

THE BOX OF BLUE POPPIES

Written by: **Bina Štampe Žmavc**

Illustrations by: **Svjetlan Junaković**

On the edge of the big town lived my grandfather and grandmother, surrounded by fields of oblivion and delicate birdsong. The Witch of Time planted an invisible garden of forgetfulness around them, stretching all the way to the blue edge of the horizon.

A beautiful story of a grandmother's ways, words and thoughts that are lost, and a grandfather's love that remains.

Although it grows in Slovenia, especially in the Prekmurje region, the blue poppy is most beautiful in the Himalayan highlands. Hardy compared to its red brother, but above all unusual. Just like how dementia is unusual. It completely changes a person, their loved ones and their surroundings. Grandma is constantly losing and searching for words and thoughts. Grandpa makes her a pretty box in which he places them for her. In the evening, when she is tired of searching for words all day, Grandpa consoles her that it's no wonder, since she had been running after her words all day long. He opens the box for her, but Grandma isn't quite sure if it contains all the right words...

A story in which fairy tale is intertwined with reality and in which words take on new and different meanings again and again, it is also a story of love and devotion. Told in a way that Bina Štampe Žmavc has mastered so artfully and with such skill. This fairy-tale quality, topped with a good pinch of humour, is reflected in the superb, fresh illustrations by Svjetlan Junaković.

Format: 24 × 29cm, colour print, hardcover, 32 pages



SAMPLE TRANSLATION

1

On the edge of the big town lived a grandfather and grandmother, surrounded by fields of oblivion and delicate birdsong.

The Witch of Time planted an invisible garden of forgetfulness around them, stretching all the way to the blue edge of the horizon.

"Do you think I could stand on the tips of my toes and see beyond there, Grandpa?" Grandma asked the Grandpa one day.

"I don't think so, Grandma. The horizon always slips away to where we cannot reach it."

"Even if you climbed on top of a tall ladder?"

"Even then."

2

"I know," said Grandma, "I should put on my Far-Away Shoes, Grandpa."

"Far-Away Shoes?" wondered Grandpa.

"You know, with the Far-Away Shoes you can cross the farthest distances and catch up with things that are moving away, Grandpa. Even the words that have got lost in the distance," said Grandma.

Grandfather knew how awful it was to lose your words when you needed them most. It was almost like losing yourself. So he thought deeply about it for a while.

Then he said, "I don't know, Grandma, where you could get a pair of Far-Away Shoes. But I know what I can do. I'll make for you a little box for lost words."

3

Grandpa carved a box out of wood and painted beautiful blue poppies on it. Into it he placed all of Grandma's lost words. That way, Grandma would be able to find them again whenever she needed them. Grandma was overjoyed with the box.

"Oh, Grandpa, what a beautiful, beautiful... There, I've lost the right word again, Grandpa!"

"You wanted to say box, Grandma," Grandpa smiled, "We'll put it in the box right away. And there you have it, a box within a box! Done!"

"Indeed, like our Russian dolls, Grandpa! None of them ever get lost, they fit so well together! You know what, Grandpa, I'm going to bake a raspberry pie. So I make something for you too," Grandma said.

4

She took a basket and went raspberry picking. Meanwhile, Grandpa picked a bouquet of flowers and put them in a vase next to the little box of lost words. But time went by, and Grandma had not returned home. Grandpa became worried and went to look for her.

"You got lost, Grandma!" he said when he found her. "You got lost again!"

"But I didn't, Grandpa! The path got lost and kept twisting and turning in different directions. It kept running away from me, the cheeky thing. Without telling me where it was going. I think it was pretending to be a maze, Grandpa."

"Oh, that must have been exciting, Grandma!"

5

"I suppose so," Grandma thought deeply, and then she became a little frustrated, "But, Grandpa, to think I didn't even have a ball of red string with me, let alone some white pebbles to drop along the path I was walking on. How should I have known how to get back home, Grandpa?"

"Well, what we'll do is collect some pretty white pebbles for you to always keep in the pocket of your cardigan, Grandma. So you can leave a trail of them as you go. That way you'll always find your way back home!"

"That's right, Grandpa! So I can always come back to you! And to myself," said Grandma wistfully.

"Of course," said Grandpa cheerfully, "how could we have forgotten the white pebbles!"

"But, Grandpa, I had to get lost first for us to think of them, remember?"

"Oh, yes," said Grandpa. "How could I have forgotten something like that?"

And together they went raspberry picking and baked a raspberry pie.

"Mmm, raspberry pie is perfect for days when you get lost and find yourself again," said Grandma. "Almost like a little birthday, Grandpa!"

"Almost like a little birthday."

6

From then on, there were always pretty round white pebbles in the pocket of Grandma's cardigan, so that she could find her way back if she got lost.

But then one morning, Grandma got up so early that Grandpa was still asleep. When he woke up, he heard Grandma talking to someone outside.

"Oh, we finally have a visitor," said Grandpa, quickly putting on his slippers. But when he came out to the front of the house, there was no one there. There was only Grandma, talking to herself.

"Grandma, you were talking to yourself again," said Grandpa disappointedly.

"I wasn't, Grandpa," said Grandma. "I was talking to the day so it wouldn't be so lonely. You know, even a day can be bored if it's alone, didn't you know that? And especially..."

