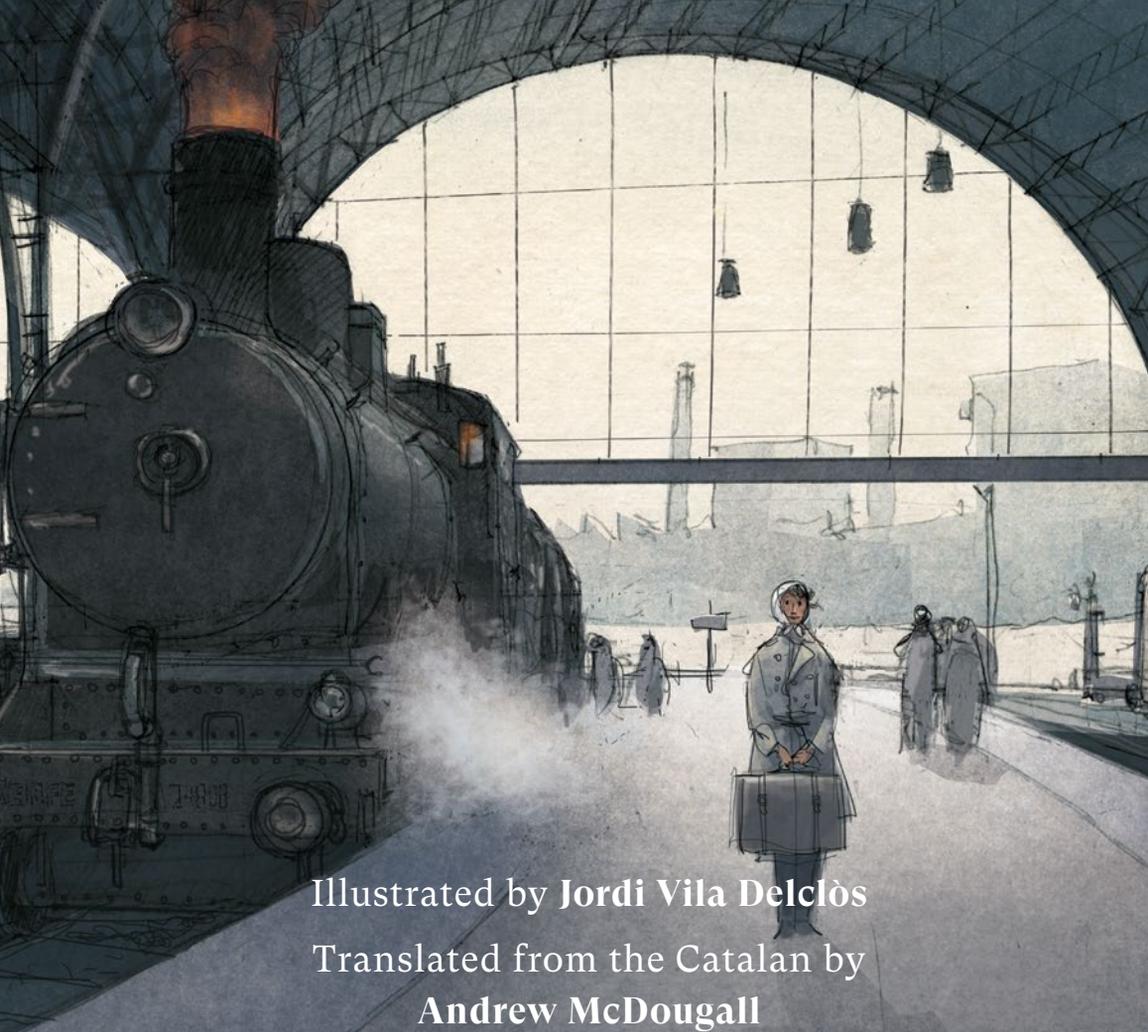


**bromera**

# The True Story of Flora Pomerania

**Anna Vilar**



Illustrated by **Jordi Vila Delclòs**  
Translated from the Catalan by  
**Andrew McDougall**

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© Illustrations: Jordi Vila Delclòs, 2024

Translation: Andrew McDougall, 2025

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*For Judith and Esther,  
my first readers*



# 1

## Who was Flora Pomerania?

Flora Pomerania was my great-grandmother. She lived until she was ninety-six, which is a ripe old age. I wasn't born yet, so I never met her. My grandma and mum are always mentioning her to us. They say: *Flora Pomerania's female descendants are all alike*. We are all called Flora, but not Pomerania because you had to use the father's surname and the mother's wasn't worth anything. So, my grandma, my mum and I don't have the same surname. If I ever have a daughter, you never know, I'll give her my surname, or, if possible, I'll bring back the Pomerania name. Pomerania is a breed of dog and an area in central Europe; I know because I looked it up. There are people there with that surname, but here there aren't any at all. We don't know where it came from, perhaps a great-great-great-great-grandfather, or even further back, was a German or Polish man who got lost and ended up in Catalonia. What we do know is that a Pomerania married a Roig from Tarragona and they had five children, four boys and a girl, the youngest, Flora.

