

The Glass Deer
By Gwyneth Ozar

Every year, since I was two years old, I spent the winter break at my grandparent's house. I loved everything about it. Playing with their ancient dog Dapple, frolicking about in their colossal backyard all bundled up in my puffy little snowsuit, and chomping away on my grandma's special Christmas cookies. Then, when dusk fell, I would toddle up the stairs, my belly full from a savoury home-cooked meal, and climb into bed. Grandma would heave an old book from the hand-carved mahogany bookshelf, and carefully blow the dust off. She would plop down with a sigh on the creaky cedar rocking chair that resided in the corner and read fairy tales to me until my eyelids drooped. My grandpa would perch in the cushy armchair beside the bed and listen peacefully, and Dapple would curl up at my feet, keeping them toasty. My parents slept in the room next door, so I was never afraid.

And of course, there was the beautiful little glass deer that Grandpa kept on the bookshelf in my room. Grandma had given it to him. She had bought it from a crafter when she had gone skiing in the Rocky Mountains, and each time I visited I would stroke it gently and admire its glistening form. It was absolutely breathtaking.

Whenever winter break approached, excitement would build up inside of me. I treasured the time I spent with my family. When I was there, I felt peaceful and loved and happy all at once. Everything was perfect. That is, until this year.

When my grandmother passed away, everything changed. We still had plans to stay with Grandpa on the break, but I knew that it would be different.

Our mud-caked old minivan halted in front of the ramshackle dwelling, and I felt a sharp pang in my heart. I missed my grandma so much. Grandpa limped to the door, and it creaked open softly. I gasped at the sight of him.

It had been a few months since I saw him at Grandma's funeral, and he had changed. His once bright, twinkling eyes were dull and sunken, with dark shadows beneath them. His hair was as white as the snow on his lawn. As we approached, his gloomy, exhausted frown crinkled up into a hopeful smile.

"Evelynn! Shawn! Come in, come in!" Grandpa called hoarsely. He blinked joyfully at me. "Harper! It's so wonderful to see you." He stretched his arms out wide and I hugged him gently. He gripped me so firmly that for a moment I thought I was going to suffocate. Then he released me and gave a tiny smile before turning and disappearing into his home.

My mother ushered me into the dusty house, then murmured, "Okay Harper, we're going to have coffee with your grandpa. Why don't you go find something to do? Read a book, maybe."

I nodded, and watched as she followed my grandpa into their cozy kitchen.

The staircase was right beside the door. Curiosity drew me on. I wanted to see if anything had changed up there.

As I wandered through the upstairs hallway, peering idly into rooms, I noticed a door left slightly ajar. Choking clouds of dust billowed up from the carpet as I strode towards the room.

I shouldered in and a tidal wave of memories crashed over me. "My old room-" I breathed.

The furniture was arranged exactly as I remembered it, but the room seemed... different. The ancient rocking chair creaked and rattled in the corner when I nudged it. The fluffy rug felt as though it hadn't been vacuumed in decades. Grandma had always kept every room in her household neat and tidy, and every time I'd come it was clean

and well-kept. It looked as though Grandpa had paid no attention to the house in his grief. *Seems like he hasn't entered this room in quite some time*, I thought worriedly.

The bed was still pressed against the wall. Draped across the bed was the quilt that grandma had made. It carried a slightly musty odour now, but I forced myself to ignore it and made a mental note to remind Grandpa to wash it.

My feet unconsciously carried me to the mahogany bookshelf. Rows and rows of massive books perched on the fancy shelves, brimming with colourful stories and fond memories. Most of the shelves were crowded with literature, except for the middle one. It held a scorch-marked old candlestick, a photo of a youthful looking Grandma and Grandpa standing together on a beach, and the glass deer.

There it stood, in all its glory, its dainty hooves planted firmly on the shelf. Without thinking, I seized it and stroked my fingers across its glossy body.

The deer had always awed me, but now, with Grandma gone, it was even more stunning. It felt as though now it carried her memory within its glass body, and it made my heart ache slightly.

Its head was held high with all the pride and elegance of a beautiful creature, pronged antlers stabbing at the sky. Although it had been sitting on that shelf, unpolished for a year, not a speck of dust clung to the glittering animal. It was as though dirt did not dare approach this grand beast. It was sleek and its curves were smooth. I could see why Grandpa loved it so much. The deer was powerful and graceful all at once.

It reminded me so much of my grandmother. This was exactly the kind of thing that she would choose from a souvenir vendor. Blissful memories crowded my heart, of the times that she would take me to the park, and how she would let me wake her at 7:00 am on Christmas morning just so that we could open gifts immediately, and how

beautifully she used to play the old piano in the sitting room. A single tear rolled down my rosy cheeks and plopped on the deer's slick surface. The glass sculpture seemed to be made of completely clear ice, it was so gorgeous.

A weak ray of sunshine crept through the window, casting its glow across the room. When the light touched the magnificent buck it gleamed and shimmered like a gemstone. As I stood, gaping, I heard footsteps clomping up the stairs.

"Let's get you settled in your room." croaked Grandpa to my parents. Although his voice was tight with grief, he sounded slightly more cheerful, as if our visit had chipped away a bit at the heavy stone of loneliness that sat inside him.

"Of course, and then I must find Harper." My mom replied. "I don't know where that girl disappeared off to!"

My dad had murmured something in reply, but I hadn't heard it. I didn't know why, but it felt like I wanted to keep my moment with the deer private. Fumbling desperately with the glass figurine, I rushed to place it back in its bookcase. But in my haste, I made a terrible mistake.

As I stretched out my arm towards the shelf, the delicate glass ornament slipped through my fingers. I snatched at it frantically and missed. It plummeted to the dusty hardwood and met it with an ear-splitting crack. The beautiful deer shattered into a thousand little pieces.

"No!" A shriek tore itself from my throat. I stood there, trembling and weeping, surrounded by pieces of glass that glistened like chips of cold, hard ice on the floor.

There was the thud of footsteps and my grandpa appeared in the doorway. His eyes widened with shock and horror, and my heart stopped. *What have I done?*

But to my utter surprise, he gasped, “Harper! Watch out! There’s broken glass all around you!”

He rushed to me and, taking my hand gently, guided me around the damage. As soon as I was safe, I let out a wail. “Grandpa! I’m so sorry! I was looking at the deer and it slipped from my grip and I broke it and I-” My words ended in a choking cry. A giant hand of fear and guilt grabbed me and squeezed my lungs, until I felt as though I could not breathe.

“Oh, Harper.” He rasped. I threw myself into his arms and he stroked his creased hand along my back. “Harper, I’m not mad.”

I pulled my face from his shoulder and stammered, “You-you’re not? B-but I broke your present from Grandma.”

He shook his head softly. “I am sad that the deer is broken, but it isn’t important. It was an accident, and you know what? I don’t need something material to remember Grandma. I will always carry her in my heart, and I’ll never forget her.” He whispered.

The crushing hand seemed to loosen its grip on me. He wasn’t angry! I drew in a long, shuddering gulp of air. “Yes.” I breathed back. “I’ll never forget her either.”

I gazed into his rheumy, heartbroken eyes and saw the pain within their depths ease slightly.

That was when I noticed tears were streaming down his wrinkled cheeks. I hugged him tighter, and we both stood there for a moment, sobbing and quietly remembering.