

## Mum Gets Up

Mum was in bed for four days straight, hibernating with one eye barely open, waiting for a worthy catalyst to set her in motion. Lila could never forget the time her mother had jumped out of bed and saved the day. It had been almost five months ago. Nana, had been alive and had frozen in place that afternoon, mostly because she was old and couldn't move fast enough and knew enough not to try. Mum was so casual about the incident that immediately afterwards the girls wondered if it had happened.

The power had been out on Wicket Way and over their flannel pajamas the Swan sisters were wrapped in big sky-blue angora identical sweaters knit by Nana. Two feet of Vermont snow had cancelled school. The three girls sat around the kitchen table deeply engrossed in a game of Monopoly. Seven-year-old Daisy and Nana were playing the Thimble piece as a team. The two already owned Park Place and Boardwalk, so when Nana landed on the square "Go Directly to Jail" she laughed.

"In jail again?" Daisy was distraught.

"What kind of bread do you think they serve in jail?" Pen asked. She was playing the game with the Scottie Dog piece and was a stickler for details. She was truly interested in the bread they served people in jail.

Lila, who was using the Ocean Liner to get around the board, pondered the real-life consequences of some of the situations that arose in the game. Personally, she had no fear at this time in her life of jail or paying rent.

"Well, girls, if they served banana bread in jail, a lot of people wouldn't mind going. If being in jail was as comfortable as being at home, no one would mind." Nana stated as she put her Thimble on the corner of the game board with the jail cell. Nana had on a big sweater on top of her quilted red bathrobe, and wore an old fur hat that had seen better days, but as she said to the girls when she put it on:

"Sometimes, function must outweigh fashion. I may look nutty, but my head is toasty warm."

Lila loved that hat -- the way it looked like it was breathing on Nana's head. It seemed different on Nana than it did when Mum had worn the same hat on the cover an old fashion magazine, where her big green eyes highlighted the mahogany tones in the fur.

Nana smiled as she counted the rent money Pen had given her for landing on Park Place.

"I don't want to ever go to jail," said Daisy, as she spun the Thimble around in the little Jail square on the board.

"It's only a game Daisy! Real jail is nowhere near as fun as Monopoly jail' said Pen.

"When Nana gets out of jail I am not playing anymore." Daisy declared. "I want her out forever."

"Okay Daisy, now I am free" proclaimed Nana as she moved her Thimble to the Pennsylvania Railroad on the game board. "That's enough Monopoly for today."

Pen, being the banker counted everyone's money, and concluded that Nana and Daisy had won by \$311.00 and by owning over 66% of the available real estate. The winners' moment of glory was interrupted by the sudden buzz of appliances and twinkling of lights, as the electricity went back on. After a day and half of no lights or heat Lila was elated to hear the refrigerator humming and the radiators hissing.

"Well, girls. Help me tidy up now and get dressed," said Nana.

"You can go outside and play in the snow for a while before I make dinner. I want you to get all your things ready for school tomorrow. The roads should be clear by then, and I don't want anyone to miss the bus. You know how your mother hates to drive in the snow." Nana was at the sink rinsing dishes. She had taken off her fur hat and put it on the kitchen table where it looked like a sleeping woodchuck.

Pen sorted all the Monopoly dollars into the right slots, put away game pieces and closed the box.

"Daisy, stick this in the cupboard with the other games. I am going to find our boots," directed Pen.

The girls heard water running upstairs and then their mother's footsteps across the bedroom floor above the kitchen.

"Mum's up!" cried Daisy.

“Well, don’t bother her, dear, she will be down in her own time.” Nana said. “I won’t.” Daisy said knowingly. She picked up the Monopoly box and headed into the den next to the kitchen, where the television sat amongst unending piles of games and books the girls had collected since they were little. They liked to pretend they were in a store upon entering this room, deciding which game to play or story to read.

Nana and Lila were in the kitchen when the crash of tumbling books and boxed up games sent them running for the den.

“What in the world is going on?” Nana yelled, throwing her tea towel onto the counter.

Pen had arrived a moment before they had and was standing stock still. Daisy was in her pink pajamas with her feet on a ladder-back chair in front of a now empty bookshelf. There were boxes and books scattered on the floor next to her chair, and one box was wide open, with the impression of a handgun crushed inside the black velvet lining.

Daisy was holding that gun in her small hand. It was a miniature pink pistol, which she suddenly turned towards her face.

“Do you think this is real?” Daisy asked, as she peered down the short barrel of the handgun. “Does it shoot?”

The height of the chair made Daisy look more powerful than her small self would have appeared had she had been standing on the oriental rug in the den. Lila watched her little sister being blind to the fear in the faces below her. Daisy remained in her own world, captivated by the weapon.

“I wish it was pinker. I don’t like metal.” Daisy twisted the gun around in her hand, trying to see it from all angles while pointing it at each of them.

Nana was speechless. She had little beads of sweat on her forehead, and Lila suspected she knew something about the gun that the girls did not.

While Daisy was closely examining the pearly pink hand grip, Pen slid out of the room, after she had whispered to Lila:

“I’ll get Mum. Maybe this time she’ll know what to do.”

In no time, Constance Swan arrived in the room. Lila couldn’t make out her expression under her cold-creamed face. She was wrapped in her Lanz-of-Salzburg robe and had her hair swept-up in a towel, looking more suited for a spa than a potential shoot out.

“I don’t think it’s a cap gun. It’s not like my water gun.” whispered Daisy, as she slipped her hand into place on the gun handle placing her finger on the trigger.

