

Storytime

Cecilia Cipullo

“That’s strange.”

“What is?”

“That he was made of wood.”

“Anything’s possible in a fairytale, Leah.”

Leah frowned at her grandma. She sat back on her knees.

“But that wasn’t a fairytale.”

“How do you know?”

“Well fairy tales have princesses and kings and castles and dragons. This just had a boy made of wood and a girl with blue hair.”

“Ah, but Pinocchio could speak and the girl wasn’t a normal girl,” said Grandma. “She was a fairy. And if there is a fairy in the story, as well as wood that can talk, is that not magic just like dragons and castles?”

Leah shrugged.

“I guess.”

She got up and started pacing around the living room. Grandma watched her with her warm brown eyes, her old and slightly battered copy of *Pinocchio* sitting closed on her lap. A fire was blazing under the ornate mantelpiece, which had pictures of wooden trees and cats and foxes and donkeys carved into the shiny stone. This was the oldest room in Leah’s house, and everyday at 3:00pm Grandma would read her a story (or a few chapters of one) until her parents came home from work, around 7:00pm. A few moments ago, Grandma had finished reading the

last pages of *Pinocchio* and it had seemed like everything was supposed to be over, but eight year old Leah was confused. This is what led her to start pacing, which is what she was still doing now.

“What’s on your mind?” asked Grandma.

“I don’t understand the point of the story.”

“The point?”

“He was bad the whole time.”

“The whole time? Are you sure?”

“Yes! He was bad! But then the Blue Fairy turned him into a boy anyway. I don’t get it.”

Leah started tracing the carvings of the wooden trees and cats and foxes and donkeys on the mantelpiece with her small fingers.

“The Blue Fairy only turned him into a real boy once he started earning money for his father and going to school again.”

Leah put her hands on her hips.

“Yes, but he was bad for much, much longer than he was good. Why did she change her mind so fast?”

Grandma thought about her answer to this question. She needed to phrase her words right because Leah could be tricky. She had never been one of those children that could be persuaded easily. Even when she was just three years old, if there were three cookies on a plate and her parents only allowed her one, Leah would be stubborn and always required a reason as to why she couldn’t have all three before she let the subject drop. So, because of this, Grandma was slow and specific when she answered.

“To me, Leah, it is because Pinocchio had been a real boy all along. Normal wood cannot talk. Do you remember when the Blue Fairy saved him from being hung from a tree?”

Leah nodded, her hands still on her hips.

“Well, that tree didn’t talk. And neither did any of the other trees or things made of wood in the story. Pinocchio was the only one. There was something special and magic about him from the beginning. I think that, deep down, there already was a real boy inside of Pinocchio and the Blue Fairy was just waiting for Pinocchio to start acting like one to uncover the real boy inside him.”

Leah wasn’t satisfied.

“I don’t think so. Because he wasn’t just wood, he was a puppet.”

“That is true.”

“And puppets are moved around by other people, aren’t they?”

“Yes, they are,” answered Grandma, watching Leah carefully. It was a joy for Grandma to watch her granddaughter’s mind at work.

“Well, well then, I don’t think it was really about finding the boy deep down inside of him, because he was just made of wood. I think it was about - what’s the word for when one person is free to do whatever they want?”

“Independent?”

“Yeah, that. I think it was about Pinocchio’s independence. Because the whole story the Fox and the Cat and Candlewick and the other bad animals were talking him into doing things that weren’t his idea, just like you can make puppets do things out of their control. But at the end Pinocchio started finally listening to his heart, maybe sub - subjectively?”

“Subconsciously.”

“Subconsciously! Yeah, maybe subconsciously, but he started doing his own thing to help his father instead of being persuaded to do bad things by the other characters in the book. I think when he started being more independent in a good way was the moment the Blue Fairy decided to change him into a real boy.”

“I suppose you might be right.”

Leah looked proud of herself, for the little speech she had just made, albeit she had struggled with a few words here and there. All of a sudden, though, her expression dropped again. Grandma, ever noticing the smallest of things, smiled slightly.

“What now?”

Leah scrunched her nose and then unscrunched it.

“Well,” she said, “I still don’t really see the point of the story. It didn’t feel like much changed after he became a real boy. It was sudden.”

“You know,” said Grandma, “I agree with you a bit. It definitely feels fast at the end.”

“Yeah, it does.”

“But,” Grandma continued, “Isn’t it possible that the point of the story is to teach a lesson about independence? Instead of having a romantic or completely happy ending, the point of the story is to show us how all the problems Pinocchio faces happen when he listens to the bad word of someone else, instead of making decisions for himself. As the readers, we’re supposed to get out of this that we should always make up our minds on important decisions by ourselves, instead of blindly trusting the word of someone who may be lying.”

Leah’s eyes widened.

“Oh! So the message of *Pinocchio* is hidden in the entirety of the story. It doesn’t just come up at the end, like in fairytales when everything is fixed with a true love’s kiss?”

“Exactly. The author - his name is Carlo Collodi - didn’t make it easy for us. It’s like a puzzle, where we have to find the message and importance and “point,” as you say, in every one of Pinocchio’s actions throughout the story. He never tells us the point of the story, but if you think about it, you can find it.”

There was a pause. Leah was thinking.

“That’s so interesting,” she finally said, quietly.

“I think so, too,” said Grandma, getting up off the chair and putting Pinocchio back on the bookshelf, which stood next to the fireplace with the mantelpiece that had the carvings of wooden trees and cats and foxes and donkeys.

“I want to be a writer,” said Leah.

“Yeah?” Grandma looked down at her. “Then start writing!”

Leah smiled.

“Do we have time for another story?”

Grandma checked her watch.

“We have time to start one,” she said. “What do you want to read next?”

Leah looked at the bookshelf.

“Peter Pan!” she said.

“Ah, much shorter, but a very good story,” said Grandma, taking the book off its resting place at the end of the shelf and settling down in her chair again.

Leah sat down and crossed her legs, ears open and eyes wide. She hugged her knees to her chest as Grandma read to her about three siblings and a boy that could fly and a fairy and pirates and a faraway island in the middle of the sea, escaping into yet another world of story.