Great-grandma Flora was the first Flora in the family. As a girl it seems she had a difficult character. She said so herself when she was older and she still had a difficult character! That means she didn't let herself be walked all over or manipulated by her four brothers. The family history tells us that she was the sharpest, cleverest and best student of all the siblings; however, as she was a girl, further education wasn't on the cards for her. Her brothers went to university: a doctor, an engineer, a botanist and, the youngest, an architect. Flora had classes in drawing, painting, sewing, piano, horticulture, French and etiquette. When she turned seventeen, she escaped from that house full of men who looked down on her. She reappeared when she was twenty-three, as that was the legal age of adulthood back then, with the same difficult character and an engineering degree under her belt. They never knew where she had been during those six years, but no one could deny that she had made good use of the time. She spoke English, French and German, and she had an engineering degree from a German university. Where she had lived, where she had got the money from and other such minor details relating to her survival, she never told them. She moved back into her room in the family house, where we still live, as if she had never left.

Her room is now mine. None of the furniture



remains from when she made it hers at twenty-three years old. My mum and grandma say that I have inherited more than just a bedroom from my great-grandma Flora: my character – somewhat unpredictable, one moment so joyful and cheerful it wears everyone out, the next fierce and abrupt like a summer storm; my height – we’re all tall and thin like the birch tree at the end of the garden; my smarts – we’re sharp and clever, just give us a device to repair or a puzzle to solve and we’ll have it done in a jiffy – and we’re also independent and solitary, we don’t like being told what to do and I can’t stand being given advice on how to do things, I like doing it my way.

I have a younger sister, Frida, and an older brother, Felix. I like having siblings, although they often invade my space and then I explode like a firework on bonfire night. Frida is okay, she’s nine and follows me around all day; Felix is better, he’s fifteen and he’s good company, and I’m in the middle, twelve-years-old and the eldest girl, the heir to the family name, Flora. Although, they often change my name: Flor, Floreta, Florist, Florinda, Foulra and Flemra. They find it funny, I suppose. I don’t mind if they laugh at my name, I’ve got more important things to think about. For example, I think a lot about an app that translates what pet cats say, or a programme that records their thoughts

and writes them out as text. And sometimes I lose track of time imagining a robot that plans the family meals, cooks them, does the weekly shopping and all according to my tastes, not those of my mum. I don't just chew it over, I also build things, like when I used a heater to make a body-drier for after the shower to save on all the towels we go through, as there are five of us in the house! It wasn't a success, because my dad said we'd get an electric shock. I've also tried my hand at making lots of other little gadgets. Dad says that maybe I will invent something amazing when I'm older that will make us famous, and he adds, *like the mop*. I'm not sure what's so amazing about a mop, but it seems that before people used to scrub the floor on their hands and knees with a cloth. Obviously, it was women who did it and, how infuriating, a man had to come along and invent a stick with a cloth on the end and a bucket with a wringer. Then they said they had freed women from a task on their knees. They didn't free them from washing the floor, oh no! Just from doing it on their hands and knees, which was apparently a watershed moment. And now we have these machines which sweep and mop all by themselves, but in a house like ours, full of steps and corners, they don't work too well.

Forgive me, I've strayed off topic and I must focus. The topic is great-grandma Flora Pomerania. It turns

out, Felix has done a very important – his words – project on historical memory, which don't know the exact meaning of, but I can have a guess: *memory*, so remembering, and *historical*, so old things. Anyway, it seems you could do it about your family and mum told him that the most historic member of ours, the most eccentric, was great-grandma Flora. So, all five of us – not counting the animals – teamed up to discover the true story of the exceptional and extravagant Flora Pomerania i Roig.

