

## The Grandma Who Turned into a Puppy



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Age: 6+

Little Marie loves her grandma very much. Marie's grandma is old and sick, so she can't move very far from her bedside. Marie is glad to offer her grandma company. They watch TV, read books, and simply chat together. Grandma's old dog Saku also loves being close to the cheerful woman, because no one else has so much time to scratch his nape. One winter day, Grandma dies and goes to heaven. The same happens to Saku the next spring. Now, the house seems sad, quiet, and boring to little Marie. Yet one day, her father comes home with a puppy. The little pup shares the same birthday as Marie's grandma and comes from the same village, where Marie's grandma worked her first job. Before long, it turns out that the dog is just like Grandma in a number of other ways, too. Has Grandma truly turned into a puppy?

1.

Delicious—like a childhood dream. A sandwich. Smoked sausage and a little green onion served on a blue-rimmed plate. Grandma sits on the edge of the bed, munching on the sandwich. It's like a dream that's not from the future, but from the long-gone past when as a little girl, she sat on the back steps, eating her first-ever onion sandwich. Did they even have sausage back then? Probably just onion.

But this sausage sandwich was served to her by her granddaughter, little Marie. Marie's mother made it in the kitchen and little Marie brought it to Grandma on the blue-rimmed plate. Now, she is sitting on the edge of the bed with Grandma, watching Grandma eat. The girl herself won't pop onions into her mouth, because she's not used to the taste yet. "I'll sure get used to it someday," little Marie says.

Grandma can't get up from the bed and make a sandwich on her own. When she starts walking, there's a chance she could fall down, just like a little kid.

A little kid gets right back up and keeps running after falling, but Grandma can't—she needs help getting back up, because she's so old. To be on the safe side, Grandma doesn't risk getting up or walking, because she's afraid of falling.

"Grandma doesn't go upstairs because she's got hip problems, and they hurt," Mom explains to Marie. Little Marie has been told this so many times that she's nicknamed Grandma "Old Problemy".

"I'm taking Old Problemy her sandwich!" little Marie announces. For a long time already, her whole family—little Marie, Mom, Dad, and especially their dog Saku—have been used to Grandma sitting on the edge of her bed.

Even though Grandma seems to be glued to the bed, all she does is smile. She watches television, reads books, and smiles cheerfully—especially when someone comes in her room and sits down next to her for a chat. Little Marie does this most of all, reading books and chit-chatting with her grandma. On top of that, Grandma can always seem to find candy in the little nightstand next to her bed—always. Little Marie knows this very well. The candy is there, and the grandma who hands out the candy is there, too, for now. It doesn't matter that she's sick—what matters is that she's there.

Someone else goes to sit with Grandma often, though not on the edge of the bed, but on the rug at the foot of the bed. That "someone" is their dog Saku, who likes it when Grandma scratches him behind the ears. No one else has as much time to pet their dog as Grandma does. For her, scratching Saku behind the ears is like an exercise that she can do many, many times every day.

2.

A colorful woodpecker. Or a gray nuthatch. It had to have been a bird, who knocked on the window a couple of times so hard that the panes rattled. Everyone was startled, and Mom's face turned as white as a sheet. Dad said so right when it happened: Mommy's gone as white as a sheet.

It happened a couple of weeks after Grandma fell off the edge of the bed and an ambulance took her to the hospital. Little Marie waved to her from the window, but Grandma didn't have the strength to wave back. "She was watching, though, and she saw you wave," Mom comforted little Marie.

On that winter's day, at Christmastime, when the bird tapped on the window, Grandma died. They found out when a call came from the hospital. "The bird tapping was a message that she's going away now," Mom said.

It was so cold on the day of Grandma's funeral that little Marie didn't go to the cemetery. She did go to the church, however, and listened to the people beautifully sing: "Angels call you to heaven so sweetly." Little Marie's godmother also talked about heaven as they waited in a café while everyone else was in the cemetery.

"Where's Grandma now?" little Marie asked her godmother in the café.

