

# THE MAGICAL GRANDPA

*By Karl Milde*

## Chapter 1: A Visit to Grandpa

“Do I *have* to?” twelve-year-old Danny pleaded as he leaned against the kitchen counter, watching his mom slide the spatula beneath the eggs and bacon, flipping the bacon over and over.

“It’s only for the weekend,” his mother replied. Her voice showed she understood his concern.

“I don’t like Grandpa. He’s really old and he lives on...on a *farm*.” Danny pronounced “farm” as if it were somehow distasteful. He couldn’t imagine spending time with Grandpa all by himself. He and his parents had visited Grandpa over the holidays quite often but for only a few hours at a time. Grandpa was his father’s dad and his father had grown up on the farm, yet Grandpa’s world was so different now from what Danny was used to that, when they did go, he felt he was visiting a stranger.

“Your father and I are going to Boston for his college reunion,” his mother said firmly. “And anyway, Grandpa’s expecting you. He said he’s very much looking forward to having you stay with him overnight.”

“But he lives in the *sticks*!” Danny complained, his dread continuing to build. The smell of bacon in the oven did nothing to lift his spirits. “There’ll be nothing to do and no one to play with.”

“Suit yourself. Bring whatever.” She shut off the burner and turned to give him her full attention. “How about your bicycle? You can bring that if you want.”

“That won’t help. You can’t ride a bike on Grandpa’s dirt road.”

“You’ll have your cell phone. And your laptop.”

“Grandpa doesn’t have cell phone coverage, let alone Wi-Fi.”

“I’m sure he’ll find things for you to do.”

“Why can’t I stay at Billy’s?”

“I checked. His family’s away for the weekend. You’re staying with Grandpa. It’s settled,” Danny’s mother said firmly. “Now finish packing your things. We’ll leave soon.”

Teary-eyed, Danny left the kitchen and walked back to his room in a dark mood. It was Saturday morning, and there was no escaping it—he would be at Grandpa’s farm the entire weekend.

With his clothes and a toothbrush stuffed in his backpack, Danny reluctantly climbed into the family car, and they drove off. He sat glumly in the rear seat as they stopped for gas and then headed out of town in the direction of Grandpa’s farm. After several miles on the main road, they turned onto a narrow dirt road that

led to the farm. Danny felt the car bump and sway over the uneven surface as they passed through a heavily wooded area.

Looking ahead, Danny eventually saw the roadside open into a clearing with several hayfields on the right and Grandpa's house and two barns on the left. The house was all white but in dire need of repainting. The barns were a faded red color, as was usual for New England farms. Behind the barns was a cow pasture surrounded by a barbed wire fence. In the distance, Danny saw a herd of cows—some grazing while others lazily chewed their cuds.

The car came to a stop in front of the house, and Danny's father beeped the horn. Grandpa appeared out of nowhere, wearing dark blue overalls held up by suspenders, and came hurrying over, grinning from ear to ear. He seemed happy to see Daniel, although Danny wasn't at all happy to stay with him. Easing his way out of the car and pulling his bag behind him, he looked up at his grandpa's wrinkled face.

"Hello, Grandpa," he said, forcing a smile. "I'm here."

He didn't say what he was thinking because it would have been rude: *You have me for the weekend, but not a minute longer.*

## Chapter 2: A Summer Day on the Farm

It was a warm summer day with the sun quickly rising high into the azure-blue sky. Some cumulus clouds floated lazily overhead. “You chose a great day to come,” Grandpa said brightly. “We have a dry spell this weekend. Ideal for haying.”

Danny ignored him and just stood there, watching his father turn the car around and drive away. When the car was finally out of sight, he turned and faced Grandpa. “What can I do?” he asked, his voice revealing his dread. It was going to be a boring day, he thought.

“I’m glad you asked,” Grandpa replied. “Here’s the plan. I’ve already milked the cows and fed the chickens, so we’ll both get out there and mow the big field. You can sit on my lap while I drive the tractor.”

“I’d rather not,” Danny said flatly.

“Well, I’m not going to leave you standing here. Follow me.” Grandpa took off toward the barn without looking back. Danny hesitated at first, but having nowhere else to go, he followed.

