

# ORBIT

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Aarr, me hearties—  
pirate play ahoy!  
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Meet an adventurous gran, who you'll never forget, on page 7

# Invisible Gran

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PIERRE DIDN'T KNOW what to write.

He sat chewing the end of his pen, trying to find the right words. His handmade card looked pretty on the outside, with the vase of flowers he'd drawn during their last art class, but the inside was a blank, cream colour. Just like his mind.

Classical music wafted around the classroom. Mrs Maguire had put on one of her favourite CDs to help them to be creative. But it wasn't working. It was just making Pierre sad.

"Hey, what's up, Pee Air? Are you trying to make up what to write to your INVISIBLE gran? What's she doing this time so she can't come to Grandparents' Day? Kayaking in Antarctica?"

Pierre ignored Jack's whispers. He always ignored them. Mrs Maguire had moved Pierre to the desk in front of Jack because Pierre was the only kid in class who didn't react to Jack's bullying. It was easier to pretend Jack was the invisible one.

Mrs Maguire had the ears of a bat and was suddenly standing beside Jack's desk. "Well, I hope when I'm a grandma I'll be having adventures like Pierre's gran. How exciting to kayak around icebergs or ride a camel across the desert sands!" She turned around to Pierre. "Will your gran be back for Grandparents' Day next week, or will she still be on one of her adventures?"

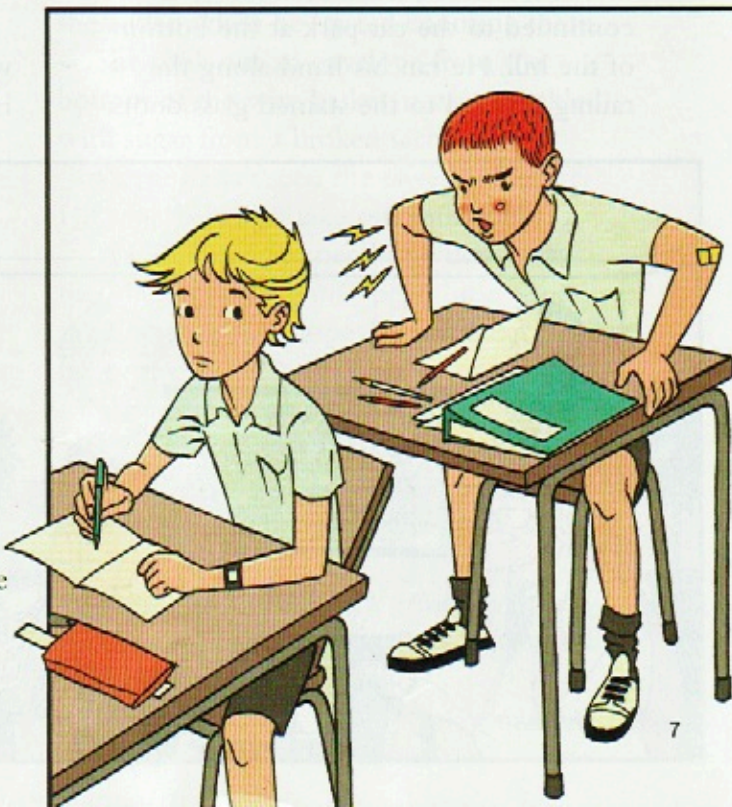
Pierre felt his face heat up and he knew he was starting to blush. It always happened.

"Um. No. She's still away. I think she's bungy jumping in New Zealand."

Jack snorted and shuffled in his chair. Pierre knew that he'd keep this information for another day of teasing.

"Well, just write how much you love her. I'm sure she'll treasure it. Now back to work, you two. The bell's about to go. I don't think any grandparent wants to get a half-finished invitation!"

Whether it was the thought of the bell going, or promises of more bullying from Jack, Pierre started to write. It just seemed to flow.



As he walked home from school, all he could think of was his gran's card slipped between the pages of his maths book. When he got to his street, he didn't turn into it. He kept walking towards the shops. His parents weren't going to be home until dinnertime, which gave him an extra couple of hours.

