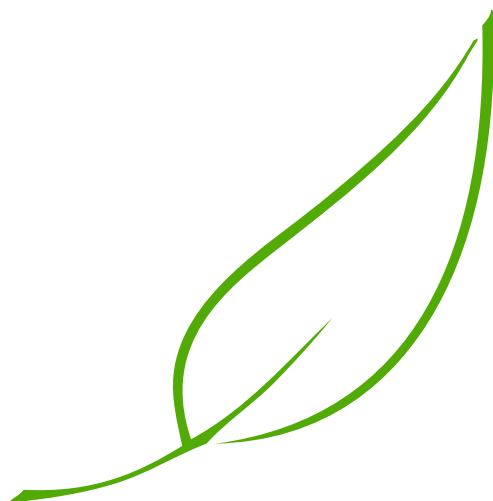


THE GRANDMA CONSPIRACY

by Ken Bradbury



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It's a plot. Sort of. A conspiracy. I looked up the word and I think I got it right. Maybe "scheme" is a better word. But if I get arrested, don't blame me. It's my grandma's fault.

Let me tell you about Grandma. For one thing, she doesn't look much like a grandmother. Grandmothers are supposed to sit around in rocking chairs drinking tea and watching soap operas. My grandma drives a yellow Mustang, lives on Dr. Pepper, and she can beat me in most video games. She's sort of a whacko and that's why I love her. She always tells me, "Anybody can be normal. Why bother?"

I really do hope we don't get arrested. You see, we've been causing some trouble in the neighborhood. Grandma and I. Nobody's caught us yet. Grandma says that if we ever get caught she can blame it on being old and forgetful and I can make up my own excuse. Grandma does that to people sometimes. She gets you into trouble.

It all started when she was taking me to ball practice in her Mustang. Did I mention it's a convertible? It was a nice spring day and we went by the house of an older lady who was sitting out on her porch, just staring at the street. "Look at that!" said Grandma. "That's terrible!" Okay, Grandma just blurts things out at times, but this seemed sort of ... well ... mean.

I said, "Grandma, what are you talking about?"

She looked at the lady on her porch then looked at me and said, "She's just sitting there! All alone! That's awful!" I didn't see anything wrong with someone sitting on her porch but like I said, Grandma's a bit different. Before I knew what was going on, she slammed on the brakes and stopped the car.

I said, "What's going on?"

She looked at me and said, "Get with the program, kid!" The car had barely stopped rolling when Grandma jumped out and walked right up to the lady's porch so I followed her.

I whispered, "Grandma, I'm supposed to be at ball practice."

She looked at me and said, "Tough it, kiddo. This is important." We walked up onto the porch, introduced ourselves, and sat and talked. That's it. We just sat and talked. I completely missed ball practice, Grandma had the chat of her lifetime, the sun started going down, and when we left, the elderly lady had the most beautiful smile on her face that I'd ever seen. As we pulled away, Grandma said, "Sorry about the ball practice. I'll call the coach and tell him you had an emergency." Grandma does things like that. She just can't stand anybody being lonely. It's a conspiracy.

Oh, and this one was really embarrassing. It was Mom's birthday so we took her out to this really fancy seafood restaurant. White tablecloths and everything. Dad hid her birthday cake in the trunk for the waiters to deliver at the end of the meal. So we were all sitting there chowing down on clams and fish and suddenly Grandma got up from the table and walked to a little booth back toward the kitchen. We wondered what she was doing but with Grandma you don't ask questions. I looked back there and saw she was talking to an older man eating alone. Can you see what's coming here? Yep. She thought it was a shame that anyone should eat alone so before we knew what was happening, and even though the little old man was confused and embarrassed, and Grandma had to practically drag him to our table, there he was. "Move over and somebody get another chair!" she said. Dad rolled his eyes and did as he was told. When Grandma's on a mission even the Marines don't get in her path.

The man had lost his wife to cancer two years ago. He told us, "It took me most of a year to get the nerve to eat in public. I always feel sort of odd eating by myself." I wanted to cry, okay? I mean it completely changed the birthday party to something else but Grandma won again. Dad picked up the tab, the man protested, Grandma lied and said we'd just won the lottery, and the old man had tears in his eyes as we hugged and said goodbye. It's a conspiracy and Grandma's the general.

But Grandma ... being Grandma ... doesn't stop there. It's like she's on a lifelong mission to make sure there's not a lonely person left in the world. She'll walk into a retirement



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