

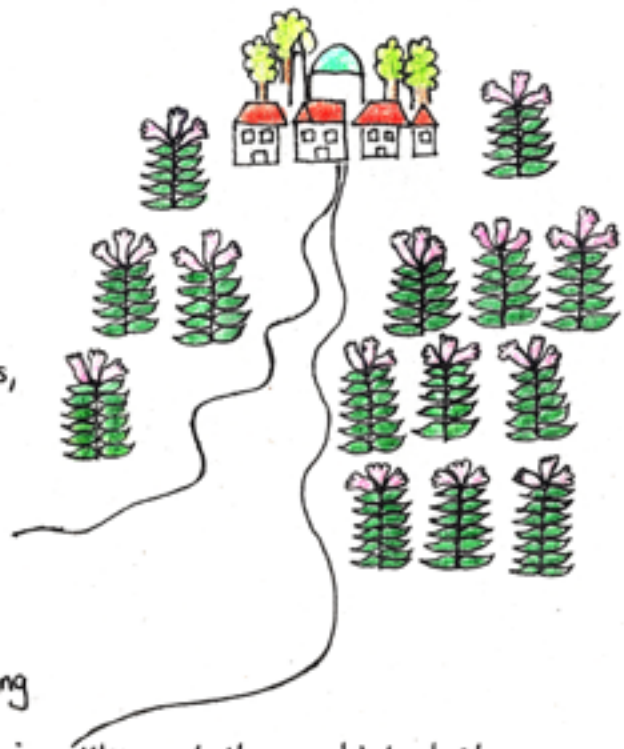
It all started when my grandpa
stole a library for me...



When I was a kid we were living in a small town of a few thousand people in Balıkesir. My parents decided to move to this town from the village because there were three primary schools in the town and they were all better than the one in the village.

The village was only 7 km away from the town. But when we moved into the town I located the village in another distant universe in my mind. My universe was now filled with friends, teachers, books, crayons, cartoons that I watched every Saturday morning... Whereas the village was the land for adults.

Not that there weren't any kids in the village, but they were working in tobacco fields, talking and behaving like adults. - which left me confused about what it meant to be a child and what was the right way to be a child.





At the time my father was a mine worker and my mum was a housewife. To make more money they decided to spend summers in the village cultivating tobacco.

I couldn't go to the village without my red bike, because it was the only means of transportation into my universe where money was no problem.

I wondered why my dad wouldn't just get more money from the ATM. I was pretty sure he was allowed to use the ATM because he was over 18 and tall enough to press the buttons.



It was hot and picking tobacco leaves was a difficult job. My parents were out in the tobacco field 2 times a day: at dawn and after sunset until about midnight. To make things easier they built a hut in the

tobacco field. So we didn't need to go to my grandparents' to sleep. Being a child in this environment was pretty lonely, but I couldn't complain. I was able to see that being an adult was even lonelier.

Besides I was pretty sure the owl perching on our roof and hooting in the night was my friend.



I had three chicklets who followed me everywhere.

And I rode my bike on the narrow paths that separated tobacco, green beans or wheat fields from each other.

Each field represented a different place, city or country I was wishing to go.



When my parents were out in the field picking tobacco leaves in the light of the oil lamp they placed on a stand at nights, I preferred being with them. It was

scary to stay in the hut, because it was dark and there were no other huts nearby. Besides, it was so enjoyable to lay on the ground among the tobacco plants and read stories. As my eyes moved from one word to another and I turned pages one after another I would get glimpses of so many bright stars in the sky and my parents' tiny movements while picking tobacco leaves.



Books were expensive. My dad would say "be thrifty with your reading." each time he brought me a new book. So I would reread some stories and recycle others.

I mixed and rewrote the stories I read from books and listened to from my grandma to create my own stories.



When I got really bored it was my grandpa's responsibility to entertain me. We grew strawberries in my grandpa's garden where there were always fireflies.

We made kites out of old newspaper pages.



We went to the sea when I wanted to see the waves and the fish. That meant travelling on my grandpa's motorbike for a few hours.

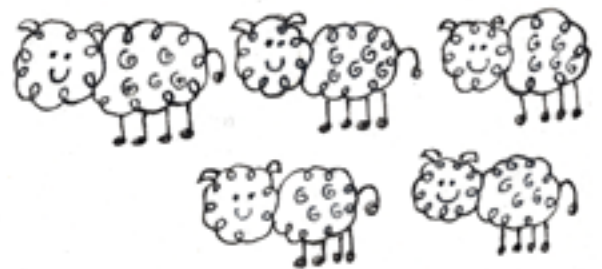


My grandpa and I, we could never make it to Istanbul together. It was nine hours from where we were living, but he always told me about the city as if talking about a very confusing dream:

"There are huugee mosques and very old towers.. and the Bosphorous Bridge is amazing. It connects Asia to Europe. You just cross a bridge and you aren't in Asia any more! There are all sorts of people from all around the world and Turkey."

When I turned 18 I went to college in Istanbul and the city became my home for almost nine years. I visited all the places my grandpa was talking about with his memory in my mind. But that is all another story...

It was so easy and great to be friends with my grandpa, because he always found ways to make me happy. Like finding sheep to pet...



giving me corn so that I could chase after chickens.

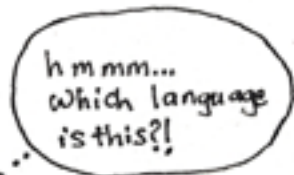


But I never imagined one day he would steal a library because I loved books.

Apparently the primary school in the village was being renovated and the books of the school library were left unattended. My grandpa carried them home saying he was protecting the books from the rain - although it was summer time and we were in the Aegean Region of Turkey.

He was pretty convinced that I could have all the books, because kids in the village weren't reading them anyway. and noone would even realize that the books were gone.

I remember some of the books were really old. I liked the way they smelled, so I picked some old books along with relatively new, colorful children's books.



I had no idea what the old books were talking about. Still I loved reading them and pretending I was studying something very important.



"The adventures of Maya the Bee" was the only book I kept from this small village library. My grandpa took all the ^{other} books back when they were finished with the renovation.



When the books were gone I took the empty space left behind and located it in my mind. I have filled it in with stories of people and places, memories, traces of the books I have read, dreams and random thoughts...

In time I have forgotten the details of some stories and I might have distorted some others in one way or another. But I believe things I've put in the Ghost Library never disappears entirely. They pop up in my mind while I am walking towards the subway station to go to work, riding my bike on a Sunday afternoon, watching the ducks at Central Park or writing a story...