

Grandpa's Pocket

Grandpa's eyes always seemed to twinkle when he looked at me. His smile conveyed the special bond that we had always shared. He was my hero and my biggest supporter. I was very proud to carry the name Valentine the same as my grandpa. Every day at the end of my school day I'd walk through the village and go to his workshop before I continued up the lane to go home. Picking up the broom that was set aside only for me, I would sweep up the bits of rubber and leather that had fallen during his day of making shoes and repairing shoes. Lately, I'd noticed there was hardly anything to be swept up.

"Come for a hug before you leave." coughed grandpa. I leant the broom against his work bench and I wrapped my arms around his once ample waist to feel the bones in his back.

I was thirteen years old and quite grown up really, but never too old for a hug from grandpa. I loved him very much and was often reminded that as soon as I could walk I became grandpa's shadow until of course I had to go to school. I'd never had a day in my life when I didn't spend time with grandpa.

I folded myself into his embrace and took in his unique smell. Leather and love was a wonderful aroma. As we pulled away from each other I slipped my hand into the pocket of his full length leather apron. The apron he wore every day while he worked. The apron had a deep pocket that ran across the front. It often held his tools and other essentials. Every week on a Friday I'd pop my hand into his pocket to find a little gift. Sometimes it was a sweet, or a wooden marble, or a little toy soldier to add to my battalion of soldiers. But these last few months there had been nothing, no little surprise, no little gift.

"Aah your grandpa is too busy these days." He wheezed.

He kissed the top of my head and gently stroked my cheek with his hard calloused fingers. His hand tremored as he brought his arm down by his side.

Early the next morning, I woke up feeling something was wrong. For a Saturday morning the house was too quiet. I padded downstairs, opened the kitchen door and there saw my mother, father, aunts and several people who lived in the village. A heaviness hung in the air I scanned their faces, there were tears on many cheeks and red rimmed eyes.

My mother stepped forward and knelt down in front of me. Her hand gently caressed my face. "Valentine," she said softly. "Your grandpa has left us. He was sick. He died peacefully in his sleep".

As she studied me, warm tears began to form and fall from my eyes. She wrapped her arms around me. Holding me close to prevent my heart from disintegrating in my chest.

Through the haze of sadness, many arrangements were made and grandpa's funeral took place. One week after the funeral, my mother sat me down, holding out his leather apron.

She said, "your grandpa wanted you to have this."

Holding it tightly I inhaled the aroma of leather and love. I reached into the pocket and could feel something there. I pulled out a leather wallet. He made this for me? The question unspoken, already had its answer. Inside to my surprise was a double leather braided bracelet and a letter addressed to me.

I opened the letter and read it aloud.

Valentine, my dearest grandson,

As I prepare to say goodbye, I want you to know how deeply proud I am of the person you've become. Watching you grow has been one of the greatest joys of my life. You've brought light, laughter, and meaning to my days, and for that, I am forever grateful.

Carry forward the lessons I've shared with you—kindness, resilience, and the courage to follow your dreams. Life will have its challenges, but I know you have the strength and heart to overcome them. Remember, it's not the destination but the journey that shapes us.

Whenever you feel lost or unsure, know that I am with you in spirit. Look to the stars, the trees, or the quiet moments, and you'll find me there, cheering you on. My love for you is eternal, and it will guide you even when I am no longer by your side.

Be good, be brave, and always stay true to yourself. You are my legacy, and I couldn't ask for a better one.

*With all my love,
Grandpa*

I looked up to see unshed tears glistening in my mother's eyes. I folded the letter and put it back in the wallet and returned it to grandpa's pocket. Slipping the leather bracelet over my hand, I saw for the first time that my name *Valentine* was embossed on one strand and on another strand the word *Strong* was embossed.

I stood, holding grandpa's apron, knowing leather and love would follow me for the rest of my days.

Norma Powell