First off, we looked out the family photo albums, then we rummaged around in the trunks in the attic and found maths and physics books full of Flora's notes. We also found workbooks from when great-grandma was in charge of the factory, and, most interestingly of all, Flora's correspondence – which means letters, like WhatsApp messages but handwritten on paper – with her siblings, a friend, Elsa E and a man called Albert E – in French, which we don't understand – and a Jordi F. When we had an idea about her life, we looked for newspapers from the time to complete our research. Finally, we had a pretty accurate and real picture of who Flora Pomerania was. Felix did his project and got an A, but his text was very boring. I've set myself the task of telling great-grandma's story my way. Let's begin!

## 2

# The diaries of Aurora Roig

There is a photo of Flora Pomerania when she returned home aged twenty-three. She has dark, curly hair and thin eyebrows, like I do. Her blouse is remarkably ugly and with a neck so tight that it must have often left her short of breath. Her head is tilted and her gaze is lost in the distance. What is she thinking? She is neither smiling nor not smiling. Like back when very few photographs were taken and everyone posed very seriously. I always clown around in photos: I stick my tongue out, jump and pose in unlikely positions. My mum gets mad, she says I look like an acrobat with a screw loose. Flora is wearing a grey pearl necklace with matching earrings, worn over her closed collar. I'd never seen a necklace worn like that! My mum keeps it in a little box she has of old jewellery, and she says that one day it will be for Frida and I. To be honest, I'm not at all interested in pearls.

There is another photograph from when she was a baby. Great-great-grandma sat down with Flora on her lap, two sons on her right, two on her left, the

youngest in the arms of the the oldest, and their father standing behind them with a hand on his wife's shoulder. The boys are wide-eyed, perhaps it is the first time they have been photographed; their mother's face looks tired, her mouth straight and serious, and Mr Pomerania looks puffed up with pride, with a moustache that hides half his face, and sparkling eyes, almost laughing. There aren't any other photos or any documents written by great-grandma Flora during her childhood, but we found a diary where my great-great-grandma wrote about her daily life. I read the whole thing and, trust me, it's very dull. She tells things about her children, her husband, the cook, the maid; there are meal plans for normal days and for important festivities. She complains about the price of flour and milk. She longs to go on holiday and draws new dresses she wants to order. Honestly, great-great-grandma was a bit daft; she didn't have to do anything at home, she had a cook, a maid and a nanny, and she still complained about having to keep track of the household expenses and order the food to be cooked. For her sons she had nothing but praise and positivity, while for Flora it was reproaches and criticisms. If my mum criticised me like that, I'd look for another family to go live with. In fact, that's what Flora did at seventeen, wasn't it? Disappear.

I've copied some extracts from great-great-grandma Roig's diary to give you an idea:

*The cook says we've run out of flour and we need to order a bag. I don't know what they do with the flour, anyone would think we're feeding an army. Maybe they pilfer a few ounces for their families in the city, but I'd rather not know. If they are in need, by all means help them; however, if Mr Pomerania found out, he'd kick up an awful fuss. Oh, Stanislav and his lack of patience with the service...*

As you can see, great-great-grandma was very worried about the flour and she didn't trust the servants. I think if she wanted to keep an eye on the food, she should have rolled her sleeves up and gotten into the kitchen herself. This topic comes up again and again, flour this, eggs that, sugar and oil the other... Everything in the kitchen has a few lines in the diary, and she didn't even go in there herself.

*Young Jordi is a doctor in the making, he's always chasing the factory's cats and dogs to put bandages on their paws. He says he'll be a doctor for animals, but, heavens, how awful, spending the whole day with horses and cows. I tell him he'll be a doctor for people and he says yes, he's such a darling. Joan spends the day pottering*

