

Granny's Legacy

Lucy steps through the mirror leaving behind the world that was 2000 years into the future. She is glad to be back.

She takes in the details that is her mundane room. The unmade bed. The jacket strewn across the chair that she'd wished she'd taken while she was in the other world. It was cold over there. Then she hears the pleasant sounds of the TV on. Clattering sounds in the kitchen and the incessant chattering – a more astute listener would call it arguing – between her father and her grandmother.

Lucy sighs. That Labyrinth she'd had to cross to get back through into her world was treacherous. Yet there was her father and Grandmother chattering away like everything was the same and nothing had changed. Except, of course, something HAD changed. Even in this world things were different. It was the reason Lucy had been let off school and it was not yet confirmed when she would be going back. It was the subject of conversation between her father and grandmother at the moment, even. In fact it was the same issue incessantly on the news and always the subject of their conversation.

Very little had changed since she'd returned to this world it seemed.

Feeling cold, she grabs her jacket and wears it. Then she starts downstairs to the living room where the TV is on and her Grandmother is seated at her usual spot on the sofa. Grandmother had lost the nerves on her legs fifteen years ago and very rarely left the couch. Sometimes she would shuffle into her wheelchair and go into the kitchen herself but most of the time it was her father who would help her. Her father would do everything. He would bring her food or sewing supplies or he would plump up the pillows. Grandmother was a very demanding woman sometimes. Other times she was impatient. She could even be stubborn and insistent when she and Hank (her adopted father) were arguing – and they usually were. Yet Grandmother also had a softer and more compassionate side that she'd reserve for Lucy. Lucy doesn't remember a single time when her Gran ever shout at her. Yet she was shouting and raging at Hank all the time and he was very familiar to her fierce side.

Grandmother looks up from the paper that is strewn across her lap:

"Lucy! Where have you been?" she says. "Those people 2000 years into the future didn't abduct you again did they?" she winks at her.

"Oh, Grandma," says Lucy. "So awful it was! I didn't even think I would return! You see there was this labyrinth... And I was so lost!"

"Ah, but you must not complicate it so much in your mind, my dear!" says her Grandmother with a spark in her eye.

Hank appears from the kitchen and gives her Gran a cup of soup that she gratefully accepts.

"Ah, Lucy," he says. "Want something to eat?"

"Yes please," she says suddenly aware that she is hungry. Hank disappears back into the kitchen.

Grandmother slowly sips her soup as Lucy sits down beside her.

"So what's changed?" Lucy asks. She could hear from the news incessantly blubbing in the background that they were still going on about the lethal respiratory virus that consumed the planet

that her Grandmother thought was a pack of lies engineered by the media. She and her father had endless arguments about it – even before Lucy had left for the other world. Hank, of course, would try and convince her gran that it's a virus that really was out there! Of course it was out there. Where else would the rising death tolls be coming from otherwise? He would argue. In fact, Lucy wasn't surprised that Hank and Gran were still on the subject even after everything she'd been through in the other world.

"Anyway, Ma," Hank continues. "This bit of news concerns you more than it concerns me. You know you're far more likely to die from the virus than we are. You're vulnerable."

"Oh, bol**cks," she interrupts. "No one's going to catch that abominable virus! I'm sick of hearing about it!"

"And why else would they have closed all the schools and Lucy's sitting round here all these days bored at home?"

Lucy clears her throat as Grandma gives her a little wink.

"... and also," Hank continues. "Why do you think people are wearing masks on the streets if this thing were a hoax? You think they'd want to be wearing those masks if there weren't something contagious to go around?"

"How do I know?" says Gran. "I haven't been out for the past five years! And I know a bol**cks news story when I hear one. That's possessed the brains of the nation!"

"But Ma!" says her father. "You DON'T know because you haven't been out! Don't you understand? People have been forced to leave their jobs to stay at home! Some people can't afford to pay rent with no work or food to put on the table. There are 2 metre lines at the supermarket. And no one is immune.

Especially not you!"

"Oh, boo hoo!" Gran says, wiping off pretend tears. "The entire population is deluded! ALL of them! ALL!"

Although Lucy knows her father is right because even her teacher had caught the virus before all the schools closed down, she loves her Grandmother too much to go against any of her ideas. There were even moments where Lucy found herself supporting her Gran's assertions – as outlandish as they were – to stay on her good side.

Lucy scratches her head and lets some of her Grandmother's comments sink in. In some ways this world was a lot crazier than the other world through the mirror. In some respects Lucy didn't want to be either here or there.

"- And why do you think the supermarkets have all run out of food and loo roll then, Ma? Think they're lying about that too?.. Here's your milk and cookies, honey," he says handing them to Lucy. "But how would you know? You haven't been out the house for God knows how many years. You don't even know how the real world runs anymore!"

