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## **Wanda Full of Wonder**

Translated by Vesna Marić

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Wanda Full of Wonder. She had grazed knees, a perky, ant-sized ski jump nose, and inside her desk drawer was a single sock, a snotty hanky, a hair clip, an old notebook and a secret album of family photographs. In one word (in three words): hectic, noisy and messy. Her mother affectionately nicknamed her My Goggly Monster, because of her large blue eyes that were like clear waters that everyone wished to dive into, while her dad called her Radish, because nothing in this world was similar to Wanda, so he just picked a radish. But this is a story about a summer without her parents, a summer she spent at her granny's, a summer when she met five unusual characters who changed her life forever. Oh yes, and there is also Racket, but she comes in a bit later. Let's meet Grammy first.

Grammy was simply Wanda's granny. No one knew when Wanda came up with this nickname, although she claimed it was on the day she came out of the maternity ward all wrapped up, and smelled the custard pies made in her honour. From that day onwards, Grammy was Wanda's favourite person in the world. Wanda apologised to her parents for this, clearly and openly, but you can't choose your favourite person in the world - it just happens. Grammy lived on the edge of a dark green forest, read books, talked to her plants and her memories. Her spacious wooden house was full of mystery, and her unusual and long life seemed like a wonderful and slightly creaky castle to Wanda, filled with hallways that lead to enchanted chambers. Wanda was about to spend an entire summer in that imaginary castle, on the corner of the sage green forest, a summer that seemed eternal and she was so excited her chest felt like it might burst as she waved goodbye to the blue car that drove her parents away, delighted and, let's face it, a little scared. Ahead of her were two long months in the house on the edge of the forest with perhaps just an ordinary granny, without any child friends, pets or computer games. That first evening, as Wanda's clear waters were clouded by worries and about to pour out onto her face, Grammy danced around the table, juggling dumplings stuffed with plums, and pulled out, one by one, tales from the old times, turning their dust into a magic powder. Soon after, sleepy Wanda went to bed, shutting the door behind her - this was Wanda after all.

The next morning, before even opening her eyes, before remembering where she was, she heard a loud knocking on the door. She squinted and saw her darkened room and jumped out of bed.

- Grammy! Grammy! - she called out, but there was no answer. The banging on the door continued. She went to the wooden blinds, and heard a jolly female voice from the outside.

- Hello! Hello! Open up! Yooohoooo!

Wanda peered through the window and saw a large woman in a colourful dress, with feathers in her fiery hair. She could not see her face, and it seemed to her that the woman was not alone, that someone was hiding behind her. She did not dare open the door, but did lean out of the window more boldly and asked in a stern voice:

- Who are you?

- Oh, an imaginative morning to you too, young lady! - the woman smiled widely and showed her white teeth. She had a freckled nose, one green, one brown eye, and she was immersed in moving colours.

- We have just come from the Land of Possibilities, let us introduce ourselves, I am Imagination, and this is my brother, ... where is he now?...

Imagination looked around herself and mumbled...

- ... is this how I brought you up, to be so rude, at least get down from the roof and do something, well, imaginative...

- Belief! - she thundered, and suddenly a young man appeared from behind her back. He wore a white shirt and linen trousers, and had dark hair and large dark eyes. Wanda thought of her mother and the goggle eyed monster nickname, while he calmly and peacefully said:

- I am Belief, forgive us for intruding, would you please give us a glass of water to quench our thirst, before we go on? I believe that you are so kind and that you won't just leave us outside. Trust us, we would not do that to you - Belief smiled a little, before being interrupted by the loud Imagination:

- If you don't have the key to the door, because we know that granny has gone to the cheese to get the village, you could perhaps find a window and push it through a tube, and then using a hydraulic pump so that you could let the water through and we can catch the water inside a lotus flower which can serve as a glass and ... - this is where Belief nudged his sister gently, who was going through the unusual ways in which you could get a simple glass of water. Wanda disappeared from the window and they could hear the lock turn.