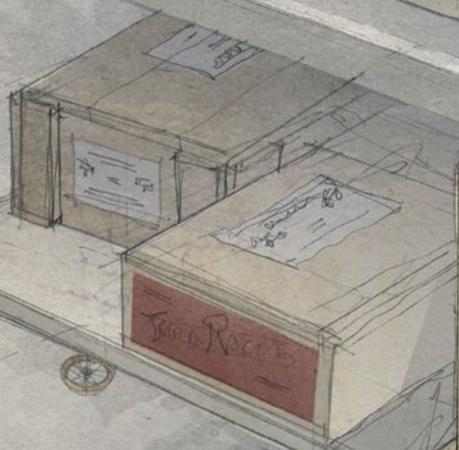
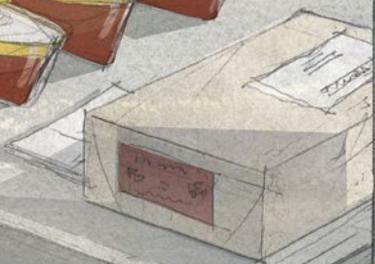
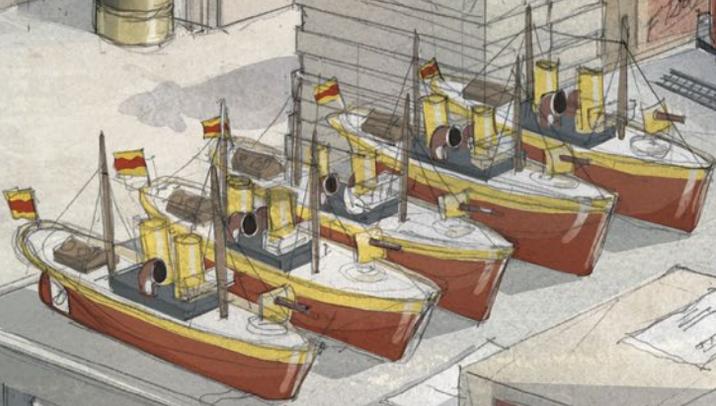
*around the garden looking for leaves, flowers, herbs, roots and bark. He puts them inside books to dry them, then he classifies them and writes their names in Latin. He's quite the botany expert! Jaume is still very young, but it seems he has an inclination for building houses with bits of wood he finds in the factory courtyard; he's very skilful! Lastly, Stanislav junior, the heir to the factory, is the one with most brains and he will grow the name of POMERANIA METAL MANUFACTURERS!*

I mean, can you see how she talks about her sons? She gets all misty-eyed, they're all brilliant, uniquely smart. In other paragraphs, she explains what they're like, what good boys they are, how extraordinarily handsome, how good-natured, and oh how they love their mother! The whole thing is very cheesy and I'll spare you it. Now let's compare that with what she says about little Flora.

*Flora is sprouting up like a runner bean, I don't know what we're going to do with this girl, she's so tall and thin! Most of all, though, she's stubborn and bad-tempered. She doesn't like drawing or painting, she's clumsy with a needle, her embroideries end up dirty, frayed and with an image that you have to imagine. HHHer handwriting is a mess and when she plays the piano I have to put cotton buds in my ears. I don't know where she got it from, this lack of femininity! I wanted a little*

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*girl as nice and sweet as a flower. I imagined a doll I could dress up with bows and frills, who would keep me company in the sitting room while we sewed or read fashion magazines from Paris. But no! She's always running after Stanislav junior and the factory lads, she gets dangerously close to the kilns and rummages around the shelves in the warehouse. The workers find her amusing, her brothers put up with her with brotherly love, little saints that they are, her father spoils her because she's his little Flora and I, well I've had it up to here with such an inconvenient daughter. Her grandmothers say that I should send her to the convent with Aunt Clara, that they'll sort her out there, but Stanislav senior would never allow that, he wants his little girl with him. We'll just see how this ends!*

As you can see, my great-great-grandma had a feeling that everything would end badly. She calls Flora an inconvenient daughter! When I read it, I took the notebook straight to my mum and I asked her what she thought of me, was I convenient or not.

'Flora, darling!' she said with a teasing smile. 'You are not convenient in the slightest, you're loud, bothersome, sulky, stubborn, you could talk the hind leg off a donkey, you're cheerful, fun-loving, tender and moody, sweet and surly. What more can I say? You have many virtues and the odd flaw, but most

importantly you are my beloved, inimitable and wonderful Flora! You're not convenient, you're unique!

She hugged and kissed me and I was left fully convinced that being inconvenient and unsuitable is the best thing in the world, as there's no one like me and whoever wants to love me will do so with all my good parts and the not so good ones. My mum is fantastic at encouraging her children, not like great-great-grandma Aurora, who spent the first seventeen years of Flora's life talking down her qualities and trying to bend her to her liking, to turn her into a girl who was obedient, placid and quiet. Ha! It didn't work; Flora was as strong and stubborn as an ox.

### 3

## The day of the disappearance

Great-great-grandma Aurora narrates the disappearance of her daughter Flora Pomerania on St John's Eve in 1925.