"She's in heaven now," Marie's godmother assured her. "Her bones are being buried, but her soul is going to heaven. Grandma is waving to you from there."

Little Marie and her godmother waved to Grandma from the café window, and Grandma waved back from heaven, even though little Marie couldn't see it, but rather felt it, very gently. It felt like a bee brushing its wing against her cheek.

4.

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One late-summer afternoon, without telling anyone about it beforehand, Dad came home with a puppy. He hoped it would come as a pleasant surprise, but that's not what happened. Mom walked around looking grumpy for three days straight after the puppy's arrival, and wouldn't even look in its direction.

All three nights, Dad slept with the puppy on a heap of old cotton blankets on the floor of the stairwell, so the dog wouldn't have to be alone. Truth be told, the puppy was the only one of the two who got much sleep, only whimpering a couple of times while he was dreaming, since Dad wasn't used to sleeping on old cotton blankets on the floor.

"Mommy wasn't ready for us to have a dog," little Marie told Dad, explaining to him why Mom had been acting cross. "She might have been ready for a cat. That's what she told me."

Dad didn't say anything in reply, since he couldn't stand cats. Dad thought of himself as a dog person. He grouped everyone in the world into cat-people and dog-people, and he counted himself among the latter.

On the fourth day, when the puppy started getting braver, he found Mom's sandals with the red hearts on them in the hall. He chewed off the part that holds your toes to the sandals, and when Mom yelled at him for it, he hid underneath the cupboard. Mom used a broom handle to get the puppy back out, picked him up, and was about to shake him. But then, she sighed:

"How can you shake a two-month-old puppy? He doesn't understand what he did, anyway." Instead, she hugged the puppy and started stroking his fur. Oh, how nice it is to pet a puppy and oh, how puppy-like a puppy can smell!

When Dad came home from work, Mom greeted him at the door. She was holding the puppy and smiling softly and bashfully.

"Mommy got over the puppy now," little Marie announced from behind Mom's skirt.

"Where'd you get the puppy, anyway?" Mom asked Dad.

"Through an online ad, from a little village called Plika, for forty euros and a bottle of blackcurrant wine," Dad told her.

When Mom heard this, she looked very somber, set the puppy down on the floor, and sat on a chair.

"I guess she *didn't* get over the puppy yet," little Marie whispered into Dad's ear.

Now, Dad started feeling a little irked. He was afraid that Mom might give him the silent treatment again, and demanded fairness. "Don't start sulking! Look at how wonderful this little puppy is. Look at how furry his legs are and how high he can jump! And you can't imagine how high *his* dad was jumping out there in Plika Village."

Surprisingly, Mom wasn't actually grumpy. She asked: "You said you got this dog from Plika Village?"

"Yeah, that's the one! I saw an ad for him online and drove out there. The family that owned him is very nice. Their daughter even had tears in her eyes when she handed me the puppy. It was the last one of the litter."

Mom stared at the dog thoughtfully.

"Mommy'll get over the dog, Mommy'll get over the dog," little Marie whispered to herself, as if casting a spell. She was overjoyed about getting a puppy, of course, but she didn't want to make her mommy sad, either.

"The dog doesn't have any pedigree papers, but they said his grandfather was a pedigreed West Siberian Laika," Dad said, shrugging.

"And you don't know anything else about him?" Mom asked.

"Oh, yes—I almost forgot!" Dad exclaimed. "He was born on June 21<sup>st</sup>."

"On June 21<sup>st</sup>?!" Mom gasped.

"Oh, what's wrong this time?" Dad sighed.

"No arguing, you two!" little Marie interrupted.

"My mother was born on June 21<sup>st</sup>, too, and her first job was in Plika Village. She worked at a store there," Mom explained more calmly, blowing her nose in a tissue.

"Great Scott!" Dad exclaimed.

"I'm afraid that my mom turned into a dog after she died! As soon as you brought that puppy home, I could see he's a little like an old person."

"That's not a bad coincidence at all!" Dad said, laughing.

"Now, Grandma is with us again."

"Grandma turned into a puppy!" little Marie shouted, clapping her hands.