

From A Tiny Miracle with a Fiberoptic Unicorn

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(LOUIS, 13, is reading a novel in his room when GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI, 70s, enters. She is suffering from dementia, speaks with an upper-class British accent, and is a bit daffy, but not wildly so.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

May I come in?

LOUIS

Sure.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What's that you're reading?

LOUIS

Just a book.

(she looks at it.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Fantasy adventure? Well, what sort of fantasies are you having?

LOUIS

Um...

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Kelly told me about your little relationship issue.

LOUIS

I don't have a relationship issue.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

No I remember it quite well, she said you did.

LOUIS

Well Kelly is also known around here as a gigantic liar.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

So I took it upon myself to come give you a little bit of advice.

LOUIS

That's okay, Grandma. I'm doing fine.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Nonsense. I was quite good at this at one point in time. First, you must be tender. Take her hands as if they were made of melting snow.

LOUIS

I'm not really in the taking her hands stage.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Why not?

LOUIS

I'm just not.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Don't worry about the fact that you're short, Louis. You'll grow.

LOUIS

I'm not worried—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

When I was growing up in Poland there was a boy who had a kidney ailment and never... developed.

LOUIS

I don't think that's my problem.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

We called him Shrimpy. In Polish, though. He was a wonderful boy. Never married. Hung himself. Quite awful, really. But you're such a handsome boy. A little impish, but I think that's charming.

LOUIS

I just made an ass of myself on stage.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Oh nonsense. When was this?

LOUIS

Two hours ago? And she didn't really like my Christmas present.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What does that have to do with anything? My husband Charles once bought me a meat grinding machine for Christmas, with an attendant package of meat. I think it was mutton. I can't be sure of that, though.

LOUIS

But didn't you pretend to like it? For his sake?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Why on earth would I pretend to like a package of meat? He was lucky he didn't get his fingers ground up in that contraption. Love, Louis, is what happens when you stop pretending to care about another person's feelings. You don't have to pretend.

LOUIS

Right, but—what?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

If she truly cared about you she wouldn't care at all about hurting your feelings and would simply tell you the truth. For instance, when Charles gave me the meat I told him that he could take that grinding machine and shove it some place quite personal. And that solved that situation.

LOUIS

I don't know.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Let's do a little role play, shall we? You be you and I'll be this girl.

LOUIS

That's kind of weird, Grandma.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Not at all. Go ahead, tell me... how you feel.

LOUIS

Okay... um... I don't know if I can do this—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Yes you can. Talk away.

LOUIS

Okay... Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Who's Carolyn?

LOUIS

You're Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What?

LOUIS

You just said that you were going to be her.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Right.

LOUIS

Her name is Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I thought her name was Phyllis.

LOUIS

No.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Phyllis is a lovely name. I knew a girl named Phyllis growing up. Had only one leg. A cow ate the other one.

LOUIS

A cow?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Oh yes. It just ran out of a field and grabbed her by the leg, tore it clean off. We were all shouting, "oh no! It's that cow again! Someone kill it!" But then it ran off. It was grotesque.

LOUIS

Wow. I didn't know cows were that dangerous.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

If provoked. What were we doing again?

LOUIS

We're role playing. I'm going to be me and you're going to be Carolyn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Right. Carolyn. I'm sorry, continue please. Oh, wait. We need something for the present you're going to give me.

LOUIS

Oh... um...

(LOUIS grabs a stuffed animal.)

Is this okay?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Excellent. Tell me how you feel.

LOUIS

Carolyn. I've known you for a long time.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

And I you.

LOUIS

And... there are some things I've always wanted to say to you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Such as?

LOUIS

I really like you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You're just saying that. You don't like me.

LOUIS

No no I really do like you—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

If you liked me you'd talk to me but you never do, do you?

LOUIS

I talk to you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Not often. You're always over there fidgeting in the corner.

LOUIS

Because I'm nervous.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Whatever for? I'm not going to bite you I don't even have real teeth any more.

LOUIS

Well I'm nervous you're not going to like me—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't like you when you stand in the corner. Why would I like you then? Oh look at that boy standing over there playing with himself he seems like a jolly chap, I suppose I'll pine after him. No I'm sorry I have other things to do with my time. I enjoy the company

of young men who are dashing and confident and you don't seem to have either of those qualities. Why don't you take me dancing?

LOUIS

I don't dance.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You don't dance? Well that's a lovely characteristic, isn't it? Well now I'm really going to love the small boy who doesn't dance, doesn't talk and can't seem to find the courage to talk to me even though he's known me for quite some time. Quite the gentleman you make.

LOUIS

That's not fair!

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You know what's not fair? Having babies! If I'm going to be having your babies I want to dance first. I also want flowers. Do you have flowers?

LOUIS

Here.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

What's this?

LOUIS

It's a glowing unicorn.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It's a what?

LOUIS

It's a symbol of my love.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

As a glowing unicorn?

LOUIS

It changes colors.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Well I think that's the most idiotic thing I've ever heard. What am I supposed to do with it? Look at it?

LOUIS

Yeah?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

But it's not even real. It's imaginary. There are no unicorns.

LOUIS

But that's why—

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

So you give me something that doesn't even exist? How absurd.

LOUIS

Can we stop?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I wasn't aware we had started something.

LOUIS

No I mean stop role-playing?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't know what you're talking about. All I know is that a boy who can't talk to me has given me a statue of something that doesn't exist. And he can't even tell me why he likes me.

LOUIS

I like you because...

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Because I don't really like myself.

LOUIS

I'm sorry? What?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You haven't talked to many girls in your life, have you Louis?

LOUIS

Um... I like you because....

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Yes? Am I pretty?

LOUIS

You're very pretty.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

So what?

LOUIS

And besides that you're... nice and funny, I mean not really all that funny but you're kinda funny, but more than that you're fun. And I mean fun like you've got this energy, you know? Like everything in the world is exciting to you. Like walking home from school and you are practically dancing in the street and I want to be something that makes you excited too. I want to be a part of that world. I want to love everything like you do.

(pause.)

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

See now that's a reason Louis. If you tell her something like that, it won't matter that you're petite.

LOUIS

I prefer the term short.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

Do you understand what I'm saying? She needs to hear something like that.

(Pause.)

LOUIS

Can I ask you a question, Grandma?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't think I can stop you.

LOUIS

Why do you have a British accent?

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It's more fun this way. Can I tell you a true story while I have a moment of clarity? I'm aware that I'm a bit daffy.

LOUIS

You? No.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It's true. And I don't think my stories necessarily happened. Occasionally I do, but I mostly I know... I'm having difficulty speaking what I mean. The words don't work so well any more. I'm trying, Louis.

LOUIS

It's okay.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

You see I've forgotten most of my life. It's... everywhere inside me. I remember... pieces of things that don't really make sense... and instead of fumbling, which is what I'm doing now because... I want to get at it right—I mean truth—and that makes it hard—the lies come easier—rather than fumbling... invention is easier.

LOUIS

Right.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I like to watch... Masterpiece Theatre on television. Only thing I watch. And I used to play this game... where I would sound like them. Everything seemed more chipper that way. So I did... and I learned it... and then I played the game more and more. And I'm afraid I've forgotten who I was supposed to be. So.

LOUIS

It's okay.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

I don't remember you, I don't remember when you were born, I don't know anything about you... When I think about it... when the clouds part long enough... I suppose I should be very sad. All those... disappearances from my life.

(Pause. LOUIS hugs her.)

LOUIS

It's nice to meet you.

GRANDMA SKOLOWSKI

It is, isn't it?