Time stopped. You could hear snow melting and dripping from the eaves and the house creaking as it warmed up. Lila thought about calling the police, but what would she say? She wondered who Daisy would shoot and prayed it wouldn’t be their already fragile Nana. Lila wouldn’t mind getting shot if it was in her arm or leg, nothing serious. Not a shot to the face, where people would stare. No need for life threatening drama. Pen would not be happy with a bullet wound of any kind. As the middle sister, Pen was far more apt to want to be the one explaining the situation to a police dispatcher. If Mum got shot, it wouldn’t be that inconvenient since she already spent most of her time in bed.

Lila took a deep breath, realizing that with a simple pop one of them could possibly die. Daisy was pointing it at Mum. Lila knew she had to do something fast, when suddenly Mum had authoritatively put her hands on her hips, stood up tall (she looked even taller with her head wrap) and matter-of-factly said to Daisy:

“Enough fun and games dear, give that to me.” A split second later, Mum had the gun in her hand. Daisy deflated. A spell had been lifted and the room breathed a sigh of relief.

“Honestly, Constance. I have never been so frozen with fear and dread. For a split second I thought I might faint. Thank God you came down when you did!” Nana, breathless, leaned against the old Chippendale chair for support.

“Quick thinking Mum. Daisy seemed a little nuts with that thing!” Pen looked genuinely shocked.

“Well, *that is enough excitement for one day*,” Mum said placing the pistol back into the box. “Go outside for a bit and breathe some fresh air. Then get ready for school tomorrow. I’d forgotten all about this old Lady Remington.” Mum sounded wistful as she disappeared up the stairs.

“Oh, what a day! And it’s not even noon. What were you thinking?” Nana asked Daisy as she grabbed her small hand, leading her back to the kitchen. “Nana, why is everyone so serious? What did I do?” Daisy’s lip trembled and her eyes filled with tears. “I was just putting Monopoly away and I found it. Don’t be mad at me ....” Daisy never wanted to be the cause of disappointment or sadness, which Lila always thought was sort of endearing unless Daisy really was being a pill.

Nana's sing-song tone explaining the dangers of guns calmed Daisy. "Sometimes, interesting and pretty things can be dangerous. Like the thorns in our beautiful pink rose bushes!" "Or a pink thumbtack?" Daisy hiccupped.

"Exactly like that..." Nana agreed.

Lila and Pen put the books and games back on the shelves. The girls, sweaty with their efforts, peeled off their sweaters and stood in their flannel pajamas. The adrenalin rush of the incident was slowly wearing off, as was the thrill of having the lights back on.

Returning to the kitchen, Lila found Nana sitting in her chair trying to open a large can of Spaghettis Os. Nana was having a hard time getting the opener to grasp the edge of the can.

"Lila dear, why don't you show me how you have mastered this can opener. You never know when you might need to use it, and if you don't plan on being Julia Child when you grow up, at least you'll have the skill to get into cans that will feed you!" Nana slid the can opener in Lila's direction.

Lila snapped the can opener down on the lid and the can let out a puff of air.

"Lovely, dear, now give it back to me. I don't want you cutting yourself on the sharp edges."

Lila looked up and saw Mum staring at Nana from the kitchen door, the cold cream gone from her face. Lila thought she looked more frazzled than her usual self. "Are you really feeding that terrible fake Italian stuff to the girls?!" Mum reached into the pocket of her cashmere cardigan and took out an emery board. "The preservatives will kill them! Really, you never fed me from a can."

"Trust me dear, if this was available when you were a child, I would have... It's fine. It's less dangerous for them than leaving that ridiculous Lady Remington pistol in the house. Oh, and we are having a salad, too." Nana did not even look at Mum when she spoke. Mum appeared deep in thought while she filed her right index finger.

"I have to agree with you. I shudder to think of that stupid thing causing any more damage, the last we need is another accidental .."

"I love Spaghettis Os." chirped Daisy. "Mum, you should try them!" "Good idea Daisy. Your Mum can complain all she wants, but she has to at least try them first, one must have one bite of something new before complaining" said Nana glancing up at her daughter as she stirred the pot.

Lila got a lump in her throat thinking of what might have happened if her Mum had not come downstairs and taken the gun from Daisy. Nana was usually the one who saved the girls from themselves. Today Mum had saved them.

“Mum, whose gun is that? I’ve never seen it before. Is it yours?” Lila asked bravely, knowing not to expect much of a response.

“Oh Lila, let’s not talk about this today. It’s so trivial. Anyhow, no one will find it now.”

As her mother left the room, something clicked in Lila’s rapidly maturing mind. She took her Nana’s fur hat off the table and pulled it onto her head and over her eyes. Frustrated, she turned towards the one person she could count on for a straight answer:

“Nana, why does Mum always get to walk away without answering me? I feel like she is hiding information that I am old enough to know.”

“Yes, she does do that. She forgets that secrets have a way of escaping. She knows what she doesn’t want us to see, forgetting that we have eyes.” Nana replied, leaving Lila oddly comforted.

“Now, be a good girl and don’t let your mother’s flippancy stop your curiosity. Put away my hat please.” Nana said with a smile.

Lila shoved all the winter things to one side of the drawer and allowed the hat to have its’ own private space among the mix of gloves and mittens that had collected over the years.

That was months ago. Nana was gone now. The girls had a gaping hole in their lives which was slowly filling up with expanding boundaries and shifting rules.

Life did not stop, nor did they.

Lila understood what Nana had tried to tell her many times: existence is not stationary. This was both reassuring and extremely frightening.