As Belief was downing his second glass of water, Imagination was bringing in her third multicoloured bag into the house. Shining beads fell all around her, pressed flowers fell out of the book that she carried under her arm, and a music box tinkled from inside the pocket of her silk coat, letting out a single note every now and then. She pulled out a piece of string from another pocket, and squinting at it, her head lopsided, she said:

- Belief, I thought you said we'd leave this snake in the forest, let's please not have it crawling under the bed now, please watch it!

Wanda looked around in terror, and even though she was the only person from her class to have stroked a snake at the visit to the zoo, she feared the darting tongue that came out from the end of the string. Belief lightly waved his hand:

- I don't believe there is any danger of that, we will take it with us, because I think it prefers life in the forest anyway. Although, I believe, that even if it were to stick around, it would do nothing bad, and I also believe that Wanda is not afraid of anything.

- Oh, please, just carry on and talk about Him and we'll just meet him - Imagination interrupted again.

Wanda didn't understand a thing, but Imagination and Belief were so charming that she even enjoyed listening to their bickering.

- Wanda! - thundered Imagination. - What were your plans for today? Ha? A forest adventure? A walk along the clouds? Befriending the brown bear? Directing a stampede of forest hamsters? Catching a falling star in the daytime? I know! Running under a rainbow...

Not waiting for Wanda to respond, Belief interrupted Imagination's speech.

- I believe that Wanda has planned her day and I believe that she will not get herself in any kind of trouble...

- Wanda! Wandaaa! - Grammy's voice could be heard. - You're up already, and playing, look at that! Her voice was getting closer to the house, and Wanda ran onto the porch like a shot.

- Hi Grammy, I was just doing some bits and bobs...

- You've been messing around, I know you, you've turned everything upside down I'm sure, all my shoes and scarves must be out.

When granny opened the door, Wanda nearly fainted, because Grammy's eagle eye immediately went for the thin piece of string by the bed.

- It'll bite you! - came out of her mouth as granny was bending over to pick up the snake.

- Yeah, right, as if a piece of string can bite me. Your Grammy isn't afraid of anything, not even a dragon!

Wanda rubbed her eyes and when she opened them again, Grammy was sitting on a chair, there was cheese on the table, and the string was in the bin. It was time for breakfast.

After a big breakfast - which consisted of: bread toasted on the old wooden stove and sprinkled with hot paprika; dumplings, fresh cheese and cream cheese, and home made jam that smelled of sunshine and adventure, Wanda was totally convinced that her visitors were mere remainders of a dream. She was always told by her parents and teachers that she was too imaginative and that she needed to be more grounded. This was even more so after she had told everyone at school that the people on TV were talking directly to her, but to object that she was too imaginative was as if they had objected to her eyes being too blue. She felt a bit sad when she realised that she was alone with granny after all. She had no plans for the day and Grammy

suggested she go out on the porch, walk around the house, pick a wild strawberry, and that they'd make a cake in the afternoon.

- Don't go too far, make sure you hear me call! - Grammy said.

When Wanda went out, everything around her was green. There was green, green, green, wherever one looked. She walked around the house twice, but nothing changed. She kicked a dry twig, pulled a green leaf off a bush, spat lightly on a daisy and, sighing, sat on a tree trunk. She dug a hole in the ground with her heel and spittled on the floor in front of her listlessly, when she heard a rough voice behind her.

- Baah, this is so boring...

Wanda got up and turned around, but couldn't see anyone.

- Booooooring.

It seemed to her that the voice came from a green leaf curtain. She cautiously bent forward, and then she saw a grey shape leaning against a thin tree. In a grey dress with straight grey hair with a grey pale face the girl looked ahead of herself, occasionally inhaling smoke through a cigarette holder. Wanda wasn't sure if the girl was talking to her and asked:

- Excuse me, did you say something to me?

- Ah - the girl blew out smoke and stubbed out her cigarette on a tree.