7

Grandma suddenly fell silent. Then she started to run.

"Grandma, why are you running?" called out Grandpa.

"I must catch the thought that escaped me, Grandpa!"

"But why are you running, Grandma?"

"You said I had to be more careful of my thoughts so they wouldn't escape, Grandpa! But it still got away from me. Probably more than one! So I have to run to catch it."

"But Grandma, yesterday you said we were going for a walk today!"

"Really?" Grandma stopped for a moment, but then started running again.

"You see, how am I supposed to know what I said if the thought escaped me? That's why I'm running to catch it, Grandpa. Then we can go for a walk."

8

But while Grandma was trying to catch her train of thought, evening fell. Grandma and Grandpa sat down to dinner.

"I'm so hungry, Grandpa!"

"Of course you are. You've been running after a lost thought all day, Grandma."

"True," said Grandma. "But I don't know if I'm hungry because I caught it or because I lost it, Grandpa," said Grandma deep in thought.

"It doesn't matter," said Grandpa, "The main thing is that it's evening, dinner is on the table and the stars are in the sky."

"And that we are here, having dinner together and watching the stars," said Grandma, taking Grandpa's hand.

9

Autumn came and the Witch of Time had strewn the golden leaves of trees all around Grandma and Grandpa's house. One day, the last swallows flew out

from under the awning and a late summer butterfly came and perched on Grandma's palm.

"The day sat on the palm of my hand, Grandpa," said Grandma.

"But that's a peacock butterfly, Grandma!"

"That may be so," said Grandma, "but it could also be a day. Look, it's already flown away! Just like the day, Grandpa! It's growing dark!"

Grandpa and Grandma looked up at the low autumn sky.

"The clouds have become gloomy, different. Truly cloudy. They are no longer blue and gleeful! Maybe that's why we are no longer in a gleeful mood!"

"Of course, without any glee there is no gleefulness! How clever of you to think of that! You see, I'm already in a more gleeful mood!"

"But yet the swallows didn't return, Grandpa!"

"How impatient you are, they've barely flown away."

"True," said Grandma, "but if I had Far-Away Shoes, I could walk with them all the way to wherever they fly!"

"That's all right, Grandma, we can still go to the woods and pick chestnuts in our own shoes. You still like chestnuts, don't you?"

"Of course, chestnuts," said Grandma, cheering up.

The forest was ablaze with the colourful autumn canopies and the leaves rustled under Grandma and Grandpa's feet. The smell of autumn was everywhere. Grandpa and Grandma picked chestnuts. After a while, Grandma suddenly disappeared.

10

"Grandma, where are you? Grandma, Grandma!" There was no sound to be heard. Grandpa waited a little longer, looked around for the white pebbles and followed their trail. Grandma was standing in a clearing under a mighty oak tree with her arms spread out wide.

"Grandma, why didn't you answer me?"

"Sssss... Ssssssss...", said Grandma, not moving an inch.

"But Grandma, what are you doing?"

"I'm rustling, can't you hear, Grandpa? I'm practising. I am learning how to be a tree! And the trees speak by rustling. Have you forgotten? That's why I'm learning to rustle, Grandpa!"

"You could have come when I called you!" said Grandpa, a little reproachfully.

"Do you think trees can just walk around like that, Grandpa?"

"True," said Grandpa, "But those who are just learning to be trees can take a break sometime, Grandma!"

Grandma thought about it. Then she said, "You're right, Grandpa! I've already taken it. A break. It's time to roast chestnuts anyway!"

And that is exactly what they did.

11

Autumn in Grandma and Grandpa's garden was getting quieter and quieter. Fewer and fewer leaves remained on the trees and large, feather-like snowflakes started to fall. The Witch of Time covered the landscape with a dusting of white snow. At first, Grandpa and Grandma were delighted by it. They made a snowman in front of their house and Grandma put her most beautiful hat on his head. But the longer the winter lasted, the quieter Grandma became. She wanted so much to tell Grandpa what she missed. But how? She had lost that one, right word! So one morning, while Grandpa was still asleep, she went to the box of lost words and opened it. But as she searched for her lost word, all the words in the box flew out. And from each of Grandma's lost words grew a beautiful sky blue poppy. In the midst of a snow-white winter, Grandma and Grandpa's garden was transformed into an expanse of blue poppies dancing all the way to the horizon.

"Spring!" exclaimed Grandma, "Oh, Grandpa, I've found my lost word! Spring is the word! Look at all the blue poppies! All my life I've tried in vain to grow even a single blue flower, Grandpa!"

"Now there's a whole meadow of blue flowers in front of us, Grandma! From here to everywhere, right under the big blue sky!"

12

And Grandma ran as if she were a young girl again. The braid in her hair fell loose as it caught on the delicate poppy stalks while Grandpa held her hand. The longer they ran, the farther out the rolling horizon of blue poppies stretched.

"Ah, Grandpa, it's like I've really found some Far-Away Shoes. I don't know whether we're sailing on a sea of blue poppies or blue clouds, Grandpa!"

"It doesn't matter, Grandma! The important thing is that we are sailing together!"

Grandma and Grandpa's footsteps became lighter and lighter, and the blue of the poppies more and more like a sea of blue clouds.

In the end, Grandpa and Grandma followed the path of clouds straight up into the big blue sky.