

## **Grandma and the Big Bad Wolf**

I remember the times when I had a sleepover at my grandma's and that she used to tell me stories at night when I was too scared to sleep. How she told me of far away castles and eerie forests, about heroes and primarily about heroines. She told me that these heroines were also scared sometimes and that it was okay to be so. I really enjoyed these stories, but often wondered why so many grown-ups seemed to be worried all the time and I thought that they might not have found their happy ending just yet. My grandma tried to make me understand that sometimes happy endings look different from what you expect and therefore even yourself may not recognise it at first. I didn't understand it back then.

I also remember how we stood in the kitchen together and baked many, many cookies for Christmas. When I close my eyes, I can still see her standing there with her kitchen apron tight around her hips, cutting out the biscuits we made. I ate so many of them right away that I got sick and my mother often grumbled with my grandma but you could see her already smiling when she turned away from my Granny, because the three of us knew that we would do it the exact same way in the following year.

I remember that my grandma knitted all the time. She was sitting in her armchair and I watched fascinated how the needles were doing their part. I can still hear the sound of it. The sound of home. Steady like a heartbeat back then. One day she knitted a beautiful red bobble hat for me. In the first year it was way too big for my head but that didn't stop me from wearing it anyway, even in school. My classmates therefore used to laugh at me and called me 'redcap' or such things, but that didn't really bother me at all, because I never owned a thing in my life I have been more proud of. And when I, at last, grew out of the bobble hat I used to cry until my grandma had made me a bigger one.

The thing is I am the one who remembers these moments, but my grandma doesn't remember at all.

First, we thought her confusion was just a normal reaction to her age and of course it was.

It began with her messing up birthday dates. That was no real problem for we could easily remind her on the day before, so we didn't really pay that much attention to it. And that she couldn't remember the recipe for my favourite cookies was odd but on the other hand who could remember so many unimportant things when having 88 lived years in your head to remember? The fact that she couldn't handle difficult situations any longer in her own didn't occur to me as very odd. She had been on her own for so long then and I thought it was normal that she wasn't capable of the things she used to be when she was younger, because that is just

life, isn't it? However, it was okay for me and I thought it was okay for her as well. I often made jokes about it to comfort her. My mother sometimes used to cook nice things for my grandma and sent me to her with these to cheer her up. And these things really helped at first. If my Granny was more delighted about the food or me visiting her was difficult to tell, but didn't matter to me. I just enjoyed the extra time with her.

At that point we weren't aware of the fact that she couldn't take care of herself anymore, so we went on like this for a long time not realising it. And then something terrible happened.

My grandma forgot not only her memories or routines of her daily life, but parts of herself. This was the worst thing for me. Realising that a little part, even when it was a very tiny one, of my grandma was gone and might never return. When even my mother couldn't ignore it any further we called the doctor. His diagnosis was clear. Alzheimer. Or how I called it: The Big Bad Wolf, who was eating my grandma, at least just tiny bits of her, but continuously. And he couldn't be stopped. Ever.

Of course, it was clear to us that with this diagnosis she couldn't live alone anymore and despite her protest she had to move from her home to ours.

Things went on in a rather unusual routine. We helped her get up in the morning and we cooked her favourite food. Whenever I told her to take her medicine, she would disagree. Whenever she told me that she needed to go home, I would disagree. Different day, same problems. I reminded her of normal activities, which meant eating correctly, drinking enough water, be nice to everyone, getting food during the day, not at night, sleeping in the night, not during the day. Sometimes she recognised me, most days she didn't. On some days the wolf was so prominent that I could feel him watching me through my Granny's eyes. On other days he was barely noticeable. The difficulty was that you never knew which day you had before you. The doctor came, the doctor left. "Everything's fine. Your grandma is in the best condition." *Because it's the wolf, not her. Don't you see these big bad eyes of him and the claws that make Granny hurt?* I wanted to ask him, but of course I didn't. "Great. Thanks for coming. See you next week.", I said instead. The situation frustrated me more than her. *What about our happy ending?* I sometimes wanted to scream at her. *What about the stories you used to tell me and their better outcomes?* But what was the point of all that? She wouldn't even remember the Fairy Tales she told me and what was worse she wouldn't even recognise me.

Time went by and I started to accept that there was no hope. And instead of loving my Granny I simply hated the wolf. We just got on with our routine. Sometimes screaming at each other, sometimes ignoring one another. Loud voices, empty hearts.

But one day, when I entered the room, something was different. I knew it because of how she looked at me, smiling, as if she was seeing me again after a very long time. I was a little puzzled at first, not knowing what to make out of it. *Did she mistake me for another person?* I was wondering. *Was the wolf playing tricks on me?* But then she began to speak and I recognised her voice. Her own. Not the one of the wolf. “This bobble hat still looks so beautiful on you”, she told me “It makes me very happy that you wear it so often.” I smiled at her. Did she really remember something? “Oh... You mean my hat? I wear it often. It always reminds me of you.” “I hope so, I knitted it only for you, so long ago.” “You remember this?” “Of course I do. How could I ever forget?” I smiled. She really remembered it. She remembered me. Just a tiny bit, but it was still there. When I left the room a little later I glanced at her. She was already asleep. “It doesn’t matter when the day comes that you might forget it, Granny” I told her, “I’ll keep it for the both of us.”

In that moment I suddenly realised that although there was this Big Bad Wolf that had captured my grandma, he still wasn’t part of her at all, he just needed to become a part of our lives in order to help my grandma and ourselves to be able to deal with him. He might not let my grandma go ever again but that doesn’t mean we can’t handle him. And therefore, we need to accept him so that my grandma herself can accept him. And that means sometimes he’s there but it also means sometimes he’s not and these times we have to value.

I then understood what the stories, my grandma told me, once were about and what she really wanted me to understand. That your happy ending might not be as typical as in the fairy tales, maybe even to not have a happy ending the whole time at all, but to appreciate it when you have it sometimes and remember it when times come where there might be none.