Grandpa pushed open the big sliding barn door. As he walked up, Danny could see the front of a large orange tractor. A mowing rig extended out to one side, with a mower bar pointing upward. Grandpa climbed up the back of the tractor and settled into the high seat. “Stand back!” he shouted. “I’ll drive ’er out.”

Danny stepped out of the way as the engine roared to life. The walls of the barn amplified its sound.

Grandpa eased the tractor out the barn door and stopped. Danny stood, dwarfed by the big machine, and decided to climb aboard. He looked for a place to get a foothold in the back, but all he saw were hydraulic hoses and mechanical clamps for attaching farm implements. Grandpa pointed to a spot where he could step, and, nodding, Danny stepped there and pulled himself up. Once there, Grandpa lifted him onto his lap, and they headed off.

The first thing Danny noticed was the gorgeous view from his lofty perch. The tractor seat enabled him to see above the fences and bushes that would otherwise obstruct his view. He saw Grandpa's fields up ahead and then layer upon layer of rolling blue hills beyond them, extending to the horizon. It was breathtaking on this bright sunny morning, and it lifted Danny's spirits. He completely forgot his complaints about staying with Grandpa.

Once they arrived at the big hayfield, Grandpa slowed the tractor to a stop and, using its hydraulics, lowered the mowing bar into the lush grass. "Hold the steering wheel," he ordered and, pressing a lever, started the sickle bar cycling back and forth inside the mower with a clacking sound. "Here we go!" he warned, grabbing the steering wheel as well, and they were off.

Guiding Danny's hands with his own, Grandpa steered the tractor carefully around the outside edge of the field until they returned to where they had started. As he rode along, gaining confidence in steering, Danny looked down and watched the sickle bar with fascination as it snipped away, causing a wide strip of grass to fall in its wake, forming a flat green row.

"Is that going to turn into hay?" he shouted to Grandpa above the din of the machine.

"No," Grandpa spoke in his ear. "If we left the grass there it would rot. To make hay, we have to fluff it up so air can pass through. By the way, Danny, you're a natural at steering. I'll let go of the wheel now. You take it."

"Huh...yeah, Grandpa. I got it." Danny stopped staring at the mower and looked straight ahead where they were going. "How do you fluff it up?"

"We use the hay rake for tedding. As a matter of fact, I'm going to let *you* do the tedding. When we're done mowing, I'll show you."

"Driving this tractor?" Danny was not at all sure that he heard right.

"They used to fluff up the grass by hand in the old days, but thank goodness we use the tractor for everything now. After we hook up the rake, you can drive around this field as long as it takes to ted everything. We'll rake the hay into windrows tomorrow and bale it to store in the barn."

Danny couldn't believe what he was hearing. Grandpa would teach him to *drive the tractor*. This weekend was turning out to be a whole lot better than he expected.

### Chapter 3: Dinner with Grandpa

Danny pulled up with the rake still behind, stopped and turned off the tractor, and walked into Grandpa's farmhouse at the end of the day. His back was stiff after sitting on the tractor seat for several hours. He was tired and sore, but in a good way. In fact, he was sorry he'd finished so soon. He wished there was more hay to ted.

Grandpa had disappeared after making sure Danny could safely handle the tractor, and Danny now realized he'd spent the rest of the afternoon cooking dinner. The aroma wafted throughout Grandpa's home and made him feel welcome.

"I've got the meal right here," Grandpa called from the kitchen. Danny, hungry after the long work day, walked in just in time to see Grandpa carefully pull a covered iron pot from the oven and place it on the counter. "Your mom said you liked pot roast," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

"It's my favorite, Grandpa! Gosh, it looks and smells great!"

"Potatoes, carrots and gravy too. Get a coupla those paper plates from the cupboard over there and I'll load 'em up. Also get some of those plastic knives and forks."



Danny did so and received an extra generous portion. Grandpa grabbed a Styrofoam cup and poured it half full from a milk bottle on the table, but Danny declined. “No thank you, Grandpa. Have you got Coke?”

“Sorry, no. But have you ever tried milk straight from the cow?”

“What do you mean?”

“This milk is fresh from this morning.”

“What? It could have *germs*.” Danny stared at his cup and made a face.

