Mitică Apetrii can't get married in church cause he disrespected God's representative on Earth?

COSTEL: He can't do that! Can he?

MITICĂ: Remember two years ago when he didn't want to bury old Mr. Mititelu cause he never went to church and blasphemed every time he saw Father Botezatu passing by? Mrs. Mititelu was desperate! It took all the pious old women in the village bringing him baked goods and eggs and wine and begging him to be charitable in order for him to finally give in and bury the 'heretic', as he called Mr. Mititelu. I don't want that happening to me.

COSTEL: But you're not a heretic, Mitică, and you're always polite to Father Botezatu and you do go to church from time to time...

MITICĂ: Yea, for Easter and Christmas. I'm sure that's not enough to make me a worthy Christian in Father Botezatu's eyes.

COSTEL: I think you worry for nothing. Besides, your grandma bakes the best cozonac in this whole area and is a staple at church, I'm sure he'll do it for her sake at least. Teacher is second.

MITICĂ: Oh for crying out loud... I say we call a vote.

COSTEL: A vote?

MITICĂ: Yea, we decide this democratically.

COSTEL: Ok. I vote for the teacher.

MITICĂ: And I vote for the priest.

They both watch TUDOR expectantly. He smiles and shrugs.

TUDOR: I don't care.

COSTEL: Dude, you have to vote.

TUDOR: I exercise my democratic right not to vote.

MITICĂ: We're stuck then. We need a third vote. Come on, man! Help us out!

TUDOR just smiles and shrugs.

VASILICA (*approaching them*): I vote teacher!

The guys look at her, surprised.

MITICĂ (*disgusted*): Costel, your sister is being a pest again.

COSTEL (*annoyed, although slightly pleased she voted like him*): Yea, I know. (*to Vasilica*) Who's asking you? And stop sneaking up on us like that! Go away and... do some useful girl stuff, will ya?

VASILICA: I want to go caroling with you this year!

The guys' jaws drop. TUDOR starts laughing.

COSTEL: Whaaaaa?!

MITICĂ: But... you're a girl!

VASILICA: So what? I want to go caroling!

TUDOR is still very amused, COSTEL looks crestfallen, MITICĂ sighs and tries to explain.

MITICĂ: Vasilica, you know caroling is only done by men. No woman has ever...

VASILICA: Prove it.

MITICĂ: What?!

VASILICA: Prove it that no woman has ever gone caroling.

MITICĂ: Well, I mean... it's just never been... I've never... it would be blasphemy! Bad luck!

COSTEL (*out of his daze now*): Yea, imagine what people would say! It's unthinkable!

MITICĂ (*hanging on to Costel's idea*): Yea! Father Botezatu would probably chase us away from his house and curse us forever! (*horrified*) I would never get married in church!

VASILICA: I really don't see why you want to get married in church so badly, it's not like you're a true believer anyway, you just go to church cause your grandma forces you to go for Easter and Christmas, otherwise she won't leave you the house in her will.

MITICĂ (*even more horrified, looking around*): Don't say that! It's not true! (*louder*) I am a true believer! I just... I just don't have the time!

COSTEL: Look, this is silly. We've got better things to do than argue about a girl who wants to go caroling. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve and we're not ready yet!

TUDOR: The costumes are ready. And the drum is in good shape.

COSTEL (*glares at him then looks at Vasilica*). NO! Is that clear? Now go away, you're bothering us.

VASILICA *doesn't move. She looks angry/upset.*

COSTEL: Besides, there's no place for you in the group, we have already allocated all the roles. Scram.

TUDOR: She could bang the drum.

The other two guys look at him in disbelief. COSTEL wants to say something but can't bring himself to speak, he's too shocked.

TUDOR: My younger brother says he doesn't want to do it anymore, so...

