

Halmoni

Part 5

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Puppy and Poppy are taking a slow walk through the Plänterwald on a cold, grey, soggy Sunday afternoon. They are both tired. Bare branches on tall and thick trees sway gently in the wind without making a sound. Their quiet grandness has a grounding and calming effect on Puppy. “It’s really nice to look at so many trees,” says Poppy.

Poppy’s grandma, who Poppy was very close to and called ‘Nanu’, died about three years ago from leukaemia at the age of 89. After her diagnosis, Nanu lived a year of “conscious dying”, during which she thought a lot about grace and gratitude, read about the different phases in a person’s life (the stage she was in at the moment was called the “Golden Gate”), tried to mend her relationship with her daughter (Poppy’s mother), began painting, and took painting lessons from her daughter.

During this time, Poppy returned home to spend time with Nanu and made audio and video recordings of interviews with her. After their grandma’s death, Poppy selected and edited the interviews into a short video titled *all the delights of the earth*. Puppy watched the video and had so many questions about and around it, that it suggested this walk through the forest.

Poppy explains how open and curious Nanu had always been, and how they felt that they could just spend time being with her without any complications or worry. When Nanu visited Poppy in Berlin, she even wanted to go to clubs with them because she wanted to experience their life in Berlin. Hearing this, Puppy bursts into delighted laughter and asks them if they actually went together. “No ...” replies Poppy, “but we did go to a bar!”. When Puppy asks about the process of grieving after Nanu’s death, Poppy says that it was a very painful process.

In *all the delights of the earth*, Nanu says: “I had times where I experienced pain and joy at the same time.”

“Don’t you think grief contains a bit of both of those emotions?” asks Poppy.

“Yes,” Nanu replies. “And that teaches you not to separate pain and joy, to be able to embrace all of these things that happen in our lives without compartmentalising. If you don’t go through it all — and a lot of people don’t go through it all — you miss a lot. Beauty represents this wholeness and unity.”

Puppy asks Poppy if they experienced both pain and joy during their grieving for Nanu. Poppy replies that despite the immensity of the pain they feel, the fact that it originates from having had such an intimate bond and love with Nanu can perhaps be seen as joy. They explain how losing Nanu felt like losing a part of their body. They couldn’t control the emotions and sensations around this loss that felt so personal and physical, and learned to slowly accept the process. Grieving, for them, has been a very physical experience, where they felt their body go through waves of changes that were unpredictable. This experience led them to think about embodiment for the first time. Since then, they have been studying and taking part in practices that involve the body.

In the video, Nanu speaks about the experience of beauty. She explains that we can find beauty in different places and that everyone has the capacity to recognise beauty — a capacity which takes us out of ourselves. She says, “Beauty involves your entire body and soul because it’s very exciting and affecting. I’ve experienced it many times, in many different situations. Little children experience it all the time. And then that gets buried as we grow up, and we have to allow it to come out again.”



Poppy and Nanu

In the woods, Puppy hears itself talking to Poppy like a passionate and stubborn child: “My grandma is the only person who I can truly say I love no matter what! Despite any disagreements we have, I love her so much that I can just smile and nod to whatever she says! I am not ready to lose her, although I know she doesn’t have much time left!” By the end of the walk, however, Puppy feels somewhat comforted from hearing Poppy’s experience of grief. There is, in fact, nothing to control and nothing to be ready for, other than to just continue loving like a child.

Puppy thought about a recent evening spent with a friend whose son had died. After some glasses of red wine, its friend said that she was an atheist. After a few glasses more, she asserted, “But religion isn’t bad! When I lost my son — and what parent would ever want to lose a child? — I couldn’t accept that he was gone. I wanted to believe that he was in heaven. If religion could have helped me get through my pain, I might easily have become a Christian.” Puppy’s grandma first became a Christian when her upstairs neighbour, who was a Christian, helped her give birth to her first precious child after having been unable to get pregnant for the first 10 years of her marriage.

Grandma is overjoyed when Puppy calls. When Puppy explains about Nanu and Poppy’s video, its grandma laughs and says: “My adorable baby, did you call because you missed me? I will live healthily, never be a burden on my children, and then when God calls me, I will eat a good

dinner and go! When I die, put it on my tombstone: ‘She went after eating really good dinner!’” She laughs and says that she doesn’t know anything because she is stupid, and that she doesn’t know how to talk about the things of the world. Therefore, she has nothing to tell Puppy, except stories about her own life. After telling Puppy that she only ever thinks about what nice things she could do for its aunt who lives with her, its grandma launches into an unstoppable monologue about her children and their lives, which Puppy has already heard many times before. After five minutes, Puppy laughs softly and quietly calls “Grandma? Grandma?”, in the hope of stopping her. After 10 minutes, Puppy laughs loudly and shouts “Grandma! Grandma?!” Its grandma stops only when its aunt comes to the rescue, interrupts her, and asks what Puppy wants to talk about.

Puppy asks its grandma what she thinks about beauty. After some pondering, she says, “Look here, the flowers I love ...” and she shows it the flowers in the room. “When I walk around the streets and see a flower blooming, I find it very beautiful each time. What harmony from God! ‘How could you blossom like this?’ I ask the flower. People who love other people love flowers and I really love others very much.” She talks about how her love for her own children also extends to other children. When she sees children on the streets, she finds them so beautiful that she wants to hold their hands and bite their little toes. “But your aunt stops me! She says that the parents don’t like it when I love their children, because I am old. Old people shouldn’t do things that other people dislike. So now, I only greet them from afar.” Flowers, however, she can love as much as she wants. Every morning, she goes to the flowers in her home and says: “Ah, wasn’t it so cold last night? How did you sleep? It must have been tough for you. I put a blanket over you to keep you warm during the night. Was it warm enough?” After devoting her love to her children for her whole life, she can’t see them so often anymore, so she can’t love them as closely as she wants. And since she can’t love children on the streets either, she loves flowers, which she finds beautiful.



Grandma and flowers

Puppy asks its grandma if she can think of an experience where she felt both pain and joy at the same time. She finds the question extremely difficult and thinks for a long time, and then says: "I felt joy raising all of you. You were all so beautiful that when I looked at you, I didn't know what to do! When I had to let my son go ..." Immediately, her voice filled with tears. "Even in that pain, God helped me so I could continue to breathe." She talks about her last goodbye with her son. Just before he was to be cremated, he was lying there and his face was not entirely covered with the cloth, and she could still see a small bit of his forehead. As soon as she went to him and tried to uncover his face, people stopped her. She tried to kiss him, but people pulled her away. She could only continue to live because she thought they would meet again in heaven. 'You were born to live only this long on Earth, and I was born to live longer,' she thought. 'Let's meet again in heaven.' She says that if God hadn't given her that thought, she wouldn't have been able to carry on living. "But still, there is place he left behind in my body. Whenever I close my eyes, tears roll down my face, and that place will never be erased. But because I love God in both good and bad times, I live on, only believing that we will meet again in heaven."

Its grandma talks about seeing the ghost of her son, both in real life and in dreams, until its aunt comes and says that it's dinnertime. Its grandma protests, saying that she doesn't have to eat yet. Puppy says that it can hang up now, but its grandma can't seem to hang up. After waiting for a while, and after the repeated urging of its aunt telling Puppy to end the call (although in its culture, the younger person should never hang up the phone on the older person), it disconnects. That night, it can't sleep and looks at flowerpots online. It selects six different flowerpots and sends them to its grandma.



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