

Anna Molnar

# **We Fade to Green**



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With a little bit of sunshine, the sky can fade to green ...

## Eavesdropping

A few weeks before my 8<sup>th</sup> birthday, I heard Mom and Dad arguing in the kitchen. I figured it was about my birthday party.

You see, I wanted to invite 20 kids from my class, organize the Summer Olympics in our back yard, and have everyone spend the night! Mom was down with my plans. “The bigger, the better!” she said. But Dad was going to take some convincing. I figured I would leave it up to Mom; she knew how to deal with him best.

When I heard Mom and Dad arguing, I immediately went downstairs to hide in our guest bathroom. We kept our Band-Aids down there in one of the cabinets above the sink, and it was the perfect place to spy from. You could hide behind the towel rack and hear everything that went on at the next door neighbor’s house. Or you could squish yourself next to the sink and hear every sound made in our living room. Or you could pretend to be looking for a Band-Aid and eavesdrop on the action in the kitchen. That’s what I was going to do. Even with the kitchen door closed, I was sure I’d get at least 70% of the conversation.

"You can't be serious, Patrick!" I heard my mother say. Then it was something with 80.

80? 80 kids? Did I even know 80 kids? 80? Could I come up with 80 kids to invite? I thought I could maybe invite the girls from the swim team and the entire track team ... Or did Mom mean 80 games? Or 80 dollars?

But before I could go on planning my guest list, or activities, or budget, depending on what was actually said, I heard my mom raise her voice and say, "That's not an option!"

What was not an option? I figured Dad didn't want to let anyone spend the night! In fact, I was sure of it! But Mom was not going to give up! They just had to spend the night! The slumber party was supposed to round the whole thing off!

My dad's voice was muffled and low. I couldn't make out what he was saying. But Mom was getting louder and louder, which was great for me!

"No Patrick! She threw out the last one again!"

Was Mom talking about the stupid doll I had thrown out the week before? I had never really been into dolls, but at age almost 8! Please! Was Dad actually thinking of buying me a doll for my 8<sup>th</sup> birthday?

Then my dad said something again, and again, I couldn't understand what! I could only hear him put the dishes into the dishwasher. He was cleaning the kitchen, because he was mad. And he was punishing the plates the most, just slamming them into the rack. It was a wonder they didn't break.

"But she needs help! They both do!" Mom said, and I could tell she was getting all worked up.

Mom was right, I did need help! I couldn't plan the party by myself. There was just too much to do. My best friend, Lucia, was helping me, but we couldn't do it on our own. I thought maybe Mom was going to help us, or get Dad to help!

Dad was still grumbling about something. Then the sink was on, and I couldn't hear anything at all. Then it sounded like one of them might have dropped a glass, and my mom ran out of the kitchen.

"You don't understand! I'm Hungarian!" Mom yelled as she stormed out into the hallway.

I just froze, hoping no one would see me if I remained motionless. I didn't even blink or breathe. Mom was playing the Hungarian card! It was going to work! I was going to have the best 8<sup>th</sup> birthday party ever!

To my surprise, Dad yelled back, "What is that supposed to mean?"

Mom was quick with her answer, "It's just not me. I was raised differently."

They were both right in front of me. I had to stay where I was. I couldn't escape.

"They would die in a nursing home!" Mom continued.

And I was confused ...

"It's just not their culture!" Mom said. "They're old and can't manage on their own!"

"... because they're too stubborn to accept help! And too picky ..."  
Dad snapped.

“Well, you’re not gonna change them at 80!” Mom countered and added, “What am I supposed to do? I’m their only child! They don’t have anybody else but me!”

Mom was crying, and it wasn’t because she was upset about my birthday party!

The evening didn’t work out too well for me. I was sent to bed without a Band-Aid, and the birthday party was definitely off. I could pick out any present I wanted on the internet, but we just didn’t have time to plan a party.

*Nagyi* and *Apu*,<sup>1</sup> Mom’s parents, were getting really old and couldn’t manage on their own. They lived in a small village called Korond. My grandparents were Hungarians from the Carpathian Basin, from an area called *Erdély*, which, if you can believe it, is Transylvania in English. I know what you’re thinking, and I was thinking it, too!

Dad thought *Nagyi* and *Apu* were difficult. Mom thought Dad couldn’t understand, because his parents died when he was 18. Dad and his older brother, Uncle Henry, were really tight, but Dad didn’t know what it meant to have to worry about elderly parents. Mom had tried to get *Nagyi* and *Apu* help, but it hadn’t worked. And with growing age, *Nagyi* and *Apu* just couldn’t live alone anymore.

Dad didn’t see why they couldn’t go to a nursing home. Mom said there were no nursing homes in Korond!

Mom said *Nagyi* and *Apu* had been at the mercy of neighbors, friends, and distant relatives, and that it was time for their only daughter to step up. Mom said she just couldn’t let her parents rot away, with strangers taking care of them, separated by an ocean from

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1 That’s Grandma and Grandpa in Hungarian.

their immediate family! Mom said a lot of things.

Mom and Dad argued right up to my birthday, so I picked out a book on Amazon about teaching myself how to draw. It showed me how to draw animals, faces and landscapes. I had to start somewhere if I wanted to be an artist one day.