

## Honey River

“Wer bist du kleine?” Who are you little one? He asked.

“Ich heisse Alex, Du bist mein Grossvater.” My name is Alex, you are my grandfather I said trying to form a simple sentence in german. He stared for a little and then turned to my grandmother who had to explain for the second time who everyone was. He started going on about the river of honey again, but this time he kept inviting people to jump in. The river was warm he explained.

The bleached walls in the hallway of the nursing home led into a similarly bland room with a chair next to a bed, some pictures on the walls, a tv, and a single window.

Reclining on the bed under the covers was my grandfather. I did not know him like a typical american grandfather because we lived on opposite sides of the atlantic ocean. He was 81 years old.

The dying light of the winter afternoon made the wrinkles on his face look like ridges on a mountain. He could barely talk in his native tongue anymore. His whole body was becoming willowy because he had not moved from the bed he was in since he had a stroke earlier in the year. At the time, looking at him made me feel uneasy. He looked like an alien on an operating table covered in white linen sheets. I felt bad for him, but at the same time couldn't help feeling a little uncomfortable.

His hand reached up to my dad who, coming from the other side of my family, did not even speak a single word of German.

“Your ass feels so cold” he said looking directly into my dad’s eyes. “The river of honey is going to drown all of the fish!”. I stared forward as all of my laughing relatives translated what he had said for me. My oldest cousin who was around 25 at the time started playing with the settings of his bed. “He likes when I move him up and down” he explained. I could not tell if that was true or not from the low moan of my grandfather.

Everything in the room made the whole place feel eerie. It was very sanitary and depressing in its own way. Even though the room was clean and organized it did nothing to help you forget that this room is likely the last one that your loved one will be in.

I walked over to the side of the bed, but did not want to get too close. I did not want to have to hold his hand while he looked up at me like a baby. I did not want him to meet my gaze while trying to form a sentence through the cloud of dementia. My cousin pushed me towards my grandfather.

“Wer bist du kleine?” He asked.

“Ich heisse Alex, Du bist mein Grossvater.” I said in oversimplified german. A confused look crossed his face. He turned to my grandmother for clarity but ended up explaining how the river of honey had mellowed out and then he started inviting people in.

My mother sat in the wooden chair next to him, but he was like a defiant child and avoided her gaze. When she touched his hand, his head slowly turned to her.

“Do you know who I am?” My mother asked in german.

“Who are you?” he replied.

“It’s Gigi, your daughter.”

“I don’t have any daughters named Gigi,” he said with a small laugh. “You probably confused me for someone else.”

“You do have a daughter named Gigi, it’s me” she said smiling. He would sometimes even forget my grandmother and she visited him almost everyday. Even though she was expecting it, my mother still looked like she had gotten slapped across the face.

“This is one of his better days.” My cousin whispered to me. “Sometimes he can’t form sentences.”

It was hard to watch someone this lost. His mind seemed like it had been reduced to that of a toddler. With each passing day he was remembering less and less I was told. He could barely make a choice on anything he wanted and even if he could he would have a hard time communicating it. Mother nature was working hard against him.

There was only one window in the room. I looked out of it onto the small city we were in. The city streets were worn and narrow and the trees had all but lost their garbs. I could trace the winding alleys and streets like veins running all the way back to my cousins house. The sky was numbingly grey, and it seemed like it was about to rain.

My brother who is one year younger than me was the next one to speak to my grandfather. My brother sat there and held his hand as he rambled on in german about his river of honey.

“The river is moving slowly now its safe for you to come in” he explained. “C’mon jump in!” My brother looked at my cousin for the translation.

“He told you to jump into the river made of honey” my cousin said.

“What should I say back?” my brother asked.

“Tell him to get out of the river” my cousin said with a smirk and then gave my brother the translation.

“I don’t want to!” my grandfather replied. He seemed to be upset even at the mere mention of leaving it. He started squirming in his bed and didn’t want anyone to move him, but nobody in the room was touching him. He looked like he was trying to break free of something. After a moment his frail figure came to a rest and he slipped into sleep. After that we all decided to leave and get lunch together. My family knew the head chef of one of the restaurants in the town so we always went there at least once if my family was visiting germany.

The nurses that had to clean him and monitor him informed my family that he would probably die after christmas.

The first time I ever experienced death in my family was about 6 months after that day.