



# GRANDFATHER'S BOOKSHELF

Gabrielle Landry  
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# Grandfather's Bookshelf

## Gabrielle Landry

*To Gramps, with love.*

1

Tatyana, eight, always daydreaming,  
Sat gently at the window bay.  
She watched the raindrops outside streaming,  
Foreseeing characters at play.  
Grandfather sat on the couch reading  
*Anne of Green Gables*, then proceeding  
To tell Tatyana, "She's like you!  
You have her spirit, red braids too,  
You think like her, with such adventure!"  
Tatyana, smiling softly, said,  
"You're right; dear Anne would be my friend.  
Together, outside we would venture."  
Then *ding!* The clock struck five-fifteen.  
"So soon?" said Grandpa. "Time to clean."

2

Tatyana grabbed the feather duster;  
The vacuum was her grandpa's tool.  
She left the living room in luster,  
Flew to the study with her stool.  
The study was in antique fashion,  
With things that marked a scholar's passion  
A desk beside some books stacked tall,  
Tatyana, whistling, dusted all.  
"But wait," thought Tanya, slowly peeking  
Behind the pile neatly high  
"A door I've never seen? Oh my!"  
With little feet, Tatyana, sneaking,  
Decided: *Not a moment more!*  
She turned the knob and pushed the door.

3

Then through the door, a passage, hollow  
Was leading to a small round room  
(Young Tanya thought it safe to follow  
For something shone beyond the gloom)  
She found the source: a bookshelf, glowing!  
Dark wooden, warm, and proudly showing  
A row of books in every hue  
Enchanted, Tanya reached for blue.  
“*The Velvet Rabbit*,” she read sweetly.  
As Tanya spoke that final note,  
The old blue book began to float!  
“’Tis I!”—The flying book buzzed fleetly.  
“Now listen closely, little one,  
Our story time has just begun.”

4

“When your Grandfather was still youthful  
Our country saw some bitter storms.  
The thunder scared him, to be truthful;  
It gave him nightmares in all forms.  
His father was a kindly fellow  
And fond of reading, his voice mellow,  
He’d often take me to his boy  
And read my tale: a little toy  
Becomes as real as any rabbit  
When he’s loved by one heartfelt kid.  
As you can see, I likewise did—  
When thunder came, we resumed habit:  
I brought Grandfather peace to feel.  
Now, in this room, I, too, am real.”

5

Her interest piqued and quickly growing  
In this enchanted story set  
Tatyana placed the book back, stowing  
The text away. "I'm glad we met,"  
The Rabbit whispered. Then—a shimmer—  
A thin green book began to glimmer!  
With laughter, Tanya touched its spine  
"The Nose," she read across the line.  
"What story could this be, I wonder?"  
"In Petersburg"—the book arose—  
"A man, Kovalyov, lost his nose  
And after having run asunder  
The nose, respected, grew in rank  
Revered in public, church, and bank."

6

"But why does Grandpa love this story?"  
Tatyana asked with shining eyes.  
"We met when he was set on glory,  
A youngblood dressed in soldier's guise,  
Filled up with college-age illusion.  
I threw his views into confusion.  
His takeaway: avoid the vain;  
This lesson lives on in his brain.  
But now, dear one, it's time we parted.  
More stories in these shelves await,  
And I believe it's getting late."  
"No, wait, we only just got started!"  
But swiftly, *Nose* resumed its spot  
Beside a crimson volume, hot.

7

Tatyana, with a finger lightly,  
Removed the burning crimson text  
*Three Questions*, blazed its title brightly  
“I’d like to know your story next,”  
Young Tanya curiously uttered.  
Like fire, Tolstoy’s story fluttered.  
“My lessons came to Grandpa’s life  
The day the bachelor met his wife.”  
Tatyana knew that her Grandmother  
Met Grandpa on a crowded bus:  
A meeting, serendipitous  
That sparked a passion like no other.  
“But where, dear book, were you that day?  
Explain the role you had to play.”

8

“Well, Grandma on the bus was bearing  
Yours truly in her little purse  
And soon the couple started sharing  
Their thoughts on novels and on verse.  
Throughout the years, my simple moral  
Kept both from falling into quarrel:  
The most important time is now  
And to your fellow ones allow  
Your full attention when they’re present  
And absolutely nothing could  
Be better than our doing good.  
These lessons made their marriage pleasant.”  
Then suddenly there came a *knock*—  
*Three Questions* flew back to its flock.

