

Honey River

“Who is this little kid?” He asked.

“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 in the room was. He started going on about the river of honey again, but this time he kept inviting us to jump in. The river was calm he explained.

I walked into the german nursing home and immediately felt very out of place. My aunt and her family led us through the long hallways and past many signs I could not understand. I ended up being the last one into the room which was oppressively bland and contained a chair next to a bed, a couple pictures hung on the walls, a tv, and a single window. Breathing slowly under the covers was my grandfather. I had met him before when I was much younger, about 4. But now that I was 11, all I really knew about him was that he had a stroke recently. He was 81 years old.

The dying light of the winter afternoon cast shadows on his face like ridges on a mountain. He could barely talk in his native tongue anymore. His whole body was willowy because he had not moved from the bed he was in since he had the stroke. In the moment, looking at him made me feel uneasy. He looked like an alien on an

operating table covered in white linen sheets. But at the same time, I couldn't help feeling like I was losing something valuable.

I was afraid of talking to him first, so I asked my dad to sit next to him. His hand reached up to my dad who, coming from the other side of my family, did not speak a single word of german.

"Your ass feels so cold" he said feeling my dads hand and 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. This scene happened years ago, but I can still replay it in my head like a movie. I was so upset at my family for laughing at my delirious grandfather, but now, when I remember this moment I can see how pained their smiling faces were.

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 felt uncomfortably industrial.

I walked over to the side of the bed, but did not want to get too close. I sat in the chair and held his papery hand, just like my dad, while he looked up at me with his sunken, beady eyes. His words seemed to drool out of his mouth as they sluggishly squirmed through his dense cloud of dementia.

“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 once she started talking he butted in about how the amber river of honey had mellowed out and then he started inviting us in.

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

“Hello, do you know who I am?” My mother asked in german.

He grunted.

“It’s Gigi, your daughter.”

“I don’t have any daughters . . . Gigi,” he chuckled. “You . . . me for someone else.”

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

“This is one of his better days.” My cousin whispered to me. “He’s not always this talkative.”

His river emptied into a small lake. When he spoke of his hallucination, his eyes completely glazed over. I couldn’t watch someone this lost. His memories seemed to have been picked apart along with his awareness of reality. I was told that he was remembering less and less everyday, and he had a hard time communicating anything anymore. Mother nature was working hard against him.

The last person in my family to take the seat next to him was my younger brother Fred. Fred held his hand as he rambled on in german about his river of honey. What he was saying in german made little sense even to the native speakers in the room.

“He is describing some lake from his childhood” my cousin said.

“What should I do?” my brother asked.

“I don’t know, he probably won’t understand anything you say”

“Oh”

After he had exhausted himself talking, his eyes gently closed and his breathing became less labored. "Well, we should probably leave him be for today" suggested my cousin. Everyone was in agreement.

There was only one window in the room. I looked out of it onto the small city we were in. The one my grandfather had grown up 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, but it was impossible to tell if it was going to rain.