Grandma looks hurt at that and Lucy strokes her gently on the hand. She collects herself again.

“This is government control is what this is!” she spits. “Control the whole wide world is what this is! Chaos.”

“Are you looking at yourself?” says Hank. “Don’t you see how crazy your rants even are?”

“Order and control is what this is!” She pats her blanket. “When you can’t even go to the hairdresser and get a haircut because you’re too scared someone will report you! THAT, my son, is unmistakably..!”

“No, Ma, they can’t go in there because they might catch and pass on the virus!”

Grandma rolls her eyes, “RIDICULOUS!” she says. Then swept by a fit of coughs and noticing Lucy is so quiet, she decides to mellow down.

“You need to go out to the real world to understand it, Ma! You need to know it’s out there and people are catching it! I’ve seen these people for myself! They exist! You can’t just lounge around at home all the time when all you got is the TV on for company! No wonder you’re creating all these ridiculous ideas about all of this!”

Grandmother draws back slightly, if not for the sake of Lucy.

Lucy thinks about how this epidemic is happening in so many countries around the world with everyone stuck at home. In some ways this world was a lot more bizarre than the world 2000 years later.

Grandmother takes Lucy’s hand into hers:

“My dear,” she says. “I want you to promise me one thing.”

“What’s that, Grandma?” Lucy asks fondly.

“I want you to promise me..” she squeezes Lucy’s hand softly for emphasis. “That you’re never going to believe this jargon assaulting our minds that the press wants us to think. PROMISE me.”

Lucy can’t quite promise her grandmother that because, indeed, she DOES believe it’s happening. So what she says next comes out as a little squeak:

“I will. I promise.”

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Lucy is feeling slightly bored so she steps into the mirror and enters the world 2000 years into the future. She wonders what she’ll discover this time.

Oh no this diabolical Labyrinth again! It’s a nightmare! She couldn’t quite get through it last time! And then, of course, there was the risk of bumping into that Minotaur again. He was a wild, untame sort of creature but she’d managed to escape through his legs last time. She supposes it’s the same thing she’ll have to do again. She walks on, arrives at an impasse, walks the other way, takes another route, arrives at an impasse again. Oh, this is terrible! She’s never going to make it through! She’ll be stuck in this nightmare forever!

Then suddenly, Lucy notices the helicopters. They fly high above and circulate the Labyrinth. From Lucy's own angle, they seem to be rotating in little circles. Then to her fear and fascination, the helicopters seem to be descending. Lower and lower down, they go. Oh, she really did need to be saved! But she doesn't know if she could trust them. Who is inside them?

The helicopters sweep down lower still until a few of them pause looming while another one continues to arrive even lower still casting its shadow upon her location. The next thing she knows, a very long ropey ladder falls down beside her and all it could be doing is insinuating that she climbs up. It was either that or be stuck inside the Labyrinth so she starts to climb.

The ascent is a pretty long trek and moments where Lucy has to stop and catch her breath wondering the whole time who could be inside the helicopter. She manages to make her way up, hot and breathless, despite the chill in the air. But nothing's about to prepare her for what she sees at the top.

There are three grown-up men. All very natural in a somewhat airy cock-pit. Except.. except.. that they're naked! Shamelessly naked! ALL of them!

"Welcome subject from 2000 years in the past," says one of the men, helping her into the cock-pit.

Lucy feels ashamed. Hopelessly, hopelessly ashamed. She covers her eyes.

"Hm.. Those are very unusual artefacts," says one of the men that is not piloting the helicopter. He reaches a hand out and touches the fabric of her sweater and the jacket she'd remembered to bring. He touches her trousers and then his hand lingers at the little earrings she's wearing.

"Those are clothes," says another one of the men. "Those tiny things on the ears are jewellery. People used to put them on their bodies 2000 years ago." He beams at her and his smile is wide. "They're great artefacts and will make an amazing display inside our natural history museum. It tells you a lot about their civilisations."

"Quite!" agrees the helicopter pilot.

"I'm not taking my clothes off!" Lucy works up the courage to say, slightly angry.

"Why do you think you're here?" asks the first man.

"Um.. I don't know. I like to explore different worlds, I guess. I suppose I was curious," she says.

"Hm.. Interesting," says the second man. "It seems she has no idea that she is here because we brought her here ourselves."

"Seems so," says the first.

"What? No you didn't! I came by myself!" insists Lucy.

"X-Boxes weren't discovered until 3005," the pilot reminds the other two men.

"Ah," says the second.

