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Age 28

### **Indian Grandmother**

The sun was shining brightly on that warm day in June. As she looked down at the pink and black marble slate grave marker that had been the only grandmother she had ever known, a sense of wonderment fell over her. Beneath the earth lied the remains of a broken warrior princess that she knew nothing about. Robbed of her Indian grandmother at an early age, she had only the nebulous stories of her father. His recollections of a life long before she existed, where sugary recreations of what she now knew was a time in his life that he himself took great measures in escaping...

As she stood in the glare of the afternoon sun, looking down at the unkempt grave, she prayed for a miracle. She prayed for a resurrection of old ghosts that would somehow lift the shroud of mystery that fell over her family, enabling her to figure out how all of the intricate pieces of this broken life fit together. She prayed for a deeper understanding of a haunted past that she only knew about in fragmented pieces. She prayed for her grandmother's soul that was lost so many years ago in the residential school system...

When she was done praying, she stood there, in St. Clement's cemetery, for a few more minutes focusing on the name etched into the pink and black marble slate. She tried to look for a sign that God had heard her pleas. A sign that perhaps there was a hint of something more than synthetic accounts of this mysterious woman buried beneath the earth. She stood there in complete and utter silence for what seemed like an eternity, pleading for answers.

Yet, in the end there was nothing.

That night, as the moon illuminated the starless sky, she laid in her bed thinking about her day at the cemetery. She scolded herself for feeling resentful to God for not

giving her the answers that she had fiercely prayed for. Yet, as disappointed as she was, she found consolation in the fact that she still had something from her father's vague stories about her grandmother. As she lay there, in her bed, recanting those very stories that her father had told her of his childhood, she tried, as she always did, to envision what his childhood home looked like. She imagined the home to be sort of dilapidated, yet considerably charming. She imagined the kitchen to be the heart of this battered home; where her young father and all of his brothers would sit around the rustic table eating homemade soup and bannock. She imagined the floors to be immaculate, reeking of disinfectant and pine, freshly mopped by her jovial Indian grandmother. She imagined her grandmother standing at the rustic table, tending to her brood of mischievous children, as they lapped up every last drop of her delicious soup.

She lay there, immersed in her thoughts, watching this recreation of her father's childhood, like a fly on the wall. She had reconstructed this home so many times over the course of the years that she knew exactly where everything was, or at least where she imagined everything was. As she lay in her bed, engrossed in her thoughts of her Nana, and a life long before she existed, she nodded off into a deep sleep.

The room was exactly as she had imagined it. The smell of disinfectant and pine lingered in the air, combined with the wafting smell of the soup that boiled on the stove, and the-bannock that was baking in the oven. The sun shone through the kitchen window, cascading over the woman that stood in front of the sink; Nana.

*"My girl."* Nana said, *"Sit, it's time to eat."*

She obeyed, and sat at the kitchen table that she had seen a million times in the vast realms of her imagination. Nana placed a bowl of steaming hot soup in front of her. The delicious fumes hovered in the air around her, and she sat there, immersed in the moment that already felt like home.

*"My girl"* Nana said again, taking the seat across from her. *"Eat."*



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Nana's hushed voice sounded just as she imagined it would. Her thick Indian accent sounded sweet and the confidence in her voice assured her that this moment was the answer to all of the prayers.

*"Your father, my boy, has raised you well. He is a good man."*

*"Thank you."* She replied, as she gazed into Nana's eyes. *"He hasn't told me very much about you, or where I come from though."*

Nana returned her stare. Her eyes were familiar pools of dark brown, just like her father's. Just like her own...

*"My girl, your father has told you what you need to know. He has given you pieces of his life, and in turn pieces of me. You have all you need to know about this life that is no longer."* Nana's words seemed to fill the stillness of the room.

*"But Nana, what about the other stuff?! -- My father never told me about the schools, and the bad stuff. He only tells me the funny stories Nana. What about the other stuff?"* She replied, getting lost in her grandmother's hypnotic stare.

*"You are not listening."* Nana replied. *"Long ago, I lived in a world that did not accept me. I endured much, and almost didn't survive the burden that our people faced. Your father has told you this, much like I am telling you now..."*

She watched Nana, as her mouth formulated every word. Though the ideas and language was familiar; she felt a different, more profound sense of Nana as she spoke. It was almost as though nobody else had ever been able to structure the meaning of those particular words before now; there was new meaning, deeper understanding and a new founded respect.

*"By telling you of this, your father has taught you all you need to know, my girl. The details that you seek will do nothing more then fill your heart with bitterness."*

Nana rose from her chair, and walked over to the stove. She stirred the simmering pot of soup, and opened the oven and pulled out a golden brown bannock.

*“But Nana, it’s important.”* She protested as she watched her grandmother prepare a feast.

*“You must not be stubborn. You must listen when I tell you that you already know all you need to know about your family. Your father, he gave you the pieces of his life that you need in order to carry on your heritage. You do not need to know the details of the hurt that has been caused to your family, nor do you need to know the details of the hurt that has been caused to other’s families.”*

*“If we don’t know the details, it will be forgotten...”*

*“It is up to you to make sure that it is never forgotten. “*

*“But Nana, how can I do that, if I don’t know?”*

*“My girl, we need to be remembered as people. We need to be remembered for being more than just victims of the schools or slaves to the bottle, as many people see us. I will not tell you that our lives were not hard. I will not tell you that I have lived through and seen things that I hope you will never have to endure. I will not tell you that the past is not important. Yet, in searching for the details you are forgetting that in the end, we survived and helped to pave the way for warriors like you and your father to carry on our people’s heritage.”*

Nana’s words cut into her like a knife. As she absorbed the profound wisdom of her Indian grandmother, she finally understood that she had been searching for something that she had never actually been without.

*“Do not forget, that all people’s memories fade with time. The details of our own past are meant to fade and become eroded from our minds in order for our people to*

*evolve. Though the injustices should not be forgotten, it is more important to move forward by raising your voice and unleashing the warrior spirit that you have within. Be proud of the Indian blood that flows through your veins granddaughter, be proud and lead our people forward from the wicked past that has consumed our people for so long.”*

Nana walked towards her. Her limp, the one her father always mentioned in his stories, was evident as she made her way across the immaculate kitchen floor.

“*My girl*” Nana said as she took the empty soup bowl from the table and carried it back to the sink, “*The past is merely an instrument that we use to succeed in the future. Trust your father, that he has given you just enough so that you will succeed, and share with others what he has shared with you.*”

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The sound of birds singing outside her window and the rays of the bright morning sun streaming through her blinds woke her from what seemed like a thousand years of sleep. She had never felt more rested or refreshed in her entire life as sat in the stillness of the morning. Quietly she sat, staring at the flood of sunlight cascading down her bedroom walls and replaying the prophetic dream that she had just awoken from about her deceased Indian grandmother. The feeling in her stomach was one she had never felt before; a combination of butterflies and airiness. She knew that her prayers had been answered in the form of a dream, and was gently content and coming to peace with herself.

Looking to the future with new founded resilience and determination, instilled by a mirage of a grandmother that she had finally come to know, she understood now that she had a legacy to maintain. The Indian blood that flowed through her veins was a source of power, and she felt honoured to continue a circle in which her grandmother, and her grandmother’s generation, had saved from the attempted annihilation of those who were not willing to understand the complex beauty of the ancient culture of her



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Indian peoples. Today was only the beginning of a new life in which she would share the wisdom that her Indian grandmother had passed on to her.

Today was the day that she would resurrect the invincible warrior spirit of her peoples.