



READ THE PASSAGE BELOW FROM GRANNY DAN BY DANIELLE STEEL

1., Answer the following reading comprehension questions.

- a, Why did the children like Granny Dan?
- b, How are the narrator and Granny Dan related?
- c, Why does the author talk about her mother?
- d, How does she describe Granny Dan?
- e, At what age did the narrator lose Granny Dan?
- f, Who are Katie, Jeff, Matthew and Jack? How are they related to Granny Dan?
- g, Can the author ballet dance? If yes why, if no why not?
- h, When did the writer's grandparents get married? And when did they have their first child?
- i, Why is the box so precious for the story-teller?
- j, Please describe the box.

2., Write 100-120 words about an elderly person whom you like. Please include what you like about the person and why it is important to have a relationship with someone more mature.

Send your answers and composition to Beáta Szentiványi-Szeles at szeles.bea@gmail.com

by the deadline of 20, December, 2016.



Prologue

The box arrived on a snowy afternoon two weeks before Christmas. It was neatly wrapped, tied with string, and was sitting on my doorstep when I came home with the children. We had stopped in the park on the way home, and I had sat on a bench, watching them, thinking of her again, as I had almost constantly for the last week since her service. There was so much about her I had never known, so much I had only guessed at, so many mysteries to which only she held the key. My greatest regret was not asking her about her life when I had the chance, but just assuming it wasn't important. She was old, after all, how important could it be?

I thought I knew everything about her.

She was the grandmother with the dancing eyes who loved to roller-skate with me, even into her late eighties, who baked exquisite little cookies, and spoke to the children in the town where she lived as though they were grown up and understood her. She was very wise, and very funny, and they loved her. And if they pressed her to, she did card tricks for them, which always fascinated them.

She had a lovely voice, played the balalaika, and sang beautiful old ballads in Russian. She always seemed to be singing, or humming, always moving. And to the very end, she was lithe and graceful, loved by all, and admired by everyone who knew her. The church had been surprisingly full for a woman of ninety. Yet none of us really knew her. None of us understood who she had been, or where, or the extraordinary world she had come from. We knew she had been born in Russia and that she arrived in Vermont in 1917, and that she had married my grandfather sometime later. We just assumed she had always been there, part of our lives, just as she was. As one

does about old people, we assumed she had always been old.

None of us really knew anything about her, and what lingered in my head were the unanswered questions. All I could ask myself now was why I had never thought to ask her. Why had I never sought the answers to the questions?

My mother had died ten years before and perhaps even she hadn't known the answers or wanted to know them.

My mother had been far more like her father, a serious sort, a sensible woman, a true New Englander, although her father wasn't. But like him, she was a woman of few words and impenetrable emotions. Little said, little known, and seemingly uninterested in the mysteries of other worlds, or the lives of others. She went to the supermarket when there were specials on tomatoes and strawberries, she was a practical person who lived in a material world, and had little in common with her own mother. The word that best described my own mother was *solid*, which is not the word anyone would have used to

describe her mother, Granny Dan, as I called her.

Granny Dan was magic. Granny Dan seemed to be made up of air and fairy dust and angel wings, all things magical and luminous and graceful. The two women seemed to have nothing in common with each other, and it was always my grandmother who drew me to her like a magnet, whose warmth and gentleness touched my heart with countless unspoken graceful gestures. It was Granny Dan I loved most of all, and whom I was missing so desperately that snowy afternoon in the park, wondering what I would do without her. She had died ten days before, at ninety.

When my mother died at fifty-four, I was sorry, and knew I would miss her. I would miss the stability she represented to me, the reliability, the place to come home to. My father married her best friend the year after she died, and even that didn't particularly shock me. He was sixty-five, had a bad heart, and needed someone there at night to cook him dinner. Connie was his oldest friend and

a sensible stand-in for my mother. It didn't bother me. I understood. I never pined for my mother. But Granny Dan . . . the world had lost some of its magic for me, knowing she was no longer in it. I knew I would never hear her sing again, in the lilting Russian . . . The balalaika was long gone by then. But with her went a special kind of excitement. I knew that my children would never understand what they had lost. She was just a very old woman to them, with kind eyes, and a funny accent . . . but I knew better. I knew exactly what I'd lost, and would never find again. She was an extraordinary human being, a mystical kind of soul. Once one had met her, one could not forget her.

