

# MARTOR



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## Dorobanți private market

**C. T. market seller, 54 years old**  
**Interview done by Șerban Anghelescu**

When I went there for the very first time I was already working for “Arta public?”, I had a job, but she said, “Godmother – ‘cause she’s Silvia’s godmother; one of them anyway – come with us to the market”. And there was a devilish Gypsy woman and a drunkard sleeping there in a room they had given her. They cooked there and everything, you know, all in that room? There were rats there. Well, in the end the manager invested in the place, modernized it and had tiles put on the walls and floors, it was the most beautiful market at the time, a real place of luxury. The first private market in the whole country it was.

She says, “Do you want to come along? “Yes, I do”, I answer. “Alright, be there at 9 in the morning”, she says. I went and I found that Stanca, the cleaning lady, was drunk. She says, “What are you doing here? Have you come to take my job?” “Woman, you must be crazy”, I say, “leave me be”. I phone Tania and say, “What am I to do now?” She says, “I can’t make it today, so go with Stanca and she’ll show you how to cash in”. She was with some men, ‘cause whenever she found one, she wouldn’t let him go for days. So, I was left with the Gypsy woman. I thought the manager would come and show me how things were done, and how to cash in. I had never done that before. So we got started. I say, “How do you cash in here?” She says, “Not

here, ‘cause they won’t give us enough for a drink”. I felt sick to my stomach. “How much should we cash from the guy with the corn flower?” That was when the merchants usually came. “Nope, be serious, he’ll bring us beer at the office soon.” Man, I thought that if I told Tania about this, she would drop dead. At a certain moment I went really mad and I went to Tania and told her, “If the Gypsy won’t let me cash in, I’m outta here”. Tania phoned her and said, “Stanca, you let her cash in, you hear?” “What? She’s here to take my job! She should go.” In the end, she cracked. I let her do her tricks with one or two merchants, so that she could get something to drink, and then I cashed in the taxes and took the money straight to the manager, as she lived across the street. When she saw me coming, she said, “Why, godmother, that much money?” Stanca wouldn’t bring her a dime.

The tax was 15 000 lei per stall. When I was hired, the stalls were made of concrete. Later on they brought stalls made of tiles, which they had taken from Floreasca, and then they ordered those that we have now somewhere in Transylvania. Then we had people coming from Galați Market and from other cities to ask us about the place. I worked there for six months. I got angry and I left, ‘cause I already had a job. A month later I was called back and I worked there for another eight months. All janitors there got in trou-

ble because the walls were covered in tiles. It looked great, brand new and expensive. We had a cleaning lady and I used to tell her, “Sanda, please clean the tiles today”. “No, I won’t, lady Tanța!” She wouldn’t do it and she would say that to your face. “Well”, I told her, “if you won’t do it, I’ll fire you”. The manager was in Greece at the time. I could have fired her then, but she kept coming back and cried her eyes out until the manager hired her back.

The merchants used to wait for me to open the market at 6 in the morning. At ten in the evening I would close it, especially in summer. They were real merchants back then; they would sell their stuff in front of the market and straight from the car. Now we have some crooks that buy cheaper produce from Obor and Rahova Markets and then sell it here. The peasants living outside Bucharest, from Teleorman County sold nuts and those from Moldova brought beans, and even endives; those from Baia Mare brought cheese and milk. Everybody knew that. They would come from outside Bucharest, on Tuesdays there were two people coming from Baia Mare, and then another two on Thursday. At the beginning there were even shepherds from Sibiu coming to us to sell their produce. It was so beautiful! We had uncle Istrate who would even play the shepherd’s flute. I was having so much fun! He drank hot beer, and I had never seen anything like that before. In December people would bring ham and lard bacon, but they had their clients who would ask them, “Have you brought *palinca*<sup>1</sup>?” and they would show them the drink. I knew what was going on. I knew all the time, but I wasn’t to blame if people sold their produce illegally. There were a lot of people coming from the Republic of Moldavia and there simply weren’t enough stalls for all of them. They thought I wouldn’t rent them any. They sold vacuum cleaners, air conditioning equipment, bed sheets, underwear, beds, virtually anything. They even exchanged money. They

brought salami, caviar, Manchurian caviar. They knew that the police weren’t after them. They just came to me and said, “Hey, we’re here!”

We had storehouses and things were as civilized as they could be. It’s such a shame that they fired the manager. They just threw her out as if she had been a dog. The city hall sent the special troops and threw her out. She took them to court and their case is judged by the Court in Strasbourg now. That’s too bad; she worked her fingers to the bone! Honestly she did. She worked; she lived and breathed for this business. All the money she made she invested in the market. She made all the changes: new ceilings, new tiles, new fridges and all the rest. The new and civilized offices were built thanks to her. There used to be little rooms there, rat infested and in ruins. Mayor Gherasim is a jerk. Tania paid for everything, the central heating and the storage. Once you would have frozen to death waiting in line at 4 in the morning. Now we have a boiler and hot water. She had imagination. She had worked at the market since she was 17, and she had loads of experience. She had seen all the markets in the city: Floreasca, Dorobanți, 1 Mai, Amzei. She had worked with the scales; she had collected taxes and supervised the market. I was a new comer. She had traveled to Spain, Greece, Turkey, and Hungary, and she copied what she had seen there.