*23 June 1925*

*The garden is looking splendid right now, the bougainvilleas on the wall have blossomed like never before and the cypresses by the entrance display an intense green, which is reflected in the water of the pond. The large flowerpots on the veranda are brimming with white daisies, bluebells and pink hydrangeas. The rosebushes surround the front gate with their red flowers. The maid has put out large tables in the hall and on the veranda. Tonight, like every St John's Eve, we have guests. We won't sit down to have dinner, we'll have a reception where, standing around the tables, we'll nibble on small dishes prepared by the cook. I got the idea from a cookery magazine from Paris, it's all the rage at gatherings, they call it a cocktail party. Afterwards, we'll play music on the gramophone and dance into the morning. The boys will stay up for the party, they're old enough now, but Flora*

*will have to retire at midnight, after the fireworks. This is my favourite festivity of the whole year, celebrating the arrival of summer with family and friends makes me very happy!*

Great-great-grandma was a bit showy. Mum says she was a snob, which means she liked to appear very distinguished and original, like all that about the cocktail reception, what nonsense! We've always just called that finger food and everyone fend for themselves. I love going round all the tables. When one has run out of olives, I go to another; if there aren't any croquetas where I am, I sprint across the courtyard and park myself in front of the last plate of grandma's croquetas.

*24 June 1925*

*The party was marvellous, perfect like a Swiss watch. The boys are still sleeping. Stanislav junior danced all night long with the eldest daughter of the Romeus. He's twenty-two now and it's time he had his own family. Stanislav senior has bought a house nearby ours. It will be their wedding present, hopefully soon! The other boys spent the whole night being fickle around the young ladies who came with their parents. Their time will come. First we have to marry the heir. Flora must be in the garden somewhere, I've not seen her yet.*

*Young ladies!* She means ‘girls’, but apparently *girls* is what plebs were called, while rich girls were young ladies. Felix explained it to me and he said that word, *plebs*, means workers and ordinary people, and he added ‘people in need of a hot meal’. Well, we’ve discovered that the Pomerania Roig family were upper-class poshos rolling in cash! My dad laughs, he says now we’re the plebs, even though we live in the family house, which is falling apart – mum says that bit. The garden isn’t as large or magnificent anymore. Grandma sold the factory building and the courtyard, and they’ve built flats there. Dad says that to afford the work to the roof, the electricity, the pipes, the kitchen and the bathrooms we’ll have to sell part of the garden, maybe the bit that looks onto the road behind. I tell him not to let them build more flats, at most some little houses: I don’t like that from the balconies they can see what we’re doing in the house. This next bit is from the entry on the 24th of June, St John’s Day.

*It’s Joan’s saint day and with the party we consider we’ve already celebrated it, but I have a special present that we’ll give him at lunch time: a press for the leaves and flowers he collects for his botanical studies. They made it at the factory according to Stanislav’s instructions,*

*using oak and cast iron, just like one he saw in a German catalogue. He'll be so happy!*

She's so thrilled to be giving such a special present to her third child, Joan the botanist, who several years later became famous for a journey he went on to Equatorial Guinea where he studied and catalogued the flora of the jungle. He was a top botanist. Great-great-grandma isn't worried yet about Flora's absence. The boys have woken up and are lounging around the veranda, and their father has gone to the factory, he never rests. The maid lays the table and the cook takes the pot of duck with pears off the stove. All of this she describes in the diary, but I'll skip over it, as it's a drag, and I'll copy the part where she talks about when they can't find Flora.

*When the bell rang for lunch, we all went to the dining room, but Flora wasn't there. The maid went to look for her in her room but didn't find her. The boys have searched the garden without success. Stanislav has gone back to the factory in case she got distracted looking at the toys in the warehouse as she so often did, but she wasn't there. We turned the house upside down, looked in the attic, the toolshed, the cellar, and nothing. Eventually, the maid found a letter under Flora's pillow. The duck with pears went cold on the kitchen counter and the*

*flower press remained hidden under the stairs. We went into the snug, all of us upset. Stanislav, startled, unable to react; the boys, disconcerted, disturbed, were waiting for an order from their father and I, well, what else can a poor woman do? I was half passed out on the chaise-longue and holding back the tears; I am a lady after all.*

They can't find their daughter and they go and sit down in the snug! How useless! I'd have already alerted the police, or run into the street, maybe one of the neighbours saw her. But no, Aurora Roig saw down on the sofa and held back the tears, because ladies don't cry in public. The letter gives some clues, but they were shocked and bewildered! Really, what fools!