“Only *good* germs. And this morning’s milk’s been cooled in the refrigerator. Try some.”

Danny lifted the cup and hesitantly took a sip. “Geez! This doesn’t taste...It’s...uh, *creamy* and...*sweet*.”

“Pretty good, huh?”

“Yeah. It’s like...um, like a dessert in a cup.”

“I can teach you how to milk a cow.”

“A co...Wait just a minute, Grandpa...Milk a cow?”

“Yup. You’ll finally see where milk comes from.”

Danny and his grandpa fell silent while they each dug into their delicious meal. Danny looked at Grandpa and smiled from time to time to show his appreciation. The pot roast was soft as butter, so the plastic knives cut right through it. “Why the paper plates and stuff?” Danny asked.

“No dishes,” Grandpa grunted between mouthfuls, as though this were self-evident.

When they were nearly through with their meal, Grandpa drawled, “Seems you like it.”

“Like it? No, I *love* it. You’re a better cook than my mom.”

“Sshh! For gosh sake, don’t say that to her. Promise me?”

“My lips are sealed, Grandpa.”

“Now that we’re done with the meal, there’s more farm work to do. You clear the table; I’ll pack up the leftovers and put them away in the fridge.”

Danny did as he was told, although it felt kind of odd because he hated clearing the table at home, and resisting it always caused an argument. But he didn’t mind clearing the table for Grandpa. He even offered to put the leftover away.

Grandpa stood up from his seat. “Time for milking,” he said seemingly to himself while exiting the kitchen. He walked right out the front door of the house without a further word.

#### Chapter 4: Morning at Grandpa's

Danny woke up with a start the next morning. Bright sunshine flooded through the side window of Grandpa's guest bedroom. He grabbed his cell phone from the nightstand and stared at the time. Nine fifteen!

He heard Grandpa rattling around downstairs in the kitchen. He'd promised to help him feed the chickens, but he overslept and now felt a sharp pang of guilt. He threw on his clothes and hurried down to find the old man sitting at the breakfast table, his hands folded and head bent, as if in prayer. He looked up as Danny entered.

"I'm terribly sorry, Grandpa. I promised to help with the chores this morning, and I let you down."

"Have a seat," Grandpa said, ignoring Danny's apology and pointing to the chair opposite him. "I made a batch of flapjacks. We've got fresh butter and lots of maple syrup. My neighbor up the road makes maple syrup every March and gives it to me in gallon jugs."

"But...you said you needed help with the chickens and...I'm sorry. I overslept."

"I figured you were dog-tired," Grandpa acknowledged. "You had a long day yesterday with a lot of stuff you'd never done before. A good night's rest once in a while is a good thing."

“But the chickens...?” Danny had only a blurry memory of Grandpa’s milking the cows after supper, but he did recall promising to help feed the chickens and gather their eggs.

“I’m an early riser. Always have been. The cows are milked. Chickens fed. Today we rake and bale the hay we cut yesterday. But first, let’s have breakfast.”

Danny looked at the stack of pancakes on the table and was suddenly famished. “Thank you, Grandpa” was all he could think to say before he sat down and started in, taking pancakes from the pile, slathering them with butter, and pouring on gobs of maple syrup.

“I’ll pour you a cup of fresh milk too,” Grandpa said, grabbing a white cup from a stack on the table and filling it from a milk container. He poured himself a full cup too, and after saying, “Nothing like fresh milk,” he downed it in one long swallow, then set it down in front of him. Staring at the white cup, Grandpa added, “I’ll bet I can levitate this cup.”

Danny looked up from his pancakes and took a short drink of milk. “You can...uh, what?”

Grandpa grew suddenly serious and confided, “I’ve been studying magic. Like Harry Potter, but only from what I can find on the Internet. I don’t know very much yet, but I can do at least one spooky thing.”

That immediately pricked Danny’s curiosity. “You can...levitate...?”

“See this cup?” Grandpa picked up the cup from the table and held it in his left hand. “I can make it float in the air.”

“No way.”

“From what I learned, you have to hold it a special way and say the right special words.”

“Special words? What words?”

“Let me show you.” Continuing to hold the cup in his left hand, he floated his right hand over it, back and forth, and said, “*Lafiossa*.”

