Martha Fraser pays a rare visit to Fort Norman while her grandson is away training at Depot, and has a lovely conversation as well as some time to bond with her great-granddaughter, two year old Abigail.

In the same universe as "The Water's Edge and the Harbour Town" and "Comes and Goes in Waves"

Notes

Just a fluffy piece in the lead-up to Christmas

Currently unbeta'd, so all mistakes are mine.

Martha Fraser knocked on the door to her grandson’s new home, or, as new as it could have been, she supposed. When he had told them that he and June were expecting a baby, he had chosen to remain in Fort Norman with her and their child. She and George had packed up their library and made their way to Inuvik, over 600 kilometres north without him. While it was a difficult life, made more difficult by the fact that they no longer had their grandson to help them, she vowed that they would keep going, the same as they always had.

She hadn’t actually told him, but she was proud of him, and the decision he had made. Of course, becoming a father at the age of sixteen was not something she would have wished for her grandson, nor did she wish his viduity for him either. But, instead of leaving his daughter to be cared for by June’s parents, he had insisted on raising her with their help. Benton’s own father, her son Robert,
had left Benton with them when Benton’s mother, Caroline, had died, and Martha had seen the effect this had on her grandson. When she had asked him what he planned to do once the baby arrived, Benton had sworn he would not do to his child what his father had done to him.

Sometimes she wondered where she’d gone so wrong with Robert, and yet had somehow done something right with Benton. Perhaps Benton took after Caroline more, at least in some respects. After all, Benton had gone and signed himself up for training at Depot, and his daughter spent her days with her grandparents, Rebecca and Henry. However, it was Martha’s understanding that he sent money back to them, and came to visit them as often as he could. This time, however, he had not been able to return, so she was already expecting that she would simply be visiting her great-granddaughter and would converse with Rebecca and Henry as well.

Truth be told, she’s always liked their family: Rebecca and Henry, and June. June also had a brother, Innusiq, but she had not seen him for quite some time. Martha supposed that was due to the fact that June had tragically passed away in childbirth, and Innusiq wanted nothing more to do with Benton. This saddened her, as it had not been anyone’s fault. Benton had written to her, and told her that June had died from a postpartum hemorrhage. There was nothing that could have been done to save her. The doctors and midwife had saved the child, however, a little girl born six weeks prematurely, whom Benton had named Abigail Caitriona. Abigail, from the Hebrew “her father’s joy”, and Caitriona, as it had been June’s wish.

Little Abigail was now two years old, and Martha had last seen her six months before, when she had just begun to toddler about. She’d written to Benton and had expressed her wish to see her great-granddaughter, which Benton had allowed, so long as Rebecca and Henry were agreeable. To her surprise, they had been, and Martha found that she was quite happy in that they’d so readily agreed.

The door opened, and Martha was greeted by Henry. He welcomed her in, took her coat, and put the kettle on for tea, invited Martha to sit in the living room. It had not been a very long wait, as she heard Rebecca coming from what she could only assume was the nursery, speaking soft Inuktitut.

“Shall we go see who is here?” she heard as Abigail babbled back. “You have a visitor today. Shall we go see who is here to see you?”

Rebecca and Abigail came around the corner and into the living room, where Abigail’s eyes lit up with happiness.

“Gigi!” she chanted in surprise. “Gigi! Gigi! Hello Gigi!”

Normally Martha would not have approved of such a diminutive, but, to cause less confusion for Abigail, and also recognizing that “Great-Grandmother” was difficult to pronounce at the age of two, she would allow it.

“Hello Abigail,” Martha greeted her as Rebecca placed the toddler in Martha’s lap. “My goodness, you’ve grown!”

“Uh huh, I’m a big girl!”

“Yes, I can see you’re a big girl now,” Martha smiled as Abigail gently wrapped her arms around her great-grandmother’s neck, giving her a quick hug. “Oh thank you. How did you know I needed a hug from you today?”

“Amma says you live far away,” Abigail answered. For all she was just over two years old, she was very articulate, even if, bless her heart, she could not pronounce Grandmother quite yet. Benton,
Rebecca, and Henry must have all stressed the importance of language skills whenever Abigail spoke. She could already see that Abigail’s first language was Inuktitut, which did not surprise her. After all, to be bilingual in the Northwest Territories would serve her well. “Like Daddy.”

“You’re right, your father does live far away right now,” Martha smoothed Abigail’s hair to the side, so her fringe was out of her eyes. “But that does not mean he will do so forever,” she insisted. “Do you know why he is far away?”

“Amma says he’s gonna be a pa-lees-man?”