Pierre walked past the newsagent, the chemist and the bakery. He stopped at the florist. He checked out all the buckets crammed with flowers. Gerberas \$8. Roses \$12. Carnations \$10. He counted the coins in his pocket. He had just enough for a small bunch of lavender. The shop assistant wrapped the damp stems in tissue paper, tied the posy with yellow ribbon and smiled as she handed it to him. "Hope your gran likes the flowers."

Pierre walked along a few more streets and then turned into a long driveway lined with blossoming azaleas.

He walked past the grand entrance to the Leisure Lea Retirement Village and continued to the car park at the bottom of the hill. He ran his hand along the railing that led to the stained glass doors

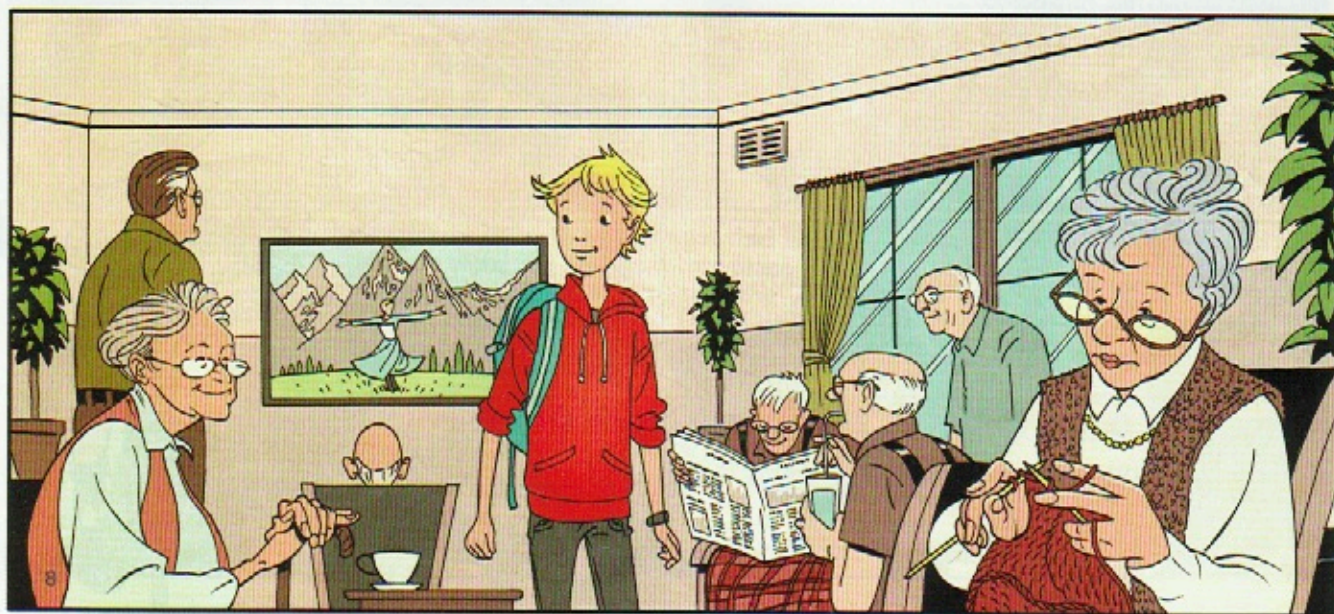
beneath the 'Welcome' sign. A new notice was stuck to it.

*If you have any signs of cold or flu, please do not enter the Azalea House Dementia Unit.*

Pierre pushed the door open and the security buzzer sounded, as usual. The long hallway was dimly lit and he sniffed the familiar lemony disinfectant. He walked past the first few rooms. Each had a number over the door and some had old-fashioned pictures of brides and grooms blu-tacked to the doorframes.

He went to room number five and threw his backpack on the floor. The single bed was next to the window that looked onto a garden. He stood beside it and felt the warming rays coming through the glass. The family photos that his mum and dad had framed were all higgledy-piggledy on the window ledge. It had been his job to write signs for each of them, naming who was in each photo.