*Dear parents and brothers,*

*I hope that when you read these lines, the shock and worry have passed. I'm not happy. I know it is not expected of me that I be happy, only that I be a good girl, that I marry a good man (preferably a rich one) and that I have lots of children, like you, mum. I don't want that life, sewing and flowers bore me, I'm too clumsy for oil painting or watercolours, and I'm hopeless at the piano. I want to go to university, like my brothers. I want to be an engineer. I'm smart and talented, I've learnt a lot from the workers and from dad. I know I can be the best*

*and that's my aim. Perhaps you won't understand my decision, I only ask that you respect it and forgive me for the ordeal I've put you through. I'm leaving the family home and going abroad. By now it will be difficult for you to catch me: my train left for Europe at six in the morning. I don't want you to worry, I'll be fine. With love from your daughter and sister.*

*Flora*

And that was it, they sat around at home and made no effort to find their daughter. Aurora explains it thoroughly in her diary. They didn't do anything, just hoped it was a brief adventure and that the girl would be back soon with her tail between her legs and begging forgiveness. From home to the station in Barcelona there's a half-hour journey by car today. What time did she leave the house? Did she take a train to go into the city. Was someone waiting for her with a vehicle or carriage outside the garden? Where was the six-o'clock train heading? They didn't wonder any of this, they waited with their arms crossed expecting their daughter to be back in a week. She took six years.

I'm sure that grandma, who is great-grandma Flora's daughter, knows lots about those years she was away from home, but she's in the care home and

she almost always talks nonsense. What I mean is she doesn't remember many things and she gets mad if we ask a lot of questions. What I really mean is mum doesn't want us to overwhelm her, that she's delicate. She's never been delicate, she's a Flora, strong and brave, but she's old and mum doesn't want us to bother her. Felix wanted to interview her to help his project on great-grandma, but it didn't work out. I'll do it, and what do you bet I manage it?

## 4

# Interview with grandma Flora Wood

Grandma Flora is great-grandma Flora's daughter. She only had one child, with an Englishman called George Wood. No one ever saw this Wood fellow. Great-grandma said she met him in Barcelona, where he was a volunteer soldier with the International Brigades in 1936, at the beginning of the Civil War. They got married in secret, she got pregnant and he died on the Aragonese front. That's what she said. The marriage documents were lost. These things happen in a war. Felix says, and dad agrees, that there was no marriage with an English soldier, that she made it up because she was expecting a baby with some mysterious man, but you can't say that because mum gets mad. The thing is that great-grandma did spend several months in Barcelona working with the republican army thanks to her expertise in metal engineering and she returned home a widow and about to give birth. Of course everyone believed it, what were they supposed to do? Flora

Pomerania was thirty and no one still thought she would get married or have children. That's what great-great-grandma says in her diaries, but I won't copy it because it's long and the writing gets hard to read, maybe she was getting older and her hand trembled as she wrote.

Grandma is in the care home in the village. She has a room to herself which gives on to a small garden. Mum chose it because it's the one that looks most like our house, her house before. Grandma can't be with us because she has good days and bad days. On the bad days she does odd things: she leaves the house without knowing where she's going, she wanders around the house at night like a confused ghost, shouting and swearing, she pulls flowers out their pots and she tells us off all day. On the good days, she's almost like the grandma of old: she potters around the garden, does some weeding or bakes sponge cake. Sometimes she recognises us, sometimes she doesn't. Often she's kind and sweet, but sometimes she's moody and disagreeable. And she says swear words, insults she'd never used in her whole life. She can't be at home because we're all busy all day: us kids at school and our parents at work. Mum hired a woman who came in the morning until mid-afternoon, but grandma was making her life impossible: she'd hide or escape, she'd throw plates on

the floor or scatter cat food all over the rug in the living room. Basically, she played pranks to annoy her. Mum decided that specialist help was required and the best place was the local care home. It's nearby and mum goes every day; we go when we want and we stay until she tires of having children around and she kicks us out.

This afternoon, when we get out of school, Frida and I will stop by to see grandma. I take Frida because she's her favourite and grandma manages to be more alert and focused when she's there. I'll use my phone to record everything grandma says.

Transcription of the conversation with Flora Wood.

*Transcription* means I'm copying exactly what grandma, Frida and I say. In brackets are the stage directions, which are the comments I added afterwards so you can understand it better.

(Grandma is on the patio, sat on an armchair and surrounded by cushions. On the table next to her there is a cup of tea and some biscuits. It's time for her afternoon snack. It's sunny and the flowers are giving off scents of spring. That all sounds very professional, a bit ordinary, but I make a good journalist hehehe).

Frida: Hello, grandma! I'll take a biscuit thanks, mmm, so good! (Friday sits next to grandma and

nibbles the biscuit; she always does that, taking other people's food!)

