

Here we are. Back in this house. The house of our childhood. With my brother James and my cousin Emily we are sitting on our grand-mother's couch. She passed away last week, and we decided to meet together to decide what we are going to do with her house. She had been living here since she married our grand-father sixty years ago. I never knew him, he died about a year before I was born. My mother and my grand-mother never talked about him. They always said to me that he was a mean person and that I should be glad not to know him.

We are sitting on the couch remembering our best memories in this house.

“Do you remember the time we broke grandma’s favourite vase and we blamed it on her dog? She knew it was us but she never told us off for that.” Emily was laughing during her story.

“And the time she took us for a walk and she had prepared a giant picnic? I think this is the best memory I could keep of her.”, said wistfully James.

“But did you ever want to know why she was so disturbed?”

- Come on Ethan. We are trying to heal ourselves with our best memories, don’t ruin the good vibes, said Emily in an exasperated way.
- I’m sorry. I just can’t stop thinking about it. Like the room where nobody was allowed to go. Why was she so afraid that we could come in?
- I don’t know. And honestly, I don’t care if I don't know the reason. It was probably one of her secrets.”

Maybe James was right. But I could not think about anything else. In fact, she could have such violent reactions, depending on what was happening. For example, one time I was asking her to tell me things about my father. I never knew him. My mother told me that she had known him for a long time but that he did something terrible and he disappeared after that. When I asked my grand-mother to give me some information about him she started to yell at me saying that he was an ugly person and that I should never want to know a damn thing about him. I was eleven and I was really shocked by her answer. It was so disproportionate; I did not understand her reaction.

After all our memories, we decided to go to bed because the next morning we would have to put away all of my grand-mother's stuff.

The next morning, we woke up quite early because there was lots of stuff to sort. We decided to divide the rooms to put be away.

“I’ll take her bedroom and the kitchen. It was my favourite room; she always cooked a lot for our snacks, said Emily.

- No problem, I’ll take the living room and the office.
- Can I take the “you must no got here” room? I asked.
- If you want, you always were obsessed with that room.”

So, I went upstairs and I had been to the door. I already had picked the key of her old keyring. I was finally going to know what my grand-mother was hiding for all these years. I entered the room and switched on the light.

At first, I was surprised by the aspect of the room. There was dust all over the furniture. I concluded that we did not have the right to enter in this room, but my grand-mother probably never went in it either, or at least nor for a while. I moved a little further in the room to look at it wholly. There was a small commode next to the door, a desk, a bookshelf and a condemned fireplace along the wall.

I started looking at the commode. It was an old piece of furniture and it was easy to see that it had not been opened for a while. I opened each drawer to check what was inside. It was all old men clothes. It was really old-fashioned, I supposed they must have belonged to my grand-father. But why did my grand-mother keep his clothes in an old commode in a room that was locked? I did not really understand but never mind.

Then, I checked the little desk. There were insignificant things on it. There was a locked drawer, but I did not have the key. I looked all over the desk but there was no clue to find it. So, I took a paper knife available on the desk and decided to pick the lock of the drawer. As the desk was really old, I did not have any difficulty opening it. There were a lot of papers in it. I found the identity papers of my grand-father. I looked at his picture and I was shocked by how much I looked like him. We had the same eyes, the same way of smiling and the same jaw. It was really disturbing especially because my mother and my grand-mother never talked about him to me. I looked carefully at all the papers, and I was surprised that they were all papers from when my grand-father was alive. There was no death certificate. I was quite disturbed. I decided to show these papers to Emily and James.

“Look at what I found upstairs. These are all papers of our grand-father. But there is no paper about his death. Don’t you think this is disturbing?”

- Wow you really look like him, it is stunning, exclaimed Emily.
- Yes, you could be brothers if you were the same age!
- I know. This is quite disturbing because I did not know him.
- It is true that it is weird there is no paper of his death. Just as if he just disappeared out of grandma’s life.
- I know! I am going to search for other information in this room.”

I went back to this secret room to search for other hidden things. But there was nothing more in the desk. I turned to myself in the bookshelf. It was all old books which had not changed places in years. I decided to put them all in moving boxes to sort them. I moved the books one by one. But between two books, there was a little red notebook which caught my attention. I opened it and I did not understand how it was filled. There was only one page of a drawing and I did not understand what it was. It seemed to be the drawing of an arch but I was not sure. I flipped through the rest of the pages and I almost dropped the notebook when I discovered dried blood on its fourth cover. How did this blood get there? And especially to whom did it belong? I was thunderstruck by what I had found out. I screamed to Emily and James to come upstairs.