Nothing happened. Looking a bit confused, Grandpa tried again. Waving his hand a different way, over and under this time, he repeated, “*Laa Fios Sa*,” emphasizing the last syllable “Sa.” He carefully let go of the cup with his left hand, and it slowly rose, then stayed motionless in the air, hovering.

“No way...” Danny stared, his eyes wide and unbelieving. “How does it...”

“I don’t know,” Grandpa replied, apparently as astounded as Danny, following the cup with his eyes as it floated evenly from side to side. After a long moment, the cup began to tremble slightly and appeared unstable. Grandpa hurriedly grabbed it out of the air with both hands before it fell. “It just...it just does.”

Grandpa stood up. “But we’re wasting time. We have to get that hay in the barn today. Let’s clean the table and get things started.” He left the table for Danny

to clear, and grabbing the milk container and the maple syrup while still holding the cup, he disappeared into the kitchen.

## Chapter 5: Haying Time

A half hour later, after Grandpa's rake had been switched from the tedding to hay-raking mode, Danny was again sitting high on the tractor seat, this time raking the hay into windrows. Grandpa stood by as Danny made a couple of turns around the field. Grandpa touched the hay as though he was checking its dryness, yet Danny knew he was there to keep a watchful eye. When Danny came around the field for the third time, Grandpa stopped him to say, "Just keep on doing what you're doing. Go 'round and 'round until you reach the center. Then stop there and wait for me."

Danny spent the next hour admiring the beautiful landscape while carefully steering the tractor to make even windrows. He liked hearing the hum of the tractor and smelling the sweet aroma of the hay. He enjoyed the freedom of the outdoors and wished that his time in the tractor seat could continue, but as he encircled the field, his loops around became shorter and shorter. As he was just short of the center, he looked over and saw Grandpa waving his arms to beckon him and heard him shouting, "Danny!" He stopped the tractor, climbed off, and walked across the many windrows he had made to see what Grandpa wanted.

"Your parents will be here soon," Grandpa called to Danny when he came within earshot.

“Well, I don’t want to go home. I’m going to stay and help you with the haying,” Danny replied as he walked up.

“That’s up to them,” Grandpa responded matter-of-factly. “You’re welcome to stay.”

“I’m about finished raking the hay. What’s next?”

“I don’t own a baler, so I called a neighbor to bale the hay. He’s on his way over.”

“What can I do?”

“Finish raking, then bring the tractor and rake back to the barn. Disengage the rake from spinning and raise it up so it doesn’t touch the hay before you drive out of there. We’ll drop the rake at the barn and attach the hay wagon.”

“Yes, sir!” Danny gave a smart military salute and ran back to the tractor. In the distance he could hear the neighbor’s tractor, faint at first but getting louder. He hoped against hope that the neighbor would start baling before his parents arrived. That way he’d be busy helping Grandpa and maybe they’d let him stay.

Grandpa was at the barn when he drove up with the rake, and together they switched out the rake for the hay wagon. Grandpa let Danny drive the tractor and wagon back to the field, where they met Grandpa’s neighbor, who was preparing to start baling.



“Last good day for hayin’,” the man said, his voice heavy with the local accent. “Your field’s nice ’n’ dry. I’m goin’ over to Rossi’s place soon as I’m done here. He’s got a lot of hay out, an’ they’re callin’ for rain tomorrow.”

“Let ’er rip,” Grandpa told him. “We’ll pick up the bales.”

Grandpa’s neighbor started the pony engine on the baler and got underway. Danny watched with fascination as the baler, pulled by the neighbor’s tractor, began devouring the windrows he’d just made. It picked up the hay with metal fingers and compacted it, pushing a bale out the back every half minute as it progressed.

Danny drove behind the baler, pulling the hay wagon, as Grandpa picked up bale after bale and tossed it onto the wagon. After a half hour, Grandpa asked him to stop. “I’ve plum run out of gas,” he said, bending over and holding his knees. “I’m an old man and these bales are *heavy*.”

“Let’s switch, Grandpa,” Danny replied, suddenly feeling empathy for his hardworking grandfather. “You drive and I’ll pick up the bales.”

“You sure?”