Grandma: Girls! My darlings, how nice of you to come to see your grandma. (It seems like she recognises us and is having a good day.) Frida, look how big you've gotten, you'll soon be as tall as me! (Grownups love pointing out that kids grow). Flora, aren't you going to say anything?

Me: Hello, grandma, how are you? (I sit down in front of her and leave my phone on the table so it records properly.)

Grandma: Fine, girls, I'm fine. Today I had beef and potato stew for lunch, but they didn't put any peas in it. I like it with peas. (Before she starts rambling about her favourite foods, which is her specialist subject, I ask her a question.)

Me: Grandma, did you know your dad?

Grandma: You're very nosy, aren't you?

Frida: No, grandma, it's not nosiness, it's just we have to do a project for school about our family tree and we've got stuck with the life of your mum, great-grandma Flora Pomerania. (Luckily Frida has followed my instructions. If she asks her, surely she'll reply.)

Grandma: (Closes her eyes as if going to sleep and falls silent for a good while. Just when I think



she's sleeping, she looks at Frida and starts talking.) My dad was very handsome, he had long, dark, curly hair down to his shoulders, he dressed very smartly and always smelled like mint.

Frida: But mum says that your dad died before you were born.

Grandma: Yes, that's true, my mum told me all this.

There was a photo of him where he looks like a film star, but it got lost. His name was Jordi Fuster.

Me: No, grandma, it was George Wood.

Grandma: What did I say then? Jordi or George, it doesn't matter! (Are her thoughts getting muddled?) *Fusta* means wood, Fuster! (Yes, she's got quite the mess in her head!) My mum made up all that about the English soldier, in reality he was one of the engineers in the factory that made ammunition for cannons and rifles that my mum worked in during the war. He was called Jordi Fuster, he was married and he couldn't abandon his family to be with another. My grandparents would never have accepted that! Oh, grandma Aurora was a bore but very rigid with what was right and what was inconvenient (She looks at us, I think she's realised that she's told us something that was the most closely guarded secret in the family.) No, I didn't know him and later I found

out that the photo my mum showed me was of an American actor. And no, he didn't die at the front, he lived until he was very old, in Vilassar, in a care home. (She stops suddenly and looks at the cup in her hand. She takes a sip of tea and closes her mouth tightly, as if signalling that she won't say any more.)

Frida: What a shame you didn't meet him.

Grandma: who says I didn't meet him? Sweetie, don't make things up when you don't know!

Frida: Oh, no, I just thought, I mean, you said...

Grandma: I met him when I turned twenty-one, when I came of age. My mother told me everything and I went to Barcelona to see him at his office. He had a factory that made things from plastic, which back then was the newest and most sought-after material. And I won't say another word.

Frida: Grandma, come on, don't leave us hanging. Besides, we have lots of gaps in our family history. Where was great-grandma Flora Pomerania during the years she was disappeared? How did she manage to live and study?

Grandma: Goodness gracious me! Nosey girls! Gosh darn me for saying a thing! Out, get out, impertinent kids! (She gets up and waves her hands about as if swatting flies.)

Me: Grandma, don't get mad, we won't disturb you anymore, we'll come another day.

Grandma: Who is this girl? Frida, who's your friend? (She can't recognise me anymore, her lapses come on like this, suddenly.) Go on, get out! Who are these girls? Leave me in peace! (We pick up our rucksacks and the phone and dash out the room.)

## 5

# We talk it over at home

The journey home seems to drag on. We can't wait to drop this bombshell on the family. Frida is skipping ahead of me and doesn't shut up for a moment.

'Flora, Flora, did grandma tell the truth? Is she Flora Fuster and not Flora Wood?'

'No, her surname hasn't changed, it's Wood, but the story about her dad has changed.'

'What will mum say? Does she know? Woah, Felix is going to be flabbergasted! We've found out more than he did.'

'Frida, don't boast in front of Felix, grandma didn't want to talk to him.'

'But she did to me, she did to me!'

Luckily we've arrived home or I'd have throttled her. Being grandma's favourite really inflates her head!

'We're not going to say a word until we're all at the table, understood?' Frida agreed and, for once, she kept her promise.

At dinner time she couldn't hold it in any longer and she blurted it out.

‘Grandma told us she met her dad.’

‘You know grandma makes things up, Frida, we mustn’t believe it all,’ says my mum.

‘It’s the disease, it makes her say things she doesn’t mean, like when she swears,’ my dad continues the explanation.

‘No, no, it’s true, she did meet her dad and it wasn’t George Wood,’ I communicate to the family.

‘What do you mean? It was Wood, that’s where my second surname comes from. Flora Riera Wood.’

