

## PLANNING

Title: Read me a secret

Who?: Grandma Jo, Sandy, Max

When?: over the school holidays.

What happens?: Over the the school holidays Sandy and Max decides they want to spend the weekend at grandma Jo's house! Sandy loves to read, so when she found that grandma has a library inside her house, she was ecstatic, but Sandy found something inside a book, something about grandma, a secret....they have two days to discover grandma's secret before they are stuck there forever! The tension is high, and their lives are on the line.

Why?: Sandy and Max thought it was going to be fun to spend times at grandmas.

Narrative:

It was the first morning of the school holidays and Sandy and Max were practically bouncing with excitement in the back seat as their parents dropped them off at grandmas Jo's house. They expected freshly baked cookies, blanket forts, and bedtime stories, not the twisted tale that would unravel inside those dusty walls.

Grandma Jo welcomed them with her usual warm smile, but behind her eyes, something flickered, something unreadable. The old house creaked with age, vines curled around its edges, and a thunderstorm rolled in, sealing them in.

While Max raced off to explore the attic, Sandy wandered into a room she hadn't noticed before: a hidden library. It smelled like ink, time, and secrets. The shelves were stacked with leather-bound books and journals older than her parents. But one book stood out. It had no title. When she opened it, her name was scrawled inside... and tucked between the pages was a fragile note:

"The one who reads this holds the key to my secret. You have two days, or you'll never leave." Her fingers trembled as the ink seemed to shimmer faintly. She whispered underneath her breath and took the note with her as she exited the room.

The note wasn't a joke. That night, clocks began ticking backward, the library door disappeared, and Grandma Jo spoke in riddles. A storm brewed, not just outside—but within the house itself. Sandy and Max realized the book was a puzzle, each chapter pointing to real places in the house: the painting in the hallway, a box beneath the stairs, even the lullaby Grandma once sang.

Through cryptic clues and whispered warnings, the secret began to take shape—a story about Grandma’s youth, a promise she made, and a magic she locked away to protect the family. The house was built around that secret. Now it was demanding a resolution.

The house seemed to breathe around them—walls shifting subtly, windows flickering with shadows, and the grandfather clock in the hallway chiming out of time.

Max tugged Sandy’s sleeve. “Look. That painting wasn’t crooked before.”

It was a portrait of Grandma Jo as a young girl. Now, it hung tilted, revealing a torn scrap of parchment taped to the back of the frame. Sandy peeled it off carefully. On it was a riddle:

“To find the truth, follow the ink.  
Where stories sleep, secrets blink.”

They exchanged a glance, hearts racing.

In the library, Sandy ran her fingers along the spines of old books until one buzzed faintly beneath her touch. It trembled open, revealing a hollowed-out center—and inside, a tiny brass key.

Max dug beneath the rug in the hallway, uncovering a trapdoor they hadn’t noticed before. And just outside the library window, a weather-worn bench had carved symbols matching those in the book’s margins.

Three clues, three pieces of Grandma’s puzzle. Something was guiding them... and time was running out.

Sandy clutched the brass key as they descended through the hidden trapdoor beneath the rug. It creaked open to reveal a narrow staircase leading into a cobwebbed cellar that smelled of earth and ink.

The walls were lined with mismatched crates, dusty typewriters, and faded portraits. Max pointed to a shelf with a locked wooden box marked “1932 – Promise.” The key fit perfectly.

Inside was a yellowed photograph of Grandma Jo with a girl they didn’t recognize, both holding hands beside a glowing tree, a locket with a flickering symbol they’d seen carved into the library bench a second note, written in shaky cursive:

“We made a vow. But vows have weight, and magic has memory. You must understand before midnight.”

They hurried back to the library, where the symbols on the bench now glowed faintly. Max remembered the riddle: “To find the truth, follow the ink...”

Sandy pulled the mysterious book from earlier—the one with her name inside. As she flipped to the final page, ink poured from the edges like liquid shadow, forming a new sentence: “The locket reveals the place, the photo the time. Ask her about the tree.”

The house moaned as if listening. The clock struck eleven. They had one hour left.

Outside the library, Grandma Jo sat in her rocking chair, humming a lullaby Sandy hadn't heard since she was little. Max whispered, "Do you think she's waiting for us to ask?"

Sandy nodded. "It's time."

The air felt heavier as Sandy and Max stepped outside, the wind whispering through the garden like a warning. Grandma Jo, still humming, gazed at the willow tree standing at the edge of the yard—gnarled, ancient, glowing faintly beneath the moonlight.

Sandy clutched the locket, the photo folded in her pocket. She walked slowly toward Grandma Jo.

"You were the girl in the photo, weren't you? And that tree... it's not just a memory, is it?"

Grandma Jo's humming stopped. She looked up, tears shining behind her glasses.

"I made a promise long ago—to protect this tree and everything it holds. It's not just wood and leaves, it remembers. It sees. And it gave me a gift... but there was a price."

Max stepped forward, voice low. "What kind of gift?"

Grandma Jo opened her hand, revealing a shimmer of light—a seed pulsing gently.

"This tree is bound to our family. I was young, foolish, and desperate to save someone I loved. I asked for help. It gave me magic. But only one of you can carry the memory now..."

Thunder grumbled overhead.

"The locket will guide you. The photo holds the time. You have minutes left to decide: read the tree's story and take its burden—or walk away, and forget everything."

Sandy and Max stood frozen as the tree began to glow brighter, the bark rippling like a turning page. A hollow opened at its base, revealing another book—blank, waiting, with room for only one signature.

Sandy stepped forward, heart pounding, and placed the locket gently into the hollow of the tree. The book fluttered open, pages filling with ink as if written by unseen hands.

Max watched silently, then smiled—an understanding passing between them without words.

Grandma Jo placed a hand on Sandy's shoulder. "You've chosen wisely. The tree will carry your memory, and you'll carry its story."

The willow shimmered one last time before fading into stillness, its glow absorbed into the roots. The wind settled. The moment passed.

But something had changed.

Sandy looked down at her hands, no longer trembling. She knew things now—things that couldn't be taught, only felt. The burden was not just memory—it was hope.

From that day on, she spoke of the tree in whispers and dreams, and each word planted a seed in someone's heart. The story lived on.

And the tree remembered.

**THE END**