

Chopin's Heart

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★ Contents ★

	Lily's Story	4
	Going Home	8
	A Dangerous Plan	12
	Danger on the Road	16
	Strength and Determination	26
	About This Story	31
	Glossary	32

Lily's Story

Today it will be just Grandmother and me. Of course, nurses and doctors will be here at the hospital as well. But it feels like it will just be the two of us because Mother will be gone all day. I feel many different **emotions**.

I am worried. Grandmother isn't getting better. I also feel bored, which makes me feel selfish. Since I am here in Paris with Grandmother, and my friends are at home in Chicago, it's hard to talk to my friends. The time difference means I am never on the computer when they are. I don't have much to say anyway, because we have barely left the hospital.

I'm sad, too. If Grandmother dies, many of her stories will die with her. I want to be a writer, yet I have not taken the time to write down any of her stories. I realize there's no time to waste and I go sit beside Grandmother's bed with the laptop.

After a half hour her eyes open, and she smiles at me. It is a weak smile, but it is a smile! I take her hand in mind. It feels cold. It feels too thin.





“How are you feeling, Grandmother? Would you like anything?”

“No, my dear, I’m fine,” she says. Her voice is weak. “I am sorry you are stuck beside the bed of an old, sick woman. How are you amusing yourself?”

I explain that I’m trying to write down the various stories she has told me. Her eyes close again. A few minutes later she opens them again.

“I have a story for you, Lily, one that I have not told anyone, not even your mother. It is time to pass along this story. It is a story my grandmother told me, and her grandmother told her.”

“I would love to hear it! But I don’t want you to get too tired,” I say.

For the first time since we arrived, I see a bit of a **twinkle** in Grandmother’s eyes.

“Telling this story may actually be good **medicine** for me,” she says.

“Just as you are named Lily after me, I was named Lily after my grandmother. And her grandmother was named Lily as well. This story is about what happened to that first Lily.”

My grandmother began her story this way, “I am very old and I do not have many days left to live. I must tell you the story about what really happened to Frédéric Chopin’s heart.”

Going Home

Her words give me **goose bumps**, although I have no idea why. Grandmother smiles again, her little smile that says she knows I can't wait to hear more.

"This first Lily, her mother was the housekeeper for the great pianist and composer Frédéric Chopin, here in Paris. He had given Lily's mother a job and a place to live when they hadn't had anywhere to go, after Lily's father died."

Grandma continues, "Thousands of people came to Chopin's **funeral**, held here in Paris. Many did not know him. To them, he was a world-famous musician. To Lily and her mother, he was someone who had shown kindness when they most needed it. They were sad he had died, but the beauty of the music comforted them. Chopin's own *Funeral March* and Mozart's *Requiem* were both part of the funeral.

"Ludwicka, Chopin's older sister, and his first piano teacher, had come from Poland to Paris to help care for him in the final weeks of his life. After the funeral, she asked Lily for a favor. Before she even knew what it was, Lily said, 'Of course, what can we do? We cannot repay his kindness, but we would like to try,'" Grandmother tells me and closes her eyes.

I help Grandmother take a sip of her water.