9

And Tanya turned to find Grandfather!  
“I see you’ve found my special shelf.”  
“I’m sorry! I don’t mean to bother—”  
“No need, my dear, to clear yourself  
Of any blame. There’s none to shoulder,”  
Grandfather, with a smile, told her.  
“Come now, Tatyana, back with me.  
There’s something I’d like you to see.”  
The duo left to get *Green Gables*.  
Reentering the magic room,  
They placed it on the shelf. A bloom:  
It shimmered pink near *Aesop’s Fables*.  
“Forever now will Anne convey  
The special moments shared today.”

10

“Grandfather, I will always treasure  
Discovering your history  
And learning: books are more than leisure;  
In part, they link our family.  
But I have countless burning questions!”  
“Allow me to make some suggestions,”  
Said Grandpa. “See, it’s nearly night.  
In time, I promise, I’ll delight  
To have a longer conversation  
But soon your parents will be here.”  
And Tanya, hugging Grandpa near,  
Replied, “Next week I’m on vacation!  
I’ll come back then.” Grandfather’s face  
And laughter brightened their embrace.

Dear reader, well, you may be thinking:  
What happened in this story next?  
Alas, my memory's now shrinking  
But I remember tiny specks:  
Tatyana to the shelf returning,  
And growing up, yet always learning.  
To Grandpa's, Tanya came and went  
Each afternoon was time well-spent.  
So carry closely all your stories  
The meaning that they hold for you  
Through troubled times and blessings too—  
They're more than simple allegories.  
Well, time for me to say goodbye  
Like Tanya's Grandpa's books—I fly!

## Afterword

*Grandfather's Bookshelf* is a magical tale of intergenerational understanding, love and connection, and the power of storytelling. In crafting this story, I took inspiration primarily from Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

First, I followed Pushkin's *Onegin* stanza form, which is written in 14 lines in iambic tetrameter following the rhyme scheme *aBaBccDDeFFeGG*, where lowercase denotes a feminine rhyme (e.g., "bearing" and "sharing") and uppercase denotes a masculine rhyme (e.g., "you" and "too"). The advantages of this form were that 14 lines were enough to tell a good chunk of each section of the story, the meter added a tone of musical whimsy that suited the story's content, and the final couplets offered the chance to end each stanza on a twist or something surprising.

Second, *Eugene Onegin* influenced my decisions about the story's characters and content. My Tatyana is a version of how I imagine Pushkin's Tatyana as a child, albeit a bit less melancholy. For example, in my opening scene (Stanza 1), Tatyana sits at the window bay daydreaming while Grandfather reads. I drew on Pushkin's Chapter 2, stanzas 24-29 to construct this depiction (Stanza 25: "And often times she'd sit all day / In silence at the window bay"; Stanza 26: "But pensiveness, her friend and treasure / Through all her years since cradle days, / Adorned the course of rural leisure / By bringing dreams before her gaze"). Additionally, my narrator character, while not as prominent as Pushkin's narrator, shares similar qualities of "forgetting" bits of the story (as in my Stanza 11), departing suddenly at the story's ending, and suggesting a sense of fondness for Tatyana throughout the text.

I was also inspired by the classic children's story *The Velveteen Rabbit*, which in my book is part of Grandfather's childhood and reveals his connection with his own father. The other two texts that Tatyana discovers—Gogol's *The Nose* and Tolstoy's *Three Questions*—were some of the many excellent works I encountered in Slavic 132. I found them to be most suited for integrating into a children's story because they can be read at several different levels—as fun and simple tales or as layered with more mature complexity.

Finally, I drew inspiration from my own grandparents. My Grandpa loves to read, and I remember feeling small in the face of his large wooden bookshelf as a child. He served in the army as a young man, directly after high school. And he met my Grandma, who passed away in December 2020, on the elevator in the building in which both worked. They shared a beautiful marriage without unhealthy strife and conflict. All of these bits of his biography played into my depiction of Tatyana's Grandfather and my selection of books to feature as prominent in his life.

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