The package sat on the kitchen table for a long time, while the children clamored for dinner and watched TV as I prepared it. I had been to the supermarket that afternoon, and bought what I needed to make Christmas cookies with them. We had planned to make them together that night, so they could take them to school to their teachers. Katie wanted to make cupcakes instead. But Jeff

and Matthew had agreed to make Christmas bells with red and green sprinkles. It was a good night to do it, because Jack, my husband, was out of town. He was in Chicago for three days of meetings. He had come to the funeral with me the week before and had been warm and sympathetic. He knew how much she meant to me, but as people do, he had tried to point out that she'd had a good, long life, and it was reasonable that she move on now. Reasonable to him, but not to me. I felt cheated to have lost her, even at ninety.

Even at ninety, she was still pretty. She wore her long, straight white hair in a braid down her back, as she always had, and wrapped it tightly in a bun for important occasions. All her life she had worn her hair that way. In my eyes, all her life she had looked the same. The straight back, the slim figure, the blue eyes that danced when she looked at you. She had made the same cookies I had planned to make that night, had shown me how to do them. But when she made them, she wore her roller skates and zipped gracefully around her kitchen. She

made me laugh, she made me cry sometimes with her wonderful stories about ballerinas and princes.

She had taken me to the ballet for the first time. And if I had had the chance as a child, I would have loved to dance with her. But there was no ballet school where we lived in Vermont, and my mother didn't want her to teach me. She had tried in her kitchen once or twice, but my mother thought it was more important to do homework and chores, and help my father out with the two cows he kept in the barn. Unlike her mother, she didn't have much whimsy. Dancing was not part of my life as a child, nor music. The magic and the mystery, the grace and art, the curiosity about a broader world than mine, was brought to me by Granny Dan as I sat listening to her for hours in her kitchen.

She always wore black. She seemed to have an endless supply of frayed black dresses and funny hats. She was neat and precise, and had a kind of natural elegance. But she never had an exciting wardrobe.

Her husband, my grandfather, had died

when I was a child, from an attack of influenza that turned into pneumonia. I asked her if she loved him, once when I was twelve, I mean . . . really loved him . . . She had looked startled when I asked her that, and then slowly she smiled at me, and hesitated for a moment before she answered.

'Of course I did,' she said with the gentle Russian accent. 'He was very good to me. He was a fine man.' It wasn't really what I wanted to know. I wanted to know if she had been madly in love with him, like one of the princes in the stories she told me.

My grandfather had never seemed particularly handsome to me, and he was much older than she was. In the pictures I'd seen, he looked a lot like my mother, serious and somewhat stern. People didn't smile in photographs in those days. They made it seem very painful. And it was hard for me to imagine him with her. He had been twenty-five years older than she was. She met him when she arrived in America from Russia in 1917. She worked in the bank he owned, and he had lost his wife years before. He had no children

and hadn't remarried, and Granny Dan always said he'd been very lonely when she met him, and very kind to her, but she never explained it. She must have been beautiful then, and in spite of himself, he must have been dazzled by her. They were married sixteen months after they met. My mother was born a year after that, and they never had any other children. Just one, and he doted on my mother, probably because she was so much like him. I knew all that, always had. What I didn't know, not clearly anyway, was what had come before it. Who Granny Dan had been when she was young, precisely where she had come from or why. The historical details had seemed unimportant to me as a child.

I knew she had danced with the ballet in St Petersburg, and met the Czar, but my mother didn't like her to tell me about it. She said it would fill my head with wild ideas about foreigners and places I would never see, and my grandmother respected her daughter's wishes. We talked about the people we knew in Vermont, the places I'd been, the things I