

The Secret Library

Linda Boubínová

Mr. Nelson lived with his daughter in a small house on the edge of a town. Once or twice a week he left his home in the evening and mysteriously disappeared into the woods and returned with a dreamy look on his face. Sometimes his ten-year-old daughter Josephine went with him. Nobody except them knew that they were going to their beloved books.

Twenty years ago the government had made a law. Everyone had to turn in all their books to the All Book Library. The people would probably never see them again.

The Nelson family had disobeyed and hidden their books in a specially made den deep in the forest.

Josephine was now a fifth grader but it was not yet long ago that her father had told her his big secret and took her to his precious hide out where he taught her how to read and love a story. It was very surprising to Josephine that books were once a part of a real life which was actually still hidden in them in its former beauty.

At school it was different. She had become used to the Math. The normal things they learned there was $1+0+1-1-0-1=0$ or some similar or longer math sentences using just 1's and 0's. Now Josephine knew it wasn't very useful and she wondered if they would do this for the rest of their lives. After all they had mastered this already in First grade. Later they did learn other numbers for counting was a main tool in the whole community but the 1's and 0's were favorites. Father had said that the government was using the once beautiful and logical Math to brainwash the people. Maybe all the repetition made the 1's and 0's stuck in the front of each person's brain pushing every other thing to the back and out. Josephine did not know but now that she was reading she was getting worse at the Math at school.

Both Josephine and her father were unfortunately unaware that Josephine's behavior was raising a big suspicion towards Mr. Nelson. And every suspicion made the government act.

One day when Mr. Nelson was going to his books alone a woman with wrapped up baby in her arms saw Mr. Nelson disappearing into the forest.

Josephine looked out of her window just in time to see the woman throw away her baby which unveiled on the ground. It was a teddy bear. The woman set off in the direction of the All Book Library. Josephine knew in an instant that the government had been spying on Father. Soon a line of policemen will be searching for him.

She quickly left the house and took the shortest shortcut she could and within minutes was on the road to the den. She ran a little more. She couldn't find Father. What if they already had him? Maybe she was going the wrong way. Father always changed ways as to not make the path to the den easy to find. Josephine ran to another road Father used. She was more careful; she had already heard some noise from that direction. And then she saw the soldiers. They were retreating. A broad smile was on each of their faces. Finally her eyes found Father. He was being dragged by two strong soldiers.

What was Josephine supposed to do? Run after them? Father probably wouldn't want her to, he would want to save her... and the books! Did they find them as well? Breathless and with tears in her eyes she ran back to the den and found the key. She took it and unlocked the door. In the corner was the old cart Father had probably brought the books in many years ago. She loaded the books on it.

An hour later she was standing at the long time ago abandoned barn that she had found one day in her wanderings. She opened the door and spilled the cart's burden on the floor. She had to retrace the tiring journey four more times. Then she finally had the time to cry. She burst into tears.

Josephine stood in front of her house. She was ten years older now but the same tears that flowed the day she saved Father's books swelled up in her eyes when she looked at the All Book Library rising high and magnificent in the distance. In this evil building the size of a village her father was imprisoned for such a long time. Quickly she wiped her tears away. She knew that if the people saw her they would run up to her and count how much tears were on her face. They counted everything. Father was a farmer but

even in that job he had to count how much apples from each tree he picked and how many birds attacked the crops.

Josephine turned away and marched to her grandma's house. If there had been no Library that controlled the country she would have gone and lived with her when her father was sent to the prison but instead a person from the Library came every day to "care" for her. There was always a different person and Josephine had never seen most of them again. A few months ago Josephine turned twenty and she was finally left alone. When she sat down at grandma's table she smiled at the old lady. The lady smiled back and spoke. This startled Josephine; grandma hardly ever spoke.

"I've told someone," she said.

"Who, why, when, how????!!!" Josephine gasped. She had trusted grandma enough to tell her a couple of stories that every one had forgotten, but much more not to tell anyone.

"Calm down. I told a person that I trust. I told Grace."

"Grace!?" To Josephine Grace was the most untrustworthy person on Earth. True, Grace had always been grandma's best friend and Father had said that she had been very kind before the All Book Library but afterwards she no longer acted as Father's godmother. Now, could a person change twice?

But to Josephine's surprise ten days later she was still alive and free. Then one day old Grace walked up to her.

She said, "I want to talk."

And walked off, towards the forest. Reluctantly Josephine followed.

Two hours later Josephine walked out of the forest and quickly returned home. So Grace had changed after all.

The old lady had actually asked if she could spread the story that grandma had told her to more people and if she could hear another. She herself had suddenly remembered a story that she had listened to when she was little. The story of Little Red Riding Hood it was called.

Obediently Josephine had told another story but to the other question she had answered more slowly and cautiously. After a long time she had nodded a doubtful "yes".

Ten weeks later Josephine had started to have secret story meetings. More and more people were coming up to her asking for stories. They told relatives and close friends which were trustworthy for them. So much people had changed. No more were they telling on every bad thing a neighbor did but trying to help them get away with it.

Finally Josephine's father was let out of jail. He saw his beautiful daughter standing on the doorsteps of their house.

He hurried up and in a moment they were both in the tightest hug possible.

"I missed you so much Father..." Josephine cried into his shoulder.

"I did too," was the quiet answer that came.

"Father, I have something to show you."

"Go ahead."

"Later," and she kissed him on the cheek.

A few days later when she made sure nobody was following them Josephine was leading her father through the forest to the little barn where the books now lay.

"Where are you leading me?" asked Mr. Nelson.

"It's a surprise," was a whisper from Josephine.

Then they were there. An assembly of people was already in front of the old barn. Mr. Nelson's mouth dropped. Josephine just smiled. She took the key from under the bush and unlocked the door. The people made a small circle on the floor.

"Any new ones?" Josephine looked around. A teenage girl raised her hand.

"I am..."

"Well we'll have a good long story for you."

Josephine rummaged through a roughly carved bookshelf. She took out a small book and started reading a story.

The people laughed and cried during it.

"And so they lived happily ever after..." Josephine ended with a nice and happy end.

Mr. Nelson smiled. He had not expected this. Without books real life would slowly die out. But he knew that his Josephine would always keep trying. And deep in his heart he

saw that the All Book Library was nearing its end. Even if it took another ten or a hundred years.