There were all sorts of inspectors coming at the market; police inspectors, finance inspectors. It was all so cute. We would receive them, we would prepare some hot coffee and chat like civil people. I had a mighty fine office with the latest music playing all day long. I had a library, a phone, and a cash register. At the beginning I only had the receipts. Then I evolved. I was fashionable, always on top. We had a book stand, a flower shop, leather goods and shoes. Once we had some Italians with “pancetta”. Their boss called me *signora* and everybody has called me *signora* ever since. We sold cooked meat too, but

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional alcoholic drink made from fruit.

it smelled awful. Everything was very expensive. There was a fishmonger's, a butcher's, a baker's and a confectioner's. We were the first to use plastic stalls and they all followed our example. We cleaned the place with a hose and with washing powder. Sometimes I would go back soaking wet. In the evening there was only me and the janitors left. Poor devils, I tortured them! They missed the last bus home too. Each morning we had the garbage collectors driving in. I paid for each cube metre of garbage but sometimes they cheated me. I was the one to prepare the buckets with the chlorine and the detergent 'cause otherwise they would have stolen some of it. I helped with the cleaning too. I would stay until 1 in the morning sometimes. They would say, "It's easy for you, Tanța, 'cause you live nearby ..."

"And, so what? Wouldn't you want me to move to the country just to please you?" I told them to make it quick but to do their job well. We had some bodyguards who stole from the peasants, the bloody bastards! They stole like there was no tomorrow. And now theft has become a fashion. It's difficult to work with people. The janitors got drunk. But bottom line is that it wasn't all that bad. The peasants were very nice, but there was a whole Gypsy mafia around the market. I never took a bribe in my whole life. The peasants were indeed very nice and behaved like gentlemen. They were eager to cater to your every need.

(The host intervenes.)

Tanța would sometimes come to Floreasca Market and would leave with 4-5 boxes of green salad. I had no idea why she did that. At that time, salad sold for, let's say, ten lei and they sold it there for twenty.

I was sent to get that salad, make no mistake. I met somebody over at some friends' place. They brought pigs from a farm. I don't know if the pigs were stolen but he sold them cheap ... He asked if I wanted half a pig and then I



bought meat for some of my neighbours too. Half a pig was for Florica. When we left here, everybody was dead drunk. We were all piled up on top of the pigs. Florica also gave us something to drink. We arrived at the house of the doctor's friend, a four-storey house with a narrow staircase. And can you imagine what he told us? He said that he couldn't carry heavy loads 'cause he was sick. And the wife was sick too. If you had seen me, you'd have fainted. The doctor and I were busy carrying the pig by its legs and the guy said, "Lift the pig up, man, 'cause it will get contaminated!" Fuck your contamination, man, and I pulled him down the stairs. Our backs hurt for three days. We didn't get the pig's back muscles 'cause he stole them, but God didn't help him. His house caught fire and burnt to the ground.

The manager took regular trips to Greece and she would let me and Doru to take care of her dog. We had the key to the house. The dog would only eat Sibiu salami and beef. I had driven people crazy 'cause I would go over and say, "The manager sent me to get a slice of beef." "For whom?" "For the dog?" "May it burn in hell!" The dog was a wretched street bitch which got sick one day. Its tits had swollen so I phoned the manager in Greece. "Hello! What should I

do?” “Call the doctors, money is no object”. The doc gave me an ointment, and I spent my day salving the bitch’s tits. The bloody hound from hell was a vicious beast. I would take it to the market and kept it with me. Nobody dared enter the office, so I couldn’t get a bribe anymore because of it. When the manager came over, we were all over the bloody dog looking bright and cheerful. Mammy’s Năița. When the bitch disappeared, she posted notices all over the market, on every wall and in every window. She offered a reward and put up a newspaper ad. Some people phoned her in the middle of the night just to make fun of her. People at the market mocked her too and told her, “Madam, I saw the dog somewhere in Călărași and we called its name before every house fence”. I heard some say that they had seen it in Scânteia Square.

Work at the market was a torture for me. I was up to my eye balls in it despite all advantages. I would indeed take something home with me, like salmon for Grigore to cook. He made some stew and soup and there would still be some left. It was huge and also expired. We had a check once and the inspectors found expired pieces of Czechoslovakian salami and bacon, so the doctor came over to me and said, “That’s it, you take the bag to the office and pour chlorine and detergent on the produce”. He cut the salami in halves: one, two three pieces. I plucked up my courage and told him, like, sir, I beg of you, stop cutting the salami! “Why the hell do you want with it, Tanța, it’s expired!” “Give it to me. I’ll eat it, and I’ll be alright, you’ll see!” “Then you’ll be responsible. You go to the garbage bin and you throw all this away”. I took the bag straight to the car trunk. That salami would have fed all my neighbours. I brought back a bag full of beef and pastrami once. Doc, do you remem-

ber that I once called for Grigore when those guys were throwing away a huge box with greens? The bloody bastards wouldn’t lower the prices and they preferred to throw the produce away when it spoiled! I saw them throw boxes full of grapes in the morning! And what about the mustard? I brought home countless boxes with Dijon mustard jars! It was enough to last my neighbours a whole year.

I didn’t have time to eat at home. I would leave at half past five, as I had to open the market at 6. When I opened the door, the peasants were right behind me pushing and almost suffocating me just to get a better place, and all I wanted was to turn on the lights! Now they have become a bunch of gentlemen and they never arrive before nine. Each has a stall and scales. When they used the market scales I had to ask for their IDs and I held them until they left. But can you guess what they did? They would leave the ID there and then disappear with the scales. I would call the police immediately but they never listened. Fancy the cops minding my bloody scales! I was supposed to pay for the damage but I never did that. At the end of the day, after they had sold their stuff, they would bring the scales back together with some fruit, cherry or apricots. Sometimes it was tomatoes, cucumbers, pepperoni, vegetable marrows or carrots. They would bring me boxes with sausages. The doc here was living the grand life back then. We would get checks from the police or the Finance Guard, and we would receive them with glasses with whiskey and cognac, and we would fill up their car trunks with stuff. We kind of “brain-washed” them.

*Translated by Alina Popescu*