Atik Howlader

Professor Spreizer

German 41W/WGS 210

12/16/2019

Essay Assignment #3

In the story “The Mussel Feast” by Birgit Vanderbeke, the main character is the daughter of a family of four, she is waiting with the rest of her family for their father to come back home to a feast they had prepared for his hopeful promotion. However, the father never comes back home, this gets the main character and her family thinking about how there lives would be like without their father and how their father’s presence has shaped their family. The father having not coming back home when he usually is expected to come back allows the family to act in ways that the usually don’t go about. The story is narrated from the daughter’s point of view. This allows the reader to get more of a personal view at the main character thoughts and feelings throughout the story.

The story starts of with the main character and her brother helping their mother prepare a feast for their father. They were preparing mussels and potatoes. The main character said “We would always have mussels to celebrate a special occasion, although in a very different way than we’d had in mind.” (18). This shows that they were preparing this feast for a special occasion, that special occasion was to celebrate the news of their father hopefully being promoted at his work. In the story the main character said the reason they cooked mussels was “Mussels were my father’s favorite food, although not ours; my brother liked mussels too, whereas my mother and I never cared for them much” (18). This shows that even though mussels weren’t the favorite food for most of the family they would still prepare a feast of the, just to celebrate their father to please him for his hopeful news. This might seem like a normal gesture to prepare someone their favorite meal to celebrate their good news, but looking into it deeper it can seem like it it something they have to do for their father since he is such a stronger figure to their household. There is a long and hard working preparation that goes into making the mussels that the main character and her mother have to endure. The main character even says “Initially I wondered whether the noise was coming from somewhere else, but it was distinctly coming from the pot, and it was a distinctly strange noise, which made me feel creepy; we were already twitchy and nervous, and now there was this noise.” (86). This shows that it feels like they are preparing this feast even though the main character and her mother don’t enjoy mussels and the main character herself is creeped out from the preparation to the mussels just because they would be let down by their father for not doing this for his sake. This shows how much consideration that the main character and her family has for their father. The main character also described how her mother would act differently in certain situation when she is with their father and when she is not. The main character when explaining how her mother would would change her mode when around her fathe she said “I liked it when we let our hair down, but my father didn’t want to hear any more of it and so she switched to wifey mode. The wifey mode the main character is referencing that her mother goes into is when she becomes more of the person that their father presence demands her mother to be. The mother also uses a serious face that she applies in school when teaching but she goes into this wifey mode whenever her husband is about to come home form work. She does this soley for her husband and it proves that the father dictates their mother’s behavior. However, the main character’s mother isn’t the only one that has to change behavior when around the father. The main character says “You see we all had to switch for my father, to become a proper family, as he called it, because he hadn’t had a family, but he had developed the most detailed notions of what a proper family should be like, and he could be extremely sensitive if you undermined these notions.” (155). This shows that the father wants his family to follows his own ideas of what he believes to be a proper family. This causes the main character and her brother to be sort of outcast from the other children in their neighborhood. They aren’t allowed to go play outside with the other kids because there father thinks that kids that play on the streets are not from a proper background and could further ruin the kid. The father says “That those weren’t proper familes, they had no sense of family life, only indifference, and so their children play on the streets.” (505). There father also makes them do there homework and practice an instrument for an hour before he gets home so he doesn’t have to listen to them play the instrument after he gets home from a long day of work. This does not work in the favor of the main character or her brother because since they have to do homework and practice an instrument all in the time before their father gets home they aren’t able to even invited their friends over to there house to play or socialize. The main character when talking about what the other kids usually do was that they usually did their homework later in the day so they would be able to play together, but since the main character’s father wanted them to do their homework and instrument practice first, they would never get the chance to play with the other kids. This was hurtful for the main character and her brother because it didn’t allow them to socialize with the other kids and build strong relationships with others outside of there family which is a very beneficial asset in the real world. The father’s expectations of his family limited them all.

When the father didn’t show up at the usual time that he comes back home, this allowed the main character to venture her thoughts and imagines what it would be like if her father wasn’t there. Even from the father being late was something they were not used too and than this caused them to act different from what they were used to. The daughter said in the story that “It’s astonishing how people react when the routine is disturbed, a tiny delay to the normal schedule and at once everything is different” (274). The main character felt that if her father wasn’t there they would be more open to doing what they like. For example, when the family was waiting for there father they started to drink Spatlese, which is something they usually don’t do in the evenings. The main character says “As we drank the Spatlese our mood became ever more peculiar; we normally drank tea and milk in the evenings, only my father drank beer and cognac while drawing in his logical conclusions” (352). Drinking spatlese was peculiar to the main character because it was something that they weren’t accustomed to doing in the evening because it wasn’t something that their father was accustomed to them doing. The main character also embarks on what her relationship with her grandmother would’ve been like if her father ideals weren’t so dictating to their lives. The main character’s father didn’t like going to his mother’s house because she was poor and the father didn’t want to be included with such poor upbringings because he felt shame from it. Since he felt shame from it he didn’t want his family to be associated with it. Howver, the main character actually enjoyed her grandmother. She thought of her grandmother to be extraordinary because she was able to do nothing so compassionately. This was extraordinary to the main character because with the lives that her family lives with their father’s ideals, their household is always busy and it seemed like everyone was always doing something. For the daughter to see her grandma being able to do nothing when just staring out the window, it made the main character kind of want to be like her. This showed that when the father didn’t show up it allowed the main character to freely think about how her life could be different without her father there.

In the story “The Mussel Feast” by Birgit Vanderbeke, the main character and her family waited for their father to come back which he ultimately never did. This caused her and the rest of the family to think what it’s like being with their father and how it could be different without him there. It seemed like the father was putting too much control over the rest of the family than he should have. When the family had time to think of what it would be like without there father’s ideals being forced onto them, their lives would seem a lot better.