

excerpt from **Sara Pritchard's Crackpots**

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My Great Grandma Larose, or Babcia, as we called her, was like a museum exhibit to us when we were young. She lived in the backroom of my Grandmother's house, her daughter, and was wheeled out only on special occasions and holidays. The parade route from her back bedroom to the dining room table was littered with myself, my sister, and our four cousins, all spectators under the age of ten, awaiting the arrival of our new specimen.

What drew us to her with such ferocious curiosity and intrigue, was not the little white haired woman herself, but the set of rules laid down by our parents beforehand. These rules were the equivalent of the forbidden fruit, the more we heard them, the more fragile they sounded. In the car on the way to Grandma's house was when we would get the briefing from my mother. She would spin around in the passenger seat of the 77' Buick Regal, and point her boney finger at us. That's how we knew she meant business.

"Remember girls, no touching Babcia, no playing with her tanks or tubes, no mentioning Grandpa, and please, only believe half of what she says. Remember, she's... not right." My mother would then spin back around and my sister and I would giggle with anticipation. It had been discovered, last Thanksgiving, when I was up three nights in a row with nightmares, that Babcia had filled my head with stories of gypsies and witches. That's when the rules came into effect. It had also been discovered that when you squeezed and held a certain clear tube connecting Babcia to a white tank behind her chair, she would, after about ten minutes, start swatting at us, and yelling in Polish. Hence the amendment to the rules, stating no touching the equipment.

When reading Sara Pritchard's Crackpots, winner of the Bakeless award for fiction in 2002, one is to approach Ruby, the narrator and protagonist, with the same caution I used with Babcia. You feel like you can only believe half of what she says.