‘Grandma says it was Jordi Fuster, like George Wood, but in Catalan,’ Frida smiles with satisfaction and turns her attention to her bowl of soup.

‘What? No way, that’s my project ruined, it’s all wrong from the beginning!’ Felix is always so dramatic.

‘But they already gave you an A, it doesn’t matter if it was Wood or Fuster,’ I reply, somewhat irritated.

‘Well it’s not the same! If it was Fuster, maybe we can find him and expand the project.’

‘He’s dead, great-grandad Fuster is dead,’ says Frida without taking a pause from eating soup, now from my bowl.

‘Kids, be quiet!’ orders mum, a little shocked. ‘Of course great-grandad is dead, he was George Wood and he died before my mum was born, and that’s that!’



‘No, mum, no. Great-grandma made up all that about the English soldier because Jordi Fuster was married,’ I explain while mum stares at me, not understanding. ‘When grandma turned twenty-one, she told her about it and she went to Barcelona to look for her dad and meet him. Then grandma got mad and she didn’t want to talk anymore.’

‘Then she didn’t know who we were.’

‘Girls, grandma gets her memories muddled up. Maybe this Fuster was someone else, a family friend or an acquaintance from her youth,’ dad is trying hard to give mum more time to react because it’s like she’s been petrified.

‘I mean, now what should I do, write it all again?’ Felix is fixated on his project and can’t see beyond that.

‘Grandma says that the family wouldn’t have accepted a baby without a father, so that’s why she made up the stuff about the soldier,’ Frida wants to make it crystal clear. ‘I don’t know what’s wrong with a baby without a dad, at school there’s Bru, who doesn’t have one, Ona who has two, Manuel who has two mums, the Grau twins who only have grandparents, and there’s nothing the matter with that, is there?’

‘No, Friday, there’s nothing wrong with that,’ my dad agrees with her, ‘but it was a different time back

then, all this was almost ninety years ago. A woman all by herself with a baby wasn't well thought of, especially in a family like that, people with money who had to save face and be perfect in every way.

'Always so worried about what other people would say,' says my mum, more composed now. 'I can still hear the family catchphrase, *don't do that, what will people think?* And yes, people talk, but a few days later no one remembers whatever it was that seemed so inconvenient and unsuitable.'

'Grandma used that word,' remembers Frida, 'inconvenient. She used it when she said great-grandma Aurora was very strict with anything inconvenient.'

'Like a baby with a stranger,' says Felix, who has finally moved on from his project.

'So what do we do now?' I ask expectantly, to see if anyone has a brilliant idea for how to continue the investigation.

'We're not going to do anything!' my mum warns. 'It's not nice to root around in other people's secrets. We'll leave it here, my grandad was George Wood and that's that.'

'Come on, mum, they're not secrets, all of them are dead!' I complain.

'No, grandma is still with us.'

'But she can't tell reality from imagination any-

more,' I hit back, because I want to get my way, 'let's investigate a bit more, please.'

'Honey, maybe we could look into if this Jordi Fuster existed,' dad takes our side. 'Although it will be very tricky, without anything to go on...'

'He was the owner of a factory that made plastic things when grandma was twenty-one,' Frida chimes in, just when it seemed she was distracted eating sausages.'

'Wow, that's certainly a clue!' Felix says enthusiastically.

'Very well, you can do some research, but you have to tell me every new detail without any frights,' mum requests. 'I almost fainted with this news,' mum is as theatrical as Felix.

'Woohoo!' I can't help jumping up from my chair with delight. 'Let's continue the investigation!'

Felix is happy too, he wants to get to the bottom of this. Frida has taken my sausages, cut them up and given them to the cats, who brush up against her legs under the table. If mum sees, she'll yell so loud that Grey and Blackie will run off at full pelt into the garden.

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Flora tells the fascinating story of her great-grandmother, Flora Pomerania. It all began when her brother had to do a school project on historical memory and he chose to focus on their great-grandmother, a woman who broke moulds and stereotypes both within her family and the society of the time. Flora Pomerania travelled and studied, and even lived in Berlin...with Albert and Elsa Einstein!

**Through letters, diaries and photographs, Flora reconstructs a life worthy of being told: the true story of Flora Pomerania.**

Anna Vilar (Barcelona 1958) has taught in several state schools. In 2019 she won the City of Badalona Prize with *Tot plegat semblava una broma* (Animallibres). The same imprint also published *L'aletieg de la papallona and Xuts en el fosc.*

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