COSTEL (*shouting*): NO! Caroling is only for men! That's the tradition from way before we were born, way before our great-grandparents were born, and that is the way it shall stay! Is that clear? The lore and costumes get passed on from father to son and no woman – girl – is ever going to be worthy of being a caroler! (*to VASILICA*) Now piss off!

VASILICA *runs out of the room, almost in tears.*

MITICĂ: Dude... you didn't have to be so mean.

COSTEL: She wasn't going to drop her stupid idea otherwise, was she? And this idiot (*points to TUDOR, who looks at him slightly disgusted*) was going to have her bang the drum! I mean... Jesus!

MITICĂ: Don't take the Lord's name in vain, Costel.

COSTEL: Oh, shut up, you „true believer”... It's not the Lord's name anyway, it's his son's.

MOTHER *walks in like a fury, followed by VASILICA. The guys freeze. COSTEL seems to shrink under her gaze.*

MOTHER (*thundering voice*): Now, what is this that I hear that you won't let Vasilica go caroling with you?!

COSTEL (*small voice*): well... she's a girl, mom...

MOTHER: So what if is she's a girl?

COSTEL (*almost wailing*): She can't go caroling, mooom! Only men go caroling, it's the thing... the tradition and all!

MOTHER: That is no excuse to be horrible to your sister! Apologise to her right now!

MITICĂ *and TUDOR snicker.*

COSTEL: Whaaaaat?

MOTHER: Apologise to your sister. Now.

COSTEL: But... but...

MOTHER: No buts. Unless you want to sleep in the cowshed.

COSTEL: Bu... (*catches himself*)... it's cold in the cowshed, mom!

MOTHER: Apologise.

The other two guys are still amused. COSTEL looks grim, but turns towards VASILICA and mutters something.

MOTHER: I didn't hear you.

COSTEL (*very small voice*): I said I'm sorry.

MOTHER: What?

COSTEL (*loud*): I'm sorry, ok? I'm sorry!

MOTHER: For...?

COSTEL looks confused. MITICĂ leans over and whispers something into his ear.

COSTEL: For... being horrible to her?

MOTHER: Good, now tell her that. The whole thing. And mean it.

COSTEL takes a deep breath, and turns towards VASILICA, who looks triumphant.

COSTEL (*between clenched teeth*): I am sorry I was horrible to you earlier. Ok?

MOTHER: Good. Now, I understand Tudor has suggested that Vasilica should bang the drum, is that right? (*she smiles towards TUDOR. The other guys are throwing him murderous looks, especially COSTEL. TUDOR smiles and nods*).

COSTEL (*the cowshed still looming in this mind, but knowing that someone has to sacrifice for the greater good*): Mom. I have apologised, ok? Bu... **However**... she can't go caroling with us. I'm sorry. She's a girl. Only men go caroling. It's been like that for ages and ages and who are we to change that? There must have been a reason for it, when they decided this, long time ago... like, I don't know, it's late at night, and there are wild animals out and about and it's dangerous out there, and men can sacrifice themselves but women have to stay at home where they are protected... that kind of thing.

MITICĂ (*who has been nodding vigorously throughout his speech*): Yea! That kind of thing!

MOTHER: The only wild animal out and about at night in our village is Mr Puiu, and he's a harmless old soul. Besides, that's why you have the drum and you're making all that

noise, don't you? No self-preserving wild animal would come near the village that night. *(she snorts)* Not to mention your singing...

COSTEL *(wailing again)*: But what will people say, mom? Letting a girl in our caroling group? We'll become the laughing stock of the village!

MITICĂ *(mournfully)*: I may never get married at all, church or no church...

MOTHER sighs.

MOTHER: Oh, you silly boys... Alright, here. *(She yanks Costel's hat off and gathers Vasilica's hair under it)*. There you go. She's a boy now.

COSTEL: Wha?! She can't be a boy. I mean, people would know, wouldn't they? Everyone knows everyone and everyone knows I am my father's only son.

MOTHER *(scoffs)*: Knowing your father, I wouldn't be so sure...