Martha looked over Abigail’s head and locked eyes with Rebecca, who nodded. Yes, Martha supposed, policeman would be a good description. After all, the simplest explanation was usually the correct one.

“Yes,” Martha answered and smiled. “Yes, your father is away training to become a police officer.”

Abigail’s expression softened as she cast her eyes into her lap. “Gigi, I miss Daddy.”

Martha could feel her heart ache. Benton had said the same thing when he had first come to live with her and George. However, he hadn’t been much older than Abigail, and he had just lost his mother. Abigail was also without her mother, but she had never known anything different.

“I understand you miss your father,” Martha nodded. “But you know what? I’ve brought something for you that can help.”

“You did?” Abigail asked, astonished. “Is it a present?”

“Yes, I’ve brought you a gift,” Martha smiled. “As long as your grandmother permits you to have it.”

“Martha, she is also your great-granddaughter,” Rebecca answered, seemingly sensing the older woman’s discomfort. “If you’ve brought her a gift, of course she may have it.”

“Now that we have your grandmother’s permission, perhaps you can help me find where I put it,” Martha set Abigail back on her feet. “I believe it’s in my handbag. I put it on the table. Would you bring me my handbag, please, sweetheart?”

Abigail nodded and made her way to the kitchen table as quickly as she could. Still a little unsteady, as two year olds could be at times. Then slowly, carefully, she brought Martha’s handbag back to her, straining to keep it off the floor.

“Ooh, is heavy!” Abigail proclaimed. She was not wrong. While Martha did not keep anything extravagant, something that would seem light to an adult would seem heavy to a little girl. “What’s it, Gigi? I can look?”

“Patience, Abigail,” Rebecca tutted from her spot in her chair. “Sit on the carpet, please. Gigi will find your gift for you.”

“Okay Amma,” Abigail did as she was asked. She sat up on her knees, watching Martha’s every move as she opened her handbag and produced a stuffed doll, made of an old shirt of Benton’s that he no longer wore, but she hadn’t been able to bring herself to cut it up and use for cleaning. No, this, she thought, would be a much better use for an old shirt. She’d also had old cloths that were not being used for anything, so she had washed them and used them to stuff this handmade doll to give it body. Instead of buttons for eyes, the doll had knots of black wool, stitched multiple times
Abigail gasped and held out her arms. “Is pretty!” she took the doll from Martha and squeezed it tightly, rocking it back and forth. “Thank you, Gigi, is the best!”

“I’m glad you like it so,” Martha smiled, closed her handbag, and put it on the floor out of the way. “Now this doll, Abigail, has a special power.”

Abigail’s mouth dropped open. “It does?”

“Yes it does,” Martha glanced at Rebecca, hoping she would keep up the charade. “This doll will give you sweet dreams at night, and listen to all your wishes.”

“Yeah?” Abigail held the doll close. “Ooh, I have lots of wishes!”

“Wishes are good things to have,” Martha nodded. “But, the wishes can only be heard when you’re in bed at night, or when you have naps. Other than that, the magic won’t work.”

“Oh,” Abigail looked slightly crestfallen, while Rebecca looked relieved. As was often the case, Martha surmised that Abigail had been resisting her naps and not sleeping throughout the night, which would in turn be difficult for Rebecca and Henry. Even if her child rearing days were behind her, perhaps she could lend a hand. “Magic?”

“Yes, magic,” Martha couldn’t help but feel somewhat silly. After all, she had not been raised to believe in magic and such things, but, in trying to be more accessible and available in her language and behaviour, she had to try. “If you tell the doll your wishes, it will try its best to make them come true.”

“Ohh…” Abigail nodded her head furiously.

“But…” Martha continued. “You can’t tell anyone else what your wish is, otherwise it won’t come true.” She put a finger to her lips in demonstration. “When it’s nap time, make a wish, and see if it works.”

“Okay Gigi,” Abigail smiled and cuddled the doll close, then turned to Rebecca. “Amma, is nap time?”

Rebecca looked as though he couldn’t believe her ears. “You want to have a nap, Abigail?”

“I wanna see magic work.” Abigail explained.

Rebecca smiled in response. “In that case, it’s after two o’clock in the afternoon, and you are actually due for your nap. So, give Gigi a kiss, and I’ll tuck you in, okay?”

“Oh, Amma,” she nodded furiously, doing as her grandmother asked. Martha quickly kissed her great-granddaughter and watched as the toddler made her way back to the nursery. She could only hope that she’d done the right thing in telling Abigail that story. After all, she’d only meant to soothe her, not bring the child’s hopes up unnecessarily.

In truth, she needn’t have worried. An hour later, as she sat at the kitchen table with Rebecca and Henry, there was a soft knock at the door.

