

Memories from a Lost World

Every summer, growing up at my grandparents' house, I used to listen to stories from another world—one that I hadn't lived in, but one that fascinated me every time it was brought up. My dear grandparents, though they didn't speak much about the war, had that deep, melancholic look that told me everything I needed to know. Many times, I felt as though I were a witness to an era long past, and their words had the power to transport my child's mind to a world that history itself no longer tells with the same emotions. These were stories about a harsh reality, told with such discretion. The passion with which they were shared was like a precious lesson, a vivid reminder of the sacrifices made for our freedom, for the people we are today. Even though they didn't speak much about those times, it was impossible for me not to be captivated by every word. From what they told me, the words of my grandmother have remained deeply etched in my memory, as if she's still speaking to me in my mind now: "I remember how we would wake up in the mornings back then, with our hearts pounding in our chests. We would hide in the cellars of the house, hoping that the chaos wouldn't find us. Shivering, each of us hidden in our corner, hearts tight with fear, you had today, tomorrow you might not. We knew that life was a kind of game of luck. The war took everything we had built, maybe even the people we once knew and played with as children, long ago. We were deprived of peace, freedom, safety, our dreams... EVERYTHING!"

Grandma would pause for a moment, gather her thoughts, and then her eyes would pierce my gaze, challenging me to be part of a story I would never forget. "When I found out that grandpa had been called to the front, I knew I wouldn't see him again soon. He was only 19, but his face seemed so mature... My love back then, your grandpa, that cheerful and lively young man had to go to war. Such a harsh reality..." Grandma would wipe her tears with the back of her hand, and looking into the distance, her voice would deepen as she recalled the pain of those days. Her words echoed in my heart like the cries from a time long gone. Time passed slowly, and grandma gathered her strength to move forward, to protect her life and bear the burden in his place. In those days, no one knew what tomorrow would bring, and every news of a fallen or wounded soldier was like an arrow piercing the hearts of those left behind.

"It took a long time before grandpa came back. He was no longer the same man who had left, with a wide smile on his face. When he finally got home, he only had one leg left. He

leaned on an old wooden cane. He didn't say anything, but his eyes betrayed a pain that was hard to describe, a pain that had left its mark on every step he took. It was hard to recognize him... Was it really him? Had the war made him so mature? Was I also hard to recognize? Although I had so many questions, I never managed to answer them all. Gathering so many injustices and half-truths, my mind couldn't judge clearly anymore. Everything seemed unclear... but I knew he had come home. With all his wounds, with his lost leg, but with the same determination in his eyes. He was home! How I wished I could have rejoiced then, but the reality we were living in was the thorn that prevented my happiness. At first, it was hard to speak about what had happened, about the war's trauma, but over time, grandpa began to open his heart more, telling little by little, only when he felt ready to accept and speak about those days. I listened patiently, without judging his words. I knew his silence had deep wounds, and that no matter what happened, I had to be there for him. He needed me so that together we could face what we had been given.

I was so tired after the war, but I had faith in our strength and in God's love, convinced that we would overcome everything and rebuild our life the way we had dreamed. Even with his lost leg, grandpa kept fighting, being there for us when we managed to start a family. He was a pillar for those dear to him and encouraged even those who had been drafted with him, but who might have been left without sight, without their left eye, or without a leg, or a hand, or a wife at home."

Well, no words were needed to understand how strong their love was. In front of a world that seemed to have stolen their happiness, grandma and grandpa had found the strength to stay together, to build a new beginning, a "new tomorrow" where the following day was another lesson about love, courage, and sacrifice. After all they had been through, they had children together, raised a family, endured many challenges, and succeeded in passing on to their children the story of the life they had lived. Hard, indeed, they would say, but not impossible... Together, they built their own world, far from the war that had once haunted them. Grandpa continued to be that quiet man, with deep wounds in his soul, but always there, the support grandma needed. Yet, time began to leave its mark on him. The only leg that no longer supported him the way it once did, the hands that sometimes trembled when he held his cane or tried to eat on his own—these were all signs of old age that had taken away the man who had once been full of life. Grandma, always there beside him, with pain in her heart, sensed that the end was near. Just as they had lived their life, death waited to come, knocking gently on their door.

In the summer of 1985, grandpa passed away, leaving everything behind. A true fighter and survivor, he passed away at the age of 84... Here, I leave the last words of grandma before she filled her handkerchief with tears.

“Until death do us part,” she said with a trembling voice, “and then I held his hand for the last time...”