“Oh my god where did this blood come from out? Is it grandma’s?”

- I do not know Emily. It is really unimaginable to think that something terrible happened. Maybe it happened in this room.
- What else did you find Ethan? Asked James.
- Only that, but I have not checked the fireplace yet.
- Continue to look at the books both of you, I am going to check the fireplace.”

I tried again with Emily to see what the drawing was but with no success. There were annotations of my grandma’s writing at the centre of the arch, as if something was built in it. After our failure to discover what it was, we started looking back at the other books.

“Guys, look what I found.”

We turned back to James who was holding a poker. I did not understand why he was showing us this but then I noticed there was also dried blood on the end of the poker.

“That cannot be a coincidence. Something happened here, declared I.

- But what could have happened? Do you think grandma was hurt by someone?
- I do not know Emily. She never talked about anything that happened to her.”

Then I realised. “Emily, show me the drawing again.” She gave it to me and I put it in front of the chimney.

“Oh my god, it is the drawing of the fireplace! But what are the annotations on it?”

- I think it matches the wooden boards which are blocking the chimney.
- What? You think grandma hid something in the chimney? Asked James.
- There is only one way to find out.”

I approached the chimney and tried to take off the first board. It was blocked with a lot of nails. With James, we pulled off on each side of the board. Once it was removed, an awful smell invaded the room.

“What is that smell? It smells rotten! Exclaimed Emily.

- I do not know! Let’s keep removing the boards.”

James and I took the boards that were behind the first one off. As we went, we discovered that there was a sort of recess in the chimney. There were a few boards left when Emily exclaimed “Tell me this is not someone’s pants in here.” I stopped moving with James to observe the recess. There was no doubt. There were someone’s pants. And this somebody was kept in the chimney.

“There is a body in our grandma’s chimney. Who could that it be? Asked James.

- I guess there is an only way to find out.”

I removed the last boards and Emily screamed. There was a skeleton. A skeleton of a human body. Hidden for thirty years in our grandma’s chimney. I started to feel sick. Emily ran away from the room – she could’nt stand it anymore. James and I were astonished by this discovery. How could our grandma hide a body for all these years?

“Look Ethan, there is a paper in the shirts pocket.”

Hiding my disgust, I took fingertips the paper. I immediately recognized my grandma’s writing.

“My name is Mary and I did something terrible, because I had to protect my daughter. If you read this letter, you will have discovered my secret. This man was a horrible person, do not think that I liked killing him. He was a sick person and he was my husband.”

I stopped reading and looked at James who was as shocked as I was. I looked back at the body and noticed a military chain around its neck. I grabbed it and my grand-father's name was written on it. I started feeling faint and I had to sit down to recover.

“My husband raped my daughter. I learned it when she told me she was pregnant. She confessed to me that he had been raping her since she was twelve and that she had never found the courage to tell me. I felt so angry and ashamed at never discovered it. All I was thinking was that this horrible person should not live any longer. So, I went to his office and started yelling at him. I was so furious that I grabbed the first thing that came to hand and I hit him with it. I could not stop hitting him, I was so disgusted by him. He fell on the floor, with blood all over his head. He was dead. I started panicking because I could not get his body out of the house. I looked at the chimney and I decided to bury his body in it. I had difficulty putting him in it, but once he was in it, he was blocked in it. I went outside to get some wood boards hanging in the garden. I covered his body with them and it was as if the chimney was condemned. I took notes in a little notebook and I decided to write this letter to leave an explication so that somebody find out the truth one day. If you find this letter; I will probably be dead. I never talked to anyone about what I did. Unfortunately, it was too late for my daughter to have an abortion. So, she decided to keep her baby and to raise it, despite the horrible story around him. She does not know a thing about what I did. I told her that I kicked him out and that he will never come back to our home. The world is better without this man.”

I thought I was going to faint. I started feeling sick and I had to run to the bathroom. I threw up in the toilet. I was born due to my grand-father's rape of my mother. I looked at myself in the mirror. All I could see was the reflexion of my father's face.