

Grandmother's floating heads

A monologue
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SCENE 1

SPEAKER

When I was young, I asked my *babcia*¹ where old people come from. I ~~knew that~~ I don't think it occurred to me to ask where young people come from — ~~I was, after all,~~ that is ~~what~~ the kind of person I was, and I had always been there. But ~~I could not imagine why there were~~ old people seemed different, to me. And I was a curious child.

~~"Piotr", she told me,~~ "She told me that when the world ached, and rain came down, it washed against the walls of houses, and the ground where people walked. When it did, it gathered all the wisdom that had been there, from all the people who lived in these places, and where it puddled, the elderly would come out of the water like a frog who had grown legs. She told me that where there were no people, or where there were people but no wisdom, there would be no elderly people, either.

This made sense to me, ~~I think~~. I remember thinking that, yes, of course there cannot be old people if there are not people — just as there cannot be young people without families. I was young, after all, and I ~~had parents~~ could not imagine my life without my parents.

When I was older, I learned that this was wrong. That young people *become* old people. And I was older, but I was not so old that I did not feel betrayed by this. I went to my *babcia*, and I told her that she had lied to me. If I remember ~~correctly~~ right, I told her that I would not believe any more of her stories — that I would only believe truths from now on.

Babcia laughed at me, and told me to believe whatever I wanted to believe. I told her I would.

Then one day, a few months later, she said she had something to show me. It had just rained. I agreed, and she led me out of the house, through the back door, and into the forest. I asked her where ~~she was~~ we were going, and she told me that I would see. It was only a few minutes, until we arrived at a ~~basin~~ hollow, where rainwater would gather and pool when it was wet. She pointed in the middle, and said to me, "*Czy ty to widzisz?* Do you see it?" I said I did.

In the hollow, there were heads. Pale and floating, with wrinkled faces and dark, shadowy eyes. I later learned she had had a friend make them out of wax, to scare me. But I did not know that, then. Then they seemed just as real as me and my *babcia*.

¹ Polish for "grandmother"

She told me, as they floated there, that these were old men and women who were trying to be born. She told me that there was not enough wisdom left in the world, and they could not be finished. That they could not find their souls. She told me that I should be very careful, and make sure I am very wise, or else they will never leave the basin. That it was my job to give them bodies, so they could become someone else's *dziadek*² or *babcia*.

I did not like this. She took me back home, and I cried. I told her I ~~could never~~ couldn't do it. I imagined other children like me, losing their *babcia* because of something that was my fault. I had nightmares of floating heads, and people who were only half-formed.

Eventually I learned that this, too, was wrong. My *babcia* had passed away, then. I was confused, when it happened. ~~I didn't know~~ Somehow it felt wrong, that this was something I shouldn't believe. Eventually, I moved on. I accepted that old people come from young people, and that in my life I will be both.

But still, I try to work hard to be very wise. I think it is in part for my *babcia*, out of respect, or habit. And part of it, because I imagine that old people must appreciate it very much when we are wise, even ~~if they are already alive~~ after they are born. I think it is a nice thing to do.

² Polish for "grandfather"