COSTEL: Mom!

VASILICA: Oh, stop snivelling like a baby. You have a brother now. *(she grins at him, posturing)*

TUDOR is amused. COSTEL looks shocked.

VASILICA: What? I am a boy now. Get used to it.

MOTHER: If she says she's a boy, then she's a boy and I'd like to see anyone dare say otherwise *(She glares at the guys. COSTEL has his head in his hands)*

MITICĂ: Yea, but she has... I mean, she doesn't have... well... you know.

MOTHER: Mitică Apetrii, don't make me come over there to check what you have got or haven't got! She's a boy now and that's it! You're taking her caroling tomorrow.

COSTEL *(weakly)*: Yea, a boy named Vasilica... huh.

VASILICA *(trying a lower voice)*: My name is Vasile.

MOTHER: There you go. Your brother Vasile.

COSTEL rolls his eyes.

MOTHER: You are taking your younger brother caroling tomorrow, and I don't want to hear any more about this, is that clear?

MOTHER storms out. FATHER and UNCLE come in at the same time and have to move out of her way. They look at each other then shrug and approach the boys.

FATHER: How's it going, boys? Ready to go caroling tomorrow? Shall we rehearse the songs again? Uncle Costache and I are here to help you in case you have any problems.

The guys don't reply. COSTEL and MITICĂ look dejected, TUDOR has brought the drum from the table/crate and is talking quietly with VASILICA, instructing her.

FATHER: What's wrong?

COSTEL: Dad. Meet your younger son, Vasile (*pointing to Vasilica*). He's coming with us tomorrow.

FATHER (*confused and embarrassed*): Younger son? heheh... surely not... (*looks sideways at UNCLE, who is amused, then approaches Vasilica*) Um... who's your mom, sonny boy?

VASILICA (*rolling her eyes*): Mom is mom, dad...

FATHER: I mean, what's her name...

UNCLE: Ere, the boy looks just like Vasilica, your daughter!

The coin drops for FATHER.

COSTEL (*glumly*): Yea, he was Vasilica until 2 minutes ago. Now he's Vasile.

FATHER: Really? Cor. Go figure. God moves in mysterious ways, doesn't he? So now I have two boys? Well, what do you know! Heheh. Welcome to the carolers' group, sonny! (*He clips a slap on VASILICA's shoulder, almost toppling her over*) Are you going to bang the drum? That's an important role, that.

VASILICA grabs the drum from TUDOR, beaming with pride. FATHER looks happy.

UNCLE: Alright, boys, so what's the plan for tomorrow? Have you decided in what order you are going through the village?

COSTEL and MITICĂ look at each, mouths open.

UNCLE: Well? Cat got your tongue?

VASILICA: We go first to the Mayor's house, then to the teacher and then to the priest. And from there we can just go to the end of the village and back to visit everyone else.

FATHER (*clips her on the shoulder again*): That's my boy, well done! Good planning! Vasile, right?

VASILICA: Yes, dad. Vasile.

FATHER: Well, Vasile, it looks like the future of caroling is in good hands. (*to COSTEL and MITICĂ*) You two, what are you sitting there like muppets for? Go get the costumes, I want to see you guys rehearsing, come on, chop-chop!

COSTEL and MITICĂ go out, still moping, followed by TUDOR.

UNCLE: I'd better go check on them, last year they duelled with the canes until they broke them... (*he exits*).

VASILICA: Um, dad?

FATHER: Yes, hon... I mean, yes, son, what is it?

VASILICA: I'm not sure I want to be a boy all the time. I mean, it's cool sometimes, but... I don't know...

FATHER: That's alright. You can be a boy today and tomorrow, and then you'll see. The times are changing, you're not stuck now to one thing or another, like we used to be.

(the light starts fading out over his words) Mind you, when I was a kid I wanted to be a wolf and run with the pack under the open sky, in the forest... might have been a bit dangerous but who knows... heheh...