“You mean like computer games and that?” asks Lucy, baffled. “No, we have those!” she says, trying her best to feel shameless since nudity seemed to be a normality to them. Yet somehow her face feels no less crimson just looking at them. The men gape back at her in confusion.

“We’re talking about these devices that make people do what we like from whatever era they come from. Present, past and future. They’re called X-Boxes.” Then he shows her a strange device – the same size as a mobile phone – that has many switches and a magnetic screen.

“Everyone has one!” says the pilot.

“But that was my choice to come!” protests Lucy.

“Mark, I don’t think she knows about the theory of Polgimity,” says the other man.

“Oh no, Patrick Barley discovered that in 2998, didn’t he? She wouldn’t have known about it from the year she’s from.”

Lucy is trying to make sense out of it all but, being a child, she was beginning to absorb the new information relatively fast.

“So basically, it was your choice and also our X-Box that brought you here to us!” he says. “It’s the theory of Polgimity. But we can’t go too much into that right now. We don’t have time.”

The pilot glides the helicopter a little further up and guides it on past the Labyrinth. Eventually, Lucy takes a glimpse into the land beyond and what she witnesses astounds her. There seemed to be a sort-of war going on with millions and millions of naked people (all rather small from this high up) colliding into one another and slaughtering each other. Lucy observes that many are dead and still plenty more are fighting.

“What is this?” she manages.

“It’s the War of the Worlds. The greatest war in living history,” says the pilot.

“We wanted to show you this,” says the first man. He glances at the second.

Lucy feels safe and enclosed within the helicopter yet she still can’t quite believe what is going on.

“Why bring me here all this way and show me this?” she asks only to be met with an eerie silence. After a couple minutes more she starts to notice it.

“We brought you here,” says the pilot, “because we wanted you to know that your grandmother was right.”

“Right about all of it,” says the first.

“Right about what?” asks Lucy.

“About the government going to great lengths to control... your population.”

“From your world,” the second adds.

“But my Grandma is bonkers!” says Lucy.

“To the people of her time, of course,” says the pilot glancing at her briefly before looking back out the window.

“But to us she is a progressive thinker. A great revolutionary! Maybe even.. the greatest..” he says after pause.

“It was her word against some extraordinary numbers, you see. She stuck to her convictions despite what everyone else thought.”

“We want you to tell her that, Lucy,” says the first man. “Tell her that she was right. Right about everything! There never was a virus. It was all made up! Eventually the assault all led up to this abominable War of the Worlds! Because people were too blind and ignorant to see it at the time.”

“So what do you want from me?” asks Lucy.

“We want you to go back to her world and let her know.”

She looks down at the strange, destroyed world far below, 2000 years into the future. She absorbs the nudity, the numbers, the chaos. And she’s suddenly hit by an urge to leave it. She slowly nods her head in comprehension and the men seem at ease that she has finally understood.

“OK,” she says. “I need to go back! I need to tell her!”

The men decide to wheel the helicopter back to the place that Lucy entered her portal and they drop the rope-ladder down at the right spot. To Lucy’s relief, descending the ladder is easier than climbing it. She reaches the ground. She salutes the guys in the helicopter goodbye and then finally leaves their world for good.

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Lucy walks back into her world bewildered by what she has learned!

She quickly runs downstairs into the living-room calling out.

“Grandma! Grandma! You were right!”

She never anticipates what she sees when she enters the room. Grandma looks ill and slightly wheezing and her father is on the phone talking to someone. When he hangs up he looks toward her and grimly shakes his head:

“Darling! I’m sorry you have to see this but your Grandma has taken ill.” He pauses to brush off a few stray tears from his eyes.

“She’s been coughing and having some problems. We think it’s the virus. I’ve called the authorities. It’s nothing. I’m sure she’ll recover.”

There is something in his tone that doesn’t convince Lucy.

Over the next few weeks Lucy is permitted to see her Grandmother again over the screen on her PC. She observes the fierce twinkle in her Grandmother's eye and the stubborn chin that is set to fight through her most vulnerable hours. Lucy has never known a single person more brave and she is proud of her. So proud! Even as her tears fall wetting the keys. But eventually that sad and solemn day comes where Grandmother can't fight through it anymore. She closes her eyes and she resigns to it.

Her father's anguish and tears over the next few months is something Lucy had to endure and would haunt her for the rest of her life afterward.

The only thing giving the young girl some hope was remembering that somewhere in another world 2000 years into the future, her Grandmother was being commemorated. But even in her world the memory of her Gran would live on forever. She'd make sure of it! Grandmother's bravery would never be forgotten. She'll make sure that her children hear about it and then her children's children too.

Lucy clenches her fists and goes into the attic, organising the diary entries and the old photographs of her Grandma within the dusty, scattered albums and she begins to arrange them.

The End