Danny climbed down from the tractor and walked over to the next bale. “I can do this,” he said, grabbing the bale. “Geez, you’re right. These are really heavy!” He carried the haybale over to the wagon and lifted it on.

Grandpa climbed up and settled himself on the tractor seat. Danny walked ahead and picked up another bale. He waited for Grandpa to bring the hay wagon closer, but the wagon didn't move. Instead, Danny saw Grandpa was looking over his shoulder toward the road.

Following Grandpa's line of sight, Danny saw his parent's car in the distance, moving toward them over the bumpy dirt road. "They're here," Grandpa exclaimed. Danny detected a slight disappointment in his tone. "I'd wish they'd given us more time."

Danny felt disappointed too, although he didn't understand why. He should have felt elated at seeing his parents and should have wanted to run toward them. But he didn't. He just stood there, holding the bale and watching glumly as his parents got out of the car.

They walked into the field and headed toward the hay wagon. Grandpa climbed down from the tractor; Danny dropped the haybale and walked toward them.

"We're here!" Danny's father said with a broad grin, spreading his arms wide in a welcoming gesture. He and Danny's mom exchanged hugs with their son and with Grandpa. "We left early to avoid the traffic."

## Chapter 6: Danny Stands Firm

Grandpa spoke up. “Could you stay, just for an hour or two? We’re picking up hay bales right now. I usually ask a young man up the road to help me with the haying, but Danny can do it.”

“I don’t think so. We need to go now. Right, Danny?”

“Do I *have* to?” Danny replied with a pleading look at his dad.

“It’s time to go home,” Danny’s mother replied, her voice firm.

“But Grandpa’s work depends on the weather, and it’s going to rain tomorrow.” Danny didn’t want to leave now that Grandpa needed him. He and his parents had visited Grandpa over the holidays but just for a few hours. This was the first time he’d really gotten to know him.

“I thought you didn’t like it out here on this...farm.” His dad whispered to Danny to avoid Grandpa’s hearing what he said.

Danny tried his best to explain. “I’ve really gotten to like it here. There’s so much to do. I love being outside, and...”

“You can ride your bicycle when you get home. You like doing that,” his dad argued.

“Yes, I do, but that’s nothing compared to driving a tractor.”

“You’ll have your cell phone. And your laptop. You said yourself, there’s no service here.” Danny’s father held up his arms in frustration.

“Grandpa has a landline if I need to call anyone. Just let me finish haying with Grandpa, *please*? He wants me to stay.”

“We’re going home, and we need to leave *now*, Danny. It’s settled,” his mother finally said sternly. “Now go get your things.”

Eyes brimming with tears, Danny trudged back to Grandpa's house. He mulled over the day’s work and what Grandpa had told his parents. Moments later, with his clothes and a toothbrush stuffed in his backpack, he walked back to the family car. His parents stopped talking with Grandpa and began to get in the car.

“Mom and Dad,” Danny said in a respectful tone but with the determination that comes with making the right decision, “I’m going to help Grandpa finish picking up the bales before I go. And, Dad, you should help too. An extra hand will make this job a lot easier.”

“No. We agreed you would leave with us now.”

“You said that, but we didn’t agree. Grandpa gave me a job to do, and I’m going to finish it.”

Danny looked at Grandpa, and he nodded. “Let’s get to work, Grandpa,” he said. Without further word, they both turned and walked together toward the hay wagon.

“Wait!” Danny’s father said. “I’ll come and help too.”

Danny turned and beckoned his dad to join them. Looking toward the car, he saw his mother standing there with a conflicted face.

Danny's father caught up with them and joined them in lifting bales of hay onto the hay wagon. They worked together, taking turns driving the tractor and talking about everything under the summer sun, until they were done. The job took just under two hours.

Danny thanked his grandfather and hugged him before he opened his car door. "Grandpa, how did you make that little cup float in the air?" he asked finally.

"If I told you, it wouldn't be magic," Grandpa replied. "But when you come back for another overnight, I'll show you how. I'll also show you a few more spooky things."

"That would be great!" Danny said and gave Grandpa one more hug to seal the deal.

Danny sat comfortably in the rear seat of the car as they headed out on the dirt road in the direction of home. He was sore from handling the bales but felt the satisfaction that comes from a good day's work.

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