- To you, to him, to anyone, everything is so boring and stupid. This boring green forest and even more boring birds, and this stupid, boring day, simply horrid!

The girl stood up listlessly and dragged herself across to the bemused Wanda. She put a limp hand out in greeting and spoke as if her nose was stuffed with cotton wool:

- I am Boredom and I'm about to die of boredom. And you? You don't look particularly interesting, just another ordinary boring girl, I'd say.

Wanda was quiet for a moment, and then she said:

- Perhaps you wouldn't be so bored if you went to a clinic to stop smoking, you'd be less grey, and more healthy, and for your information, you'd also live longer. Anyway, I'm not boring, I know loads of things, and my mother always says that there is no such thing as boredom, just ignorance - Wanda tried.

- Yes, yes, yes... It's clear that your mum is boring, and she's right because my cousin Ignorance and I have been on the road for the last two days from Stupidland, trying to overtake that silly Imagination and naive Belief, god knows how many kids they've met so far, but even that's already so boring and stupid, EVERYTHING is stupid - moaned Boredom.

To be honest, Wanda did think the forest was a bit boring, and she did say everything was senseless, and she didn't realise how boredom was connected to ignorance until...

- Idiot! - shouted Boredom, her voice filled with boredom and only slightly raised.

- Eh? - a voice yelled back from behind a bush.

- Come here and let me introduce you to this boring girl.

- Girls are stupid! - screeched a messy young man wearing his left shoe on his right foot, with a dirty finger up his left nostril. He had a sling around his neck and he was trying to tuck his coat into his trousers, which were ripped on his bottom.

- They're not stupid! Boys are more stupid! - came out of Wanda's mouth and she bit her lip straight away, because she didn't talk to people in this way normally. She felt as if that thing she didn't like was starting to overwhelm her, that same thing that overwhelmed her when Annamaria had made her skip school. She knew somewhere deep down that everyone would be worried and angry, but she decided not to think about the consequences.

- Yes they are, they're little, run slowly, have little brains, keep crying - the dirty boy screeched. Wanda's cheeks reddened and she walked off in a great huff into the dark forest, just to get away from those two. They didn't follow her, and when she saw that she had gone far enough, having walked for at least ten minutes, she had to rub her eyes to check that they were really there again, sitting on a tree trunk. Boredom waved her cigarette holder lazily through the air and spoke while exhaling smoke:

- This is going to be such a booooooring summer that I'll expire from boredom... Disappear... now that must be super boring.

- But how are you here again? - asked Wanda angrily.

- If you weren't such a stupid girl, you'd know we were always there, ha ha! - Ignorance teased. - We're always right behind you - he said.

- I'm already sick of it, kids are so boring - Boredom droned on.

- Let's do something really dumb! We could, for example... - as he uttered this, he took the sling off and pointed it at the tree branches, and after a few seconds a thump could be heard. There was a panicked rustling in the leaves. Unwittingly or deliberately, Ignorance always hurts someone. Wanda ran to the place where the rustling came from, and Boredom dragged herself across. A small furry ball writhed among the leaves, and a little petrified heart was pounding under its warm fur. Wanda circled around the wounded animal, Ignorance jumped up and down like a monkey, while Boredom simply stood on the side and flicked the cigarette ash behind her, disinterested.

- Bah, a hurt squirrel, how boring...

Wanda didn't know what to do, she was afraid to pick up the squirrel, she was afraid of the two good-for-nothings, afraid that she had wandered too far into the woods. She was afraid of the fear that was crawling up her back and that feeling when her chin starts to tremble uncontrollably. She looked up and saw a tall man in front her, wearing a black hat. He wore a long coat, and claws peered out of his sleeves. When she tried to get a look at his face, she realised that there was a deep black hole under the hat. He had no face. He didn't speak, only stood in front of her and grew taller and taller. He grew taller than the trees, and was colouring the skies with gloom. Wanda's whole body shook and she thought her heart would stop beating, she was afraid that she would remain wrapped up in darkness and that she would never see Grammy's house again. She

could see nothing, it was as if the forest had been swallowed up by a raging storm. All she could hear was the quiet scratching among the leaves and the squeaking of the squirrel, who was even more petrified than Wanda. She looked at the animal and noticed something - there were two colourful feathers on the floor, the only things standing out against the all encompassing darkness. The feathers looked familiar. Shivering with fear, she whispered...

