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Is Grandma Okay?

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By Laura G.

Corinna is a nine-year-old girl with dark dark brown hair that is almost black. She has very dark eye brows that sometimes make her look as if she is scowling when she is not because she is generally smiling since she is so very very sweet. Her eyes are a soft dark brown that twinkle when she is happy, which shows that she likes to share, because that certainly is the best way to share your happiness.

Corinna lives with her mother and her older sister, Amanda, and her little white Maltese, Mr. Small Tongue, in Virginia. She likes to talk to her dolls about her day at school and look out the windows of her bedroom. Her best friend is Meghan, who lives down the street; they always wait at the bus stop together and talk.

One of the things that Corinna likes most is to visit her grandparents in New York City. Every summer since she was six she would spend a week with her grandparents. Her sister would go a different week and her mother wouldn't go at all, which is what made it especially special. She would pretend that she was an only child that week, and be happy not to have to share anything with Amanda. For one whole week she would not have any fights with her sister. Their fights weren't very bad and they always made up, but sometimes Corinna got tired of storming off to her room because Amanda would get their mother to agree with her, or else she would give in to Amanda because she didn't want to fight.

Her week in New York was also special because her grandma and grandpa would always take her into Manhattan to do exciting things. They would also always have Chinese food at least two times (Chinese food is Amanda's favorite). In their favorite restaurant they would always order soup dumplings which were so amazing because the soup was inside the dumplings. Corinna didn't know how they did this, but the idea of biting into soup was quite exciting, especially since Corinna loves all kinds of soup. Her mother calls her a "soup nut" sometimes because of her love of soup.

This year, as always, on a day in the beginning of July her mother drove her to a rest stop in Delaware where they met her grandma and grandpa. Her mother said that this place was halfway between their house and her grandparent's house, so it was convenient for everyone, no one would have to drive too much. After a short lunch (Corinna had a crunchy peanut butter and no jelly sandwich that her mother had made), she gave her mother a goodbye kiss and hug, and went to her grandparent's car and on her way to New York. Maybe she was a little sad to say goodbye to her mother, but she was too excited about what they would be doing to stay sad.

On the drive to New York her grandparents asked her how the school year had been and what her favorite things to do were. They asked about Amanda and how her mother was, and even about Meghan. Well, they didn't really ask about Meghan, her grandma asked who her best friend is. Corinna told her that her name is Meghan, but her grandma kept asking her who her best friend is.

When they got to her grandparent's apartment, Corinna went into the room that would be her bedroom for the next week, it had been her mother's room when she was a girl. Corinna really likes calling that room "her room" for a week. It makes her feel special.

After she settled in, Grandma asked her if she wanted to go out for Chinese food for dinner. Corinna, of course, said yes. As they sat waiting for the waiter to bring their order, Grandma started to shake. Grandpa looked up from reading his menu and held her hand, and asked her if she needed anything. Grandma shook her head, and kept on shaking for another minute, then she stopped and shook her head. She took a sip of water and told Corinna that sometimes that happens to Grandma and not to be upset by it.

Corinna was scared to see her grandma shake like that. "Are you okay, Grandma?" she asked her in a really tiny voice.

"Yes, sweetie," Grandma said. "That just happens sometimes. I'm getting all shook up as I age," Grandma joked. She reached for Corinna's hand and held it. "I love you," she said. "Let's order, I'm hungry. Soup dumplings, Corinna?" She remembered the most important parts, Corinna thought, and that made it less scary.

When the waiter came over they ordered their meal, Grandpa let her order the soup dumplings.

During the meal they talked about the things they would be doing that week. They were planning to go to a Broadway show; Corinna loved to see musicals. They would also go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which Corinna loved, too; she didn't tell anyone this, but she liked to walk through the museum pretending that she was a princess and this was her private castle. Her grandparents were so proud of her because they thought that she really loved art since she always wanted to go there on her visits, but she really loved to pretend.

While they were eating, two times Grandma was in the middle of asking her a question when she stopped talking. She looked like her mother when she would go upstairs or downstairs and then forgot what she went for, but her mother, after a second or two, would nod her head and then remember what she had gone to get. But her grandma didn't remember. She just looked at Grandpa, who looked back at her with the patient expression he has when he tries to teach Corinna yet another time how to play chess, and just waited for Grandma to either remember what she wanted to say, or shake her head and say, "It'll come to me."

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When they got home, and after she had put on her pajamas, but before she would sit up until very late with Grandma watching black and white movies, Corinna called her mother.

"Mom, Grandma keeps shaking and forgetting things, is she really old?"

From far away and without being able to look at her daughter, which would help her figure out what to say, Corinna's mother said, "Yes, sweetie, that is how Grandma is getting older. But except for that she is healthy."

"But it's scary, mom," Corinna added in her small girl voice.

"I know, it's scary, sweetie. It's scary for me, too, to see my mother like that."

"Mom?"

"Yes, sweetie?"

"Will Grandma be okay?"

Corinna's mother closed her eyes for a moment, forgetting that she is the mother and not the daughter for a moment, and said, "This is the way she is now, Corinna. Don't worry about when she forgets or shakes, she can't control those things. Just be there, next to her, until it passes."

"Okay, mom. Is Grandpa okay?" Corinna asked, trying to figure out if she has to watch both of them during her week there.

"Yes, he's fine."

"How come he's not like Grandma?"

Corinna's mother sighed, this was not how she had thought that she would have a conversation on aging with her inquisitive daughter. "Well, everyone is different, just like their minds are different, so are their bodies. We all grow differently, and we all age differently."

"Like I'm taller than you and Amanda, and I have straight hair and you have curly hair?"

Her mother sighed, at least she didn't say , ‘like I'm skinny and you're not, mom.' "Yes, like that. But also like Amanda can sit for hours reading and likes to dance, and you can only sit still for a little bit and always seem to be moving around and asking a million questions," her mother said jokingly, trying to ease her daughter's anxiety.

"Okay, mom," Corinna said in a calmer voice. "I'll be with her. Will it still be okay if we stay up late to watch movies together?"

"Sure, you and Grandma can stay up till really late watching those British mysteries with men wearing fedoras and women wearing hats with feathers that don't get wet in the ever-present rain."

"What are fedoras?" Corinna asked.

"Ask Grandma, she'll remember that. Goodnight sweetie."

"Goodnight mom."

"I love you."

"Love you, too," said Corinna quietly as she put down the phone.

In her house Corinna's mother sat for a few more minutes thinking about her mother and her daughter, and how she hoped they would have many more years to enjoy each other's company. Years when her mother would be lucid and would still seemingly remember every meal she ever ate out. Years when her mother would be a link in the chain of personality that would be Corinna.

Corinna went to help her grandmother prepare their tea. "Grandma, what's a fedora?" she asked cautiously.

"It's a kind of hat that men used to wear. Grandpa used to wear a fedora, and he looked very handsome in one if I say so myself."

Corinna took her tea into the next room, sitting comfortably next to her grandmother who still knew how to make tea and what a fedora is. Oh, and knows that watching suspenseful movies at eleven p.m. is wonderful.

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