

'It's War, Grandma'

Written by

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'IT'S WAR, GRANDMA'

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. SCREEN OF VIDEO CONFERENCE CALL - DAY.

Multiscreen video call showing ANNABEL (26) as one user and the blank avatar of GRANDMA (87), whose camera is switched off, as another. GRANDMA is video calling on her computer (although her screen is blank), while ANNABEL is calling through her phone. ANNABEL walks around her mother's house, holding the phone out in front of her as she talks (taking us with her). She peers into the camera with concern.

ANNABEL

Are you alright, grandma? Mum said you couldn't get the camera working when she spoke to you. I'm worried about you there on your own.

The sound of grandma fiddling with her phone. Grandma speaks in a sweet little old lady voice.

GRANDMA (V.O)

Oh, I'm fine dear, you know, I'm resourceful... it's you young people who must be bored out of your minds.

ANNABEL

Yeah, I have to admit, it's difficult. I haven't spoken to another person besides mum in days. And she's doing my head in. I should have stayed in London... It's nice to speak to you, though! I'm just... yeah...

Annabel goes upstairs to her bedroom.

GRANDMA

Is mummy gone now, dear?

ANNABEL

Yeah, I'm in my room.

Annabel closes the door casually.

GRANDMA (V.O)

Good. (suddenly serious) Lock the door.

ANNABEL
What?

GRANDMA
Do it.

Annabel locks her bedroom door. She rests her phone (and so the conference call camera) down on a table and sits down in front of the camera, confused. Grandma switches her computer camera on, revealing an elaborate security control room with CCTV screens arranged around her.

ANNABEL
Grandma, what-

GRANDMA
As you may or may not know, Annabel, the world is facing a pandemic on an unprecedented scale. This is not something to be taken lightly. In the UK alone in the last twenty four hours-

ANNABEL
Where ARE you?

GRANDMA
I'm at home, Annabel. We ALL must stay at home.

ANNABEL
But all those screens around you...

GRANDMA
My bedroom. With some light handiwork.

Grandma types on her control board, checking her CCTV screens.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Annabel, what I am about to tell you is extremely confidential. All British citizens over the age of 80 have been called up as part of the Prime Minister's special task force to advise upon and execute his plans to eradicate the coronavirus. We survived the last war; we alone know how to fight this new war. That is, the war against the invisible, inhuman enemy that is the very air which we breathe.

ANNABEL
Er, okay... how?

GRANDMA
Old people have been training for this pandemic for years, Annabel. We knew social distancing was coming and we have prepared. Why do you think we all stay at home so much? - Training! For years, we've been building up muscle memory in our bottoms, unscrambling government code in our crossword puzzles and exercising our thumbs to new strengths by switching the volume on the television up and down, up and down, and up.... In short, preparing for war.

ANNABEL
Are you sure you're okay, grandma?
Being alone can be difficult even at the best of times...

GRANDMA
I'm not alone! I am one of an interconnected web of consultants who meet daily on the internet to discuss the evolving situation! (suddenly giddy with excitement) This video conferencing thing is really something, huh?

ANNABEL
Umm...

GRANDMA
But now we've reached our capacity of on the ground troops in the grey army. There just aren't enough recruits for the rising scale of this operation. So today, the Prime Minister asked each and every one one of us to contact our most trusted and capable Millennial to join us in the fight.

ANNABEL
To do what?

GRANDMA
To STAY AT HOME, Annabel, and to make sure others stay at home too. By
(MORE)

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
 force, if necessary. Experts have shown that Millennials, in contrast to the false reports offered by the media, are in fact the MOST capable and ready to stay at home in this pandemic. Physically, you're years ahead of your Boomer parents in your training—your squishy, inflexible bodies are practically the same as ours in many ways. You've been sitting on the sofa watching Netflix for years, now. You've perfected your virtual interactions through computer games and you, Annabel, I know from the secret cameras I have installed around your house, YOU are one of the BEST at staying home of almost all Millennials in Britain!

ANNABEL
 Well...

GRANDMA
 Even before this pandemic, you had nowhere to go! No friends, no social life! Your Friday and Saturday nights consisted of Call of Duty and a takeaway Domino's 'personal pizza'. It's almost as if you knew the pandemic was coming! It's incredible!

ANNABEL
 I mean, I went out sometimes...

GRANDMA
 No you didn't! That's the beauty of you! And I'm truly astounded at the self-control you've demonstrated in this pandemic so far: baking your own bread on a bi-weekly basis to an Instagram Live audience of four people which quickly falls to one; laying your yoga mat out on the floor of your bedroom, even though you know you're never going to actually use it... Now THAT'S the discipline of war!

Annabel looks over at her yoga mat guiltily.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
You said you were bored and lonely.
This is your chance: connect with me.
'We're all in this together'-
virtually.

ANNABEL
I didn't say I was lonely.

GRANDMA
Well, you are. Get used to it. Or
rather, don't!

Annabel thinks for a moment; she's really been struggling.

ANNABEL
What do you want me to do?

GRANDMA
Your mission is to break up gatherings
and to make people stay at home. In
today's meeting with the Prime
Minister, we were told to go local.
Thankfully, I've been preparing for
this for a long time. Do you have that
care package I sent you in January?

ANNABEL
Er, one sec.

Annabel goes off screen, returning with a cardboard box.

GRANDMA
Excellent. Take out the packet of
Werther's Originals. There is one, and
only one, of the chocolate-filled
variety in the packet: you must put it
in your mouth.

Annabel pulls out the Werther's Original and scours at it.

ANNABEL
But I hate Werther's Originals.

GRANDMA
I know, that was my security measure.

Annabel reluctantly puts the sweet in her mouth and winces.