- Imagination.

The feathers sparkled and twirled lightly in the air.

- Imagination... - she said louder and looked up. Colourful beads started to rain from the dark skies.

- And Belief - the girl uttered loudly. It was as if she had got an ounce of strength, as if something had changed, she was no longer looking up at the sky, she was focusing on the wounded animal instead. She took off Grammy's shawl from around her neck, gently wrapped up the squirrel's warm body, and cradled the bundle. She stood up straight and shouted:

- Imagination and Belief, where are you?!

She ran fast and covered what had seemed like kilometres within minutes, because she was already at a clearing in the middle of the woods. In the middle of the meadow, on a colourful spread, sat brother and sister. Imagination was winding up the musical box and Belief was reading a book. As soon as they saw her, they stood up. She went up to them, holding the shawl tightly, breathless.

- Wanda, what happened? - Imagination asked. Wanda's words couldn't come out fast enough.

- It was horrible! There were Boredom and Ignorance and I couldn't get rid of them, they told me I was a stupid girl and they hurt the squirrel, and then I got frightened, and then the scariest of all creatures appeared...

- Oh no! Him again! - Imagination slapped herself on the forehead and shook her head - the irritating, dumb Fear.

- Always wants to spoil everything - said Belief. - Hm, yes... that's what I thought, Boredom, Ignorance and Fear, the nasty trio, they are always causing trouble. Although, I guess sometimes they are needed too, but...

Imagination nodded lightly to Belief and kneeled before the girl, holding her hands.

- Wanda, we are stronger than they, and do you know why? For a start, you control us, there is no us without you. You choose who you spend time with and all the power lies with you, little girl. You're the one who decides, remember that, always. Fear does not exist unless you make it up, boredom will never come if you remain curious. And finally, they are not possible without... who? Yes? Let me not appear to be conceited...

- she looked at the girl with her colourful eyes, one eyebrow lifted in a query.

- Imagination - smiled Wanda. Belief coughed lightly.

- Yes, OK, without you too, Belief - his sister added.

- It is true that you must believe that anything is possible, because if you don't believe, even imagination is useless - she said to Wanda.

- And this little one? - Wanda pointed to the squirrel. - Will it be all right?

The bundle moved occasionally. Belief just winked and said:

- You already know the answer.

- Grammy! Graaammy! - Wanda shouted off the top of her voice although she was already at the door.

- Why are you making such a racket, I'm not deaf! You're always making a racket! - granny thundered, laughing from her armchair.

- Grammy - Wanda ran into the house looking for her. - Look what I found.

She put the bundle in her lap. Grammy unfolded the shawl carefully and a shiny, small nose and one dark eye peeked out, tiny like a pepper corn. It looked around fearfully, its little heart pounding madly.

- Don't be afraid - granny whispered, calming the animal down with gentle strokes.

- Go and bring a nut or two, Wanda, there are some in the cupboard above the table, it must be hungry... - Grammy didn't take her eyes of the squirrel's beautiful copper fur.

- You're so lovely - she whispered, as Wanda brought a fistful of walnuts, smiling.

Grammy's eyes were full of tears, because suddenly there weren't only the two of them in the house, but three, and whispering, she looked at the squirrel, and Wanda.

- Always a racket... - smiled Grammy, her eyes teary.

- Racket! - shouted Wanda. - Let's call it Racket!

She hugged Grammy and Racket tightly, firmly deciding that this would be the most imaginative, curious and beautiful summer she had ever had.