Pierre went back into the hall. Singing was coming from the television room. He popped his head around the doorway



and smiled to the usual crowd. They were watching *The Sound of Music*. Some were singing along; others were just staring at the screen.

"Peter! Peter!" An excited voice piped up from the lounge chair in the corner.

"Peter! You've come back. Everyone—this is my son, Peter."

Pierre shuffled around the wheelchairs, nodding to those who were smiling at him until he got to his grandma.

"No, Gran. It's Pierre, your grandson. Remember? I've brought your favourite flowers."

"Why thank you, darling. What are these called again?"

"Lavender, Gran. Like you used to grow in your garden."

"Peter, let's get a cuppa," she said as she pushed herself out of the lounge chair. Pierre positioned her walking frame in front of her and guided it through the maze of residents. Some of them started to get out of their seats to follow.

"No!" said Gran sharply. "You all stay here! He's my son, not yours." Pierre grinned. He felt like the Pied Piper.

He made their tea in two plastic mugs and grabbed a few cream biscuits from the cookie jar in the community kitchen. As his gran pushed on her walking frame, Pierre followed her, carrying the mugs of tea to the sunroom overlooking the driveway of azaleas.

"Just like old times," his gran said as she dunked her biscuit into her sugary tea.

For the next hour they talked about the olden days. Pierre knew the stories by heart. It was the same every time he visited.

His gran lifted up the seat on her walking frame. The small wire basket beneath stored



her worldly possessions. She took them out one by one and showed them to Pierre.

There were Christmas cards, a brush and comb, a box of tissues and handfuls of sugar sachets that she'd taken from the dining room sugar bowls. "Just in case I need them," she added when he started counting them.

She took out an envelope from the bottom of the wire basket; it was sprinkled with sugar from a broken sachet.

Pierre hadn't seen the envelope before. His gran began to take out some photos.

"Here, Peter. Remember when I was mountain climbing in Tibet a little while ago? Look at that slope. It's a wonder I didn't fall to my death!"

Then she showed him the next one. "Well, this was only last week! I was scuba diving. Remember how you were scared of the water? You thought I was going to get eaten by a shark!"

"Yes, Gran. That was a great adventure!" She took out the last photo. "Now you

haven't seen this one, Peter. It was only taken a couple of days ago when I was driving a team of huskies across the snow in Norway. I was so cold that the drips from my nose froze into icicles!"

Pierre stared at the photo. It was his gran's last adventure before she became ill. For years, he collected the postcards that she'd sent from her adventures around the world. They were all in his scrapbook.

"Gran—could I borrow this photo for a few days? I want to show a friend of mine."

"Keep it as long as you like, Peter," she said as she patted his hand.

"Here, I'll swap you." And he gave her the card he'd made.

She ran a finger over the crushed cover. "Such lovely flowers. You always were an artistic boy."

When she opened the card, she smiled. At the same time, her eyes welled with tears.

*To my adventurous gran:  
For Grandparents' Day next week  
I want to give you one afternoon tea  
and a race around the garden in your go-kart.  
Love you always,  
Pierre xxxooo*

A nurse came into the sunroom and sat beside them.

"Here, Betty, let me help you with that lovely card and posy. I hope you've left some room for dinner."

"We've just finished our cuppa! Nurse, this is my ..." and his gran paused. She looked at Pierre sitting opposite her. He looked so small in the vinyl lounge chair. "Nurse, this is my grandson, Pierre. He's such a good boy."



The nurse winked at Pierre as she helped his gran out of her chair and steadied her at her walking frame. He watched them walk off together down the hall to the dining room. They chatted all the way. His gran didn't look back. She had already forgotten he had even been there.

Pierre looked at the photo as he walked home for his own dinner. His gran was standing on the back of a sled as a team of huskies strained on their leashes, ready to race off into the snowy wilderness. She was waving at the camera. It looked like she was waving to him. Well, that's what he'd say when he took it in for Grandparents' Day. ■



Every grandparent  
has amazing stories  
to tell!