In came her grandson, covered head to toe in snow, rucksack over his shoulder.

“Hello Rebecca, Henry,” he greeted them before he realized she was also at the table. “Oh,
Grandmother, how lovely to see you!” he took off his boots and stripped off his coat before moving to kiss her cheek. “I’m sorry to not have called ahead, but with a break in training so close to Christmas, I got the first flight I could from Regina to Norman Wells.”

“That’s still nearly ninety kilometres away, Benton,” Rebecca gasped. “Was there not another flight from Norman Wells to Fort Norman?”

Benton shook his head. “Not until tomorrow. It didn’t make sense to wait so long.”

“Then how did you get here? I didn’t hear a truck outside.” Her mouth dropped open. “Please don’t tell me you walked all the way here.”

“I caught a ride from the airport to just outside town and walked from there. I had no other way,” he shrugged, as though that explained everything.

“You stubborn boy, why didn’t you pick up a telephone? We would have come for you. My goodness, you must be chilled to the marrow,” Rebecca immediately sat him down and handed him what looked to be a near-scalding mug of tea. “Drink that down, it will warm you. And give me your parka and snow pants.”

As he did so, Martha heard the soft whimpers of a toddler stirring from their nap, yawning and stretching. Benton, blessed with excellent hearing, nearly jumped out of his seat.

“Oh dear, Abigail is awake,” Henry turned his head, straining to get up from his chair. Clearly the cold weather, despite the fact that the house had heating, made it more difficult for him to move at times. “Damn these old bones. Can’t move as well as I once did.”

“I’ll get her,” Martha offered, thankful to be of help. “Benton Fraser, you sit. I’m surprised you’re not asleep on your feet after such a journey.”

“Yes Grandmother,” he consented, though clearly not happy about such an order.

Martha made her way back to the nursery, where Abigail sat on the edge of her bed, the handmade doll tucked under her arm.

“Hi Gigi,” she crooked her finger, and Martha bent down to listen. “I made a wish.”

“Oh, I thought you might,” Martha nodded. “You must remember, wishes must be kept to yourself, otherwise wishes will not come true.” For the second time that day, she put her finger to her lips. “Before we go back to the living room, do you have to use the lavatory?”

“Labatory?”

“Toilet, sweetheart,” Martha corrected herself. She’d forgotten how one must be more accessible in their language when speaking with toddlers. “Do you need to use the toilet?”

Abigail nodded. As she did so, Martha realized that the hallway led right to the living room and kitchen, and, in order to keep Benton’s arrival a surprise, she would have to think of a way to distract her.

“Okay, but you need to close your eyes and hold my hand,” Martha told her. “What if the wish came true? You don’t want to spoil it before you’re ready, do you?”

“Uh uh, no,” Abigail shook her head and closed her eyes. Martha quickly and quietly headed to the bathroom, catching Benton’s eye and putting a finger to her lips. Benton nodded in response as they
disappeared behind the bathroom door.

Finishing and washing her hands, Abigail took Martha’s hand again.

“Close my eyes, Gigi?”

“Yes, sweetheart, close your eyes. I will tell you when you can open them again,” Martha answered as she led Abigail back out to the kitchen. All parties were silent, (Benton had moved from his chair to the living room floor), eager to see just what Martha had planned.

“Okay Abigail,” Martha let go of her hand and bent down to meet the toddler’s height. “On the count of three, you may open your eyes. One… two… three.”

Martha moved to the side and gave her great-granddaughter an unobstructed path as the toddler opened her eyes to see her father kneeling on the living room floor in anticipation.

Abigail gasped and launched herself into Benton’s arms as quickly as her little legs could carry her. “Daddy!” she shrieked in delight, squeezing him tightly. “Daddy! Daddy!”

Benton chuckled as the force of his daughter running into his arms nearly knocked him backward. Abigail peppered his cheeks with kisses and giggled.

“Daddy’s home! Daddy’s home!” she repeated. “Gigi! The wishing doll worked! Daddy’s home!” She kissed Benton’s cheeks again and burrowed into his chest. “Daddy.”

“Hello, my sweet girl,” Benton hugged his daughter tightly and kissed her hair. “I missed you so much.” Still holding Abigail, he looked over her hair at Martha. “What does she mean, wishing doll?”

Martha picked up the now discarded toy lying at her feet. “I told her if she tells the doll her wishes before she goes to sleep, her wishes might come true.”

She saw tears in her grandson’s eyes as he kissed Abigail’s hair again. “Merry Christmas, Grandmother.”

Martha smiled and placed the doll on the table. “Merry Christmas, Benton.”

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