ANNABEL
Now what?

GRANDMA

Now, while we wait for the caramel exterior to melt, do you still have the £20 note I sent you in March?

Annabel pulls the note out of her bag sadly.

ANNABEL

Yep... nowhere to spend it anymore.

Annabel begins to cough on her Werther's Original, as though she has a hairball stuck.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)

What the hell is in this?

Annabel pulls a piece of paper out her mouth and examines it.

GRANDMA

A code. In T minus three seconds you will receive a knock against your bedroom window.

Sound of a knock against Annabel's bedroom window. Annabel stands up and walks off screen to the window.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Open the window and bring it inside.

Annabel returns holding a drone. She looks confused.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Now, type the code from the Werther's Original into the keypad on the base of the drone and the code written on the £20 note into the programme which will pop up on your computer screen which I am about to remotely access.

Annabel looks over her shoulder at her laptop behind her, which pops up with a text box. She's impressed.

ANNABEL

It wasn't even on!

GRANDMA

Quickly!

Annabel walks over to her computer and types in one code. She returns to the screen and types the other into the drone.

ANNABEL

I had no idea you were so au fait with technology, grandma. Whenever we try to video call you you say you can't get the camera to turn on.

GRANDMA

(shrugging)

You always call unannounced. No one ever considers I could be busy.

ANNABEL

Oh... sorry. We do care, you know.

GRANDMA

Now, you'll find the remote control for the drone in the false bottom of the care package box.

Annabel opens up the box and pulls out the remote.

ANNABEL

Cool!

Grandma receives a message through her headset.

GRANDMA

Lorie and Barbara are logging in now.

ANNABEL

From your Tuesday Club?

GRANDMA

We still HAVE Tuesdays, don't we?

The screen splits to add two more participants into the conference call, LORIE (85) and BARBARA (81), two little old ladies wearing military headsets and looking serious.

LORIE

Ready for takeoff, Big Bird.

BARBARA

Present and accounted for.

GRANDMA

Annabel, are you ready?

Annabel scrambles with the remote, testing the drone hastily in her bedroom.

ANNABEL
Er, yeah, I guess so.

GRANDMA
Annabel, this is what all your thumb training has been for: drone operation. Just think of all those nights spent swiping on Tinder! At last, they will have a purpose!

ANNABEL
WHERE did you say you've hidden these cameras?

GRANDMA
I didn't. Troops, our target is Riley's Fish and Chip shop: the epicentre of unauthorised gatherings in Bembridge at this current moment. And on our very road!

Lorie and Barbara switch into serious, listening expressions; Annabel is dumbfounded.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Within the last hour, Riley's has announced a mid-week 50% discount on their entire menu. People are queuing up outside in unprecedented numbers, with no regard for social distancing measurements whatsoever. It is our job to disperse this illegal gathering by flying into the heart of the crowd.

ANNABEL
Wait, aren't the police supposed to be the ones who break up gatherings?

GRANDMA
Fudge the police, Annabel! This is war! At times like this you have to resort to guerrilla warfare. Is everybody ready?

BARBARA
Yes, commander!

LORIE
I was born ready!

ANNABEL
Umm... let me open the window.

Annabel walks off screen and returns, sitting down with a thud. She's far from prepared for this.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)
Alright.

GRANDMA
Three, two, one... takeoff!

[NON-DIEGETIC SCORE] Barbara, Lorie, Grandma and Annabel launch their drones out their windows. We see only their faces: Annabel is inexperienced at flying and scared; the grannies are excited and expert pilots, contorting their faces in joy. We hear the progress of the drones. They reach the fish and chip shop and swoop through the crowd. Sounds of surprised people running away and shouting, interspersed with the sound of the grannies having the time of their lives.

BARBARA
Pow!

LORIE
Whoop!

[NO SCORE] The crowd has gone. The battlefield goes quiet.

GRANDMA
Yes! Well done everyone! Great job.

BARBARA
(suddenly softer)
Don't forget the compensation cheque
for the money this lost the shop
owner, dear. We don't want him to be
out of pocket.

GRANDMA
(in original, innocent tone)
Ah, yes, of course, Barbara. I'll just
drop it through the letter box.

Grandma's face contorts as she operates her drone.

(GRANDMA (CONT'D)
There! I just hope he doesn't spend it
all in one place...

LORIE
Thanks everyone. Logging off!

Lorie leaves the conference call.

BARBARA
'Til next time!

Barbara leaves the conference call.

We see Annabel and Grandma's faces as they fly their drones home. Annabel goes off screen to collect her drone; we hear her struggling to bring it inside, whilst Grandma's drone lands expertly on the desk in front of her. Annabel sits back down in view of the camera, just catching sight of grandma's smooth landing.

ANNABEL
Whoa. We should play Call of Duty
together sometime! Same time tomorrow?

Grandma says nothing. She's fallen asleep with a smile on her face. She lets out a snore. Annabel laughs and smiles at her.

ANNABEL
Thank you... really.

Annabel leaves the conference call.

Grandma opens her eyes. Lorie and Barbara log back into the call, both holding glasses of wine. Grandma leans forward and picks up her own concealed full wine glass. They all laugh. These e-meetings keep them going during isolation.

GRANDMA
She's a good kid, but it IS a Tuesday,
after all.

LORIE
They're having virtual bingo at the
Corona Arms, tonight.

BARBARA
Oooh, or how about Chatroulette? I
need a bit of excitement in my life.

GRANDMA
(laughing)
Anything's fine. Cheers, girls! To
keeping calm and carrying on!

Grandma, Lorie and Barbara all clink their computer screens